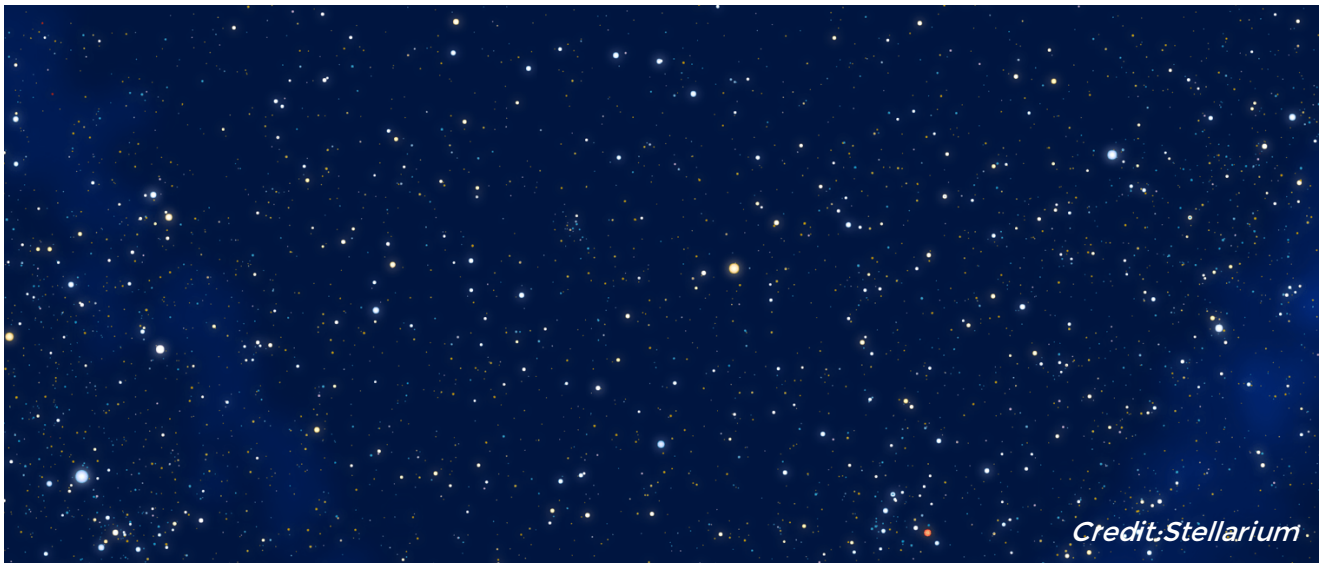
Legends in the Sky

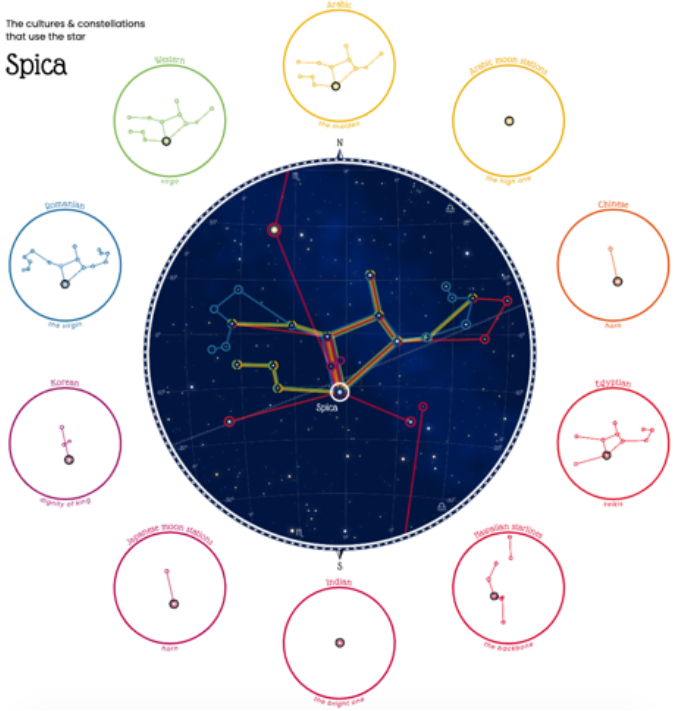
Everyone's Sky, Each Perspective Unique



Credit:Stellarium

Has anyone ever shown you a constellation in the sky? Who first helped you learn the sky?

Humans create patterns and mental maps to make sense of our world, including the stars in the sky.



