

STORIES IN THE STARS: CONSTELLATION CREATION!

Orion

Our first constellation is Orion. This is one of the easiest constellations to see in the night sky and it appears all around the world! We call it Orion after a hunter in Greek mythology. He carries his club and shield and hunts mighty beasts. In Hungary, Orion is known as Archer, while Scandinavian stories call the three stars of his belt Frigg's Distaff (which is a tool used to hold wool before it is spun into thread!). All around the world, people have looked up and seen these stars as a hunter, an archer, a giant, the list goes on and on!

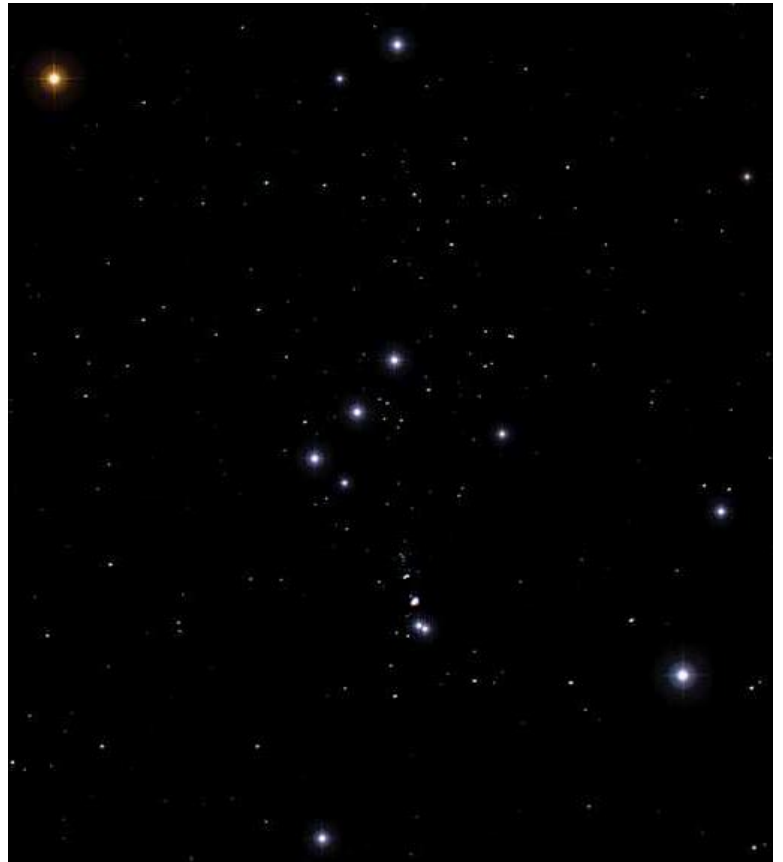
