

Constellations

By Cindy Grigg

¹ Groups of stars seen together are called constellations. This doesn't mean the stars are actually together. It's just that from our viewpoint here on Earth, they look like they are together. People long ago looked up in the sky and saw these groups of stars. They decided the stars looked like a picture, and then they made up stories about those pictures.

² Some historians believe that many of the myths about the constellations were invented to help farmers remember them. When they saw certain constellations, they would know it was time to begin the planting. Farmers have always known that for most crops, you plant in the spring and harvest in the fall. But in some places in the world, there is not much difference in the seasons. Since different constellations are visible at different times of the year, farmers used them to tell what month it was. For example, Scorpius is only visible in the northern hemisphere's evening sky in the summer. Where the constellations are seen in the sky depends on the observer's location and the time of the year.

³ This storytelling about the constellations was a part of many cultures. Thousands of years ago, people in the Middle East began stories about the pictures they saw in the nighttime sky. The ancient Greeks turned them into legends and recorded them in stories and verse. During Roman times they were given Latin names. Native American cultures had stories of their own. Today there are 88 recognized constellations.

⁴ The Big Dipper is part of the constellation Ursa Major. Although the Big Dipper is not a constellation, it is important. The Big Dipper helped people find the North Star. The two stars that make the front of the dipper are called the Pointers. If you follow a straight line out from the Pointers, you will come to the North Star. The Big Dipper changes position in the sky, but the North Star is always in the same place. Sailors used the North Star to navigate their ships across the big, unmapped ocean. During the Civil War, runaway slaves used it to guide them north toward freedom. You can read more about this in the picture book [Follow the Drinking Gourd](#) by Jeanette Winter.



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<p>1. What are constellations?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A Groups of stars seen together</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B Imaginary pictures made of groups of stars</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C 88 different groups of stars</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D All of the above</p>	<p>2. Some historians believe that:</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A The stories were made up to help farmers remember them.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B The stories were true.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C The stories were made up because the constellations foretold the future.</p>
<p>3. What two things determine where the constellations are seen in the sky?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A What will happen in the future and what happened in the past</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B The observer's location and the time of the year</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C The luck of the observer</p>	<p>4. The constellation stories were made up by the ancient Greeks.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A False</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B True</p>
<p>5. How many constellations are recognized today?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>6. It is useful to know about the Big Dipper because:</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A It can help you know when to plant crops.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B It can help you find the direction of north.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C It can remind you of a story.</p>
<p>7. The two stars called the Pointers in the Big Dipper are:</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A In the handle of the dipper</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B The front of the dipper</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C Pointing to the North Star</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D Both B and C</p>	<p>8. Most cultures made up stories about the constellations.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A False</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B True</p>