Credit: Nadieh Bremer, Figures in the Sky

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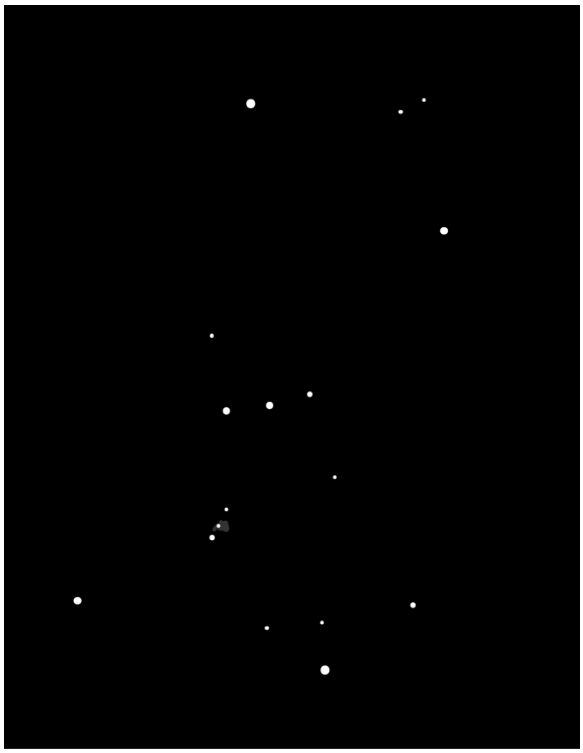
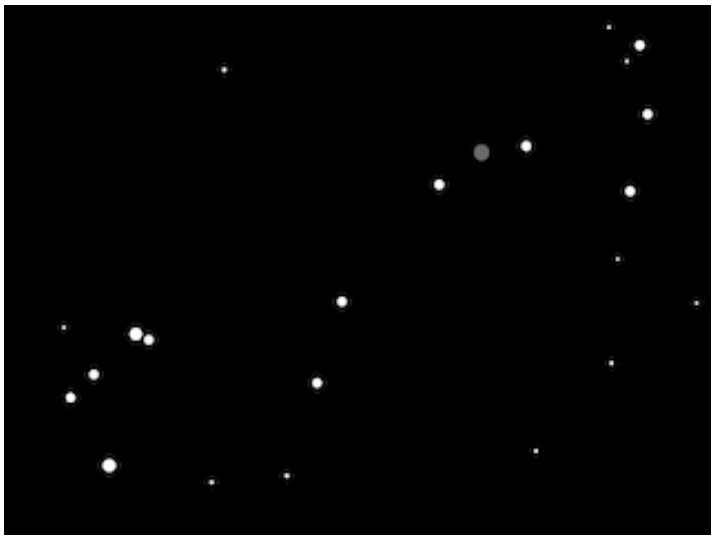
Cultures around the globe have made Legends in the Sky.



People everywhere have looked up and seen patterns among the stars. These constellations often honor things important to their culture – values, people, or animals – or indicate a time of year, such as a time for migration or planting. These legends are passed down through generations and share what each culture values.

You can create a pattern, too! Celebrate what you and your family treasure and respect.

What values are important to you? What stories do you like to share?



Do you have a hero, an animal, or object you would like to commemorate?

Do you see any patterns or bright stars in this star field?

Do you have a favorite sport that happens at this time of year?

Look at this star map and see if you can see a pattern. Bigger dots are brighter stars, so use those as anchors to your picture.

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Notes for the Presenter
Legends in the Sky

Time: 15 minutes
Visitors: General audience, ages 4+, groups from 1-30
Venue: daytime, inside, surface needed for writing

Explore the importance of the night sky to cultures around the world and create your own.

Learning Goals

1. Humans around the world create patterns to organize the night sky.
2. Cultures' constellation legends reflect both their environment and values.
3. Regular movement of the fixed constellations are used to tell time and make plans.
4. Astronomers use constellations to describe the locations of objects in the sky.

Materials

- 5 pages of sky stories (included are pages specific to each hemisphere)
- 1 copy of the current season's worksheet for each visitor
- Pencils, crayons, or markers for drawing
- A flat surface for writing
- (optional) Slide deck for larger presentations

Facilitation Notes

You don't have to know the constellations to facilitate this activity!

Respecting the legends of other cultures: It is important to understand that, far more than merely stories, the figures seen in the sky often represent ancestors, important Indigenous knowledge, and even stories not told outside a culture, or only told by certain revered members of the culture. By giving only the name of the figure, not the entire story, we are recognizing that the sky is important to cultures around the world and that the Greek constellations used by the astronomical community are just one way to interpret the sky.

We use the word "legends" not "stories" because for some cultures, these are more than stories – sometimes ancestors are memorialized in the sky or it is a part of a larger belief system. Some cultures do not use just stars to create constellations, but also use the dark spaces in the Milky Way, such as the Atacameñan Indigenous people in Chile.

The International Astronomical Union divides the entire sky into 88 constellations – regions often surrounding the Greek version of the constellations. Amateur and professional astronomers use these to indicate where an object is in the sky in the same way one might use states to tell the location of a park. So, Zion National Park is in Utah while the Sombrero Galaxy is in the constellation Virgo. The boundaries of Utah and Virgo are both invented and useful.

The northern and southern hemispheres see the constellations flipped upside down from each other. So, the foot of a dancing man in Australia may be the shoulder of Orion to people in the Northern Hemisphere.

Background Information

To learn more:

- **Figures in the Sky:** http://www.datasketch.es/may/code/nadieh/
- **Native Skywatchers:** http://www.nativeskywatchers.com/
- **Astronomy of Many Cultures Resource Guide:** https://astrosociety.org/education-outreach/ resource-guides/multicultural-astronomy.html

Virtual Presentation Tips

This activity is easily done remotely. Send participants a link to the proper season page in advance, so they can print the pattern of stars. A slide presentation is also available at: bit.ly/legendsinthesky

Additional Resources / Extension Activities

- Big Dipper Sky Clock (for Northern Hemisphere): https://skyandtelescope.org/astronomy-resources/ make-a-star-clock/
- Southern Cross Clock (Pages 17-18): https://museumsvictoria.com.au/media/1896/vceastronomy-astrophysics-student-activities-1-10.pdf

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