Written Description:

To observe the position of the asteroid belt in the Solar System, place your finger on the raised circle at the center of this tactile graphic. That raised circle represents the sun.

Move your finger out from this circle in any direction until you feel a solid line.

Track this circular line. It represents the orbit of the Earth around the Sun. Mercury and Venus also orbit the Sun but they are between the Earth and the Sun. Since the Dawn spacecraft lifted off from Earth, it did not interact with either Mercury or Venus.

Move your finger out in any direction from the line that represents the Earth’s orbit until you feel a dashed line. Track this circle, which represents the orbit of Mars around the Sun. The Dawn spacecraft will get a gravity assist at Mars. A gravity assist uses the relative movement and gravity of Mars to accelerate the Dawn spacecraft. This will save fuel, time, and expense.

Move your finger out in any direction from the dashed line Mars orbit until you feel a rough area. Track this circular rough area.

Then move out to find the solid line that marks the orbit of Jupiter. This rough area between Mars and Jupiter is the region called the asteroid belt.

Most of the known asteroids, including Vesta and Ceres, orbit the Sun in this region where there is no large planet. Asteroids are small bodies that contain building materials left over from the inner planets that were formed the early days of the Solar System.