Navigating the mid January Night Sky

For observers in the middle northern latitudes, this chart is suitable for mid January at 8 p.m. or late January at 7 p.m.

The Ecliptic represents the plane of the solar system. The sun, the moon, and the major planets all lie on or near this imaginary line in the sky.

Navigating the winter night sky: Simply start with what you know or with what you can easily find.

1. Above the northeast horizon rises the Big Dipper. Draw a line from its two end bowl stars upwards to the North Star.
2. Face south. Overhead twinkle the bright star Capella in Auriga. Jump northward along the Milky Way first to Perseus, then to the "W" of Cassiopeia. Next Jump southeastward from Capella to the twin stars Castor and Pollux of Gemini.
3. Directly south of Capella stands the constellation of Orion with its three Belt Stars, its bright red star Betelgeuse, and its bright blue-white star, Rigel.
4. Use Orion's three Belt stars to point to the red star Aldebaran, then to the Hyades, and the Pleiades star clusters. Travel southeast from the Belt stars to the brightest star in the night sky, Sirius.

Binocular Highlights
A: Examine the stars of the Pleiades and Hyades, two naked eye star clusters. B: Between the "W" of Cassiopeia and Perseus lies the Double Cluster. C: The three westernmost stars of Cassiopeia's "W" point south to M31, the Andromeda Galaxy, a "fuzzy" oval. D: M42 in Orion is a star forming nebula. E: Look south of Sirius for the star cluster M41. F: M44, a star cluster barely visible to the naked eye, lies to the southeast of Pollux.