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Which kind of nebula?

Official pages divide the clouds by what they are doing.

Nebulae, NASA's decoding page says, are "giant clouds of gas and dust in space." They can be nurseries for new stars, or expanding clouds that mark where stars have died.

Official kind	Official wording
Emission	"Stars heat up the clouds of gas, whose chemicals respond by glowing in different colors." "Think of it like a neon sign hanging in a shop window!"
Reflection	They "scatter the light of stars hiding in or near them," "a bit like seeing a streetlamp illuminate the fog around it," and "are often bluish in color."
Planetary	A historical name. They "keep the name, but we know they have nothing to do with planets." They form when low- to medium-mass stars expel their outer layers.
Absorption, or dark	They "don't emit or reflect light, but block light coming from behind them." William Herschel called those seemingly empty spots "a hole in the sky."
Supernova remnant	The Crab, official example: the 1054 explosion "was so bright that for weeks it could be seen even in the daytime sky."

A short quiz

1. What does NASA liken an emission nebula to?
2. Who called dark, seemingly empty spots "a hole in the sky"?
3. Do planetary nebulae have anything to do with planets, according to official pages?

Answers. 1. A neon sign hanging in a shop window. 2. William Herschel. 3. No. They keep a historical name.

Wording from NASA Science, Hubble's Nebulae, and Decoding Nebulae. Checked 17 November 2026.
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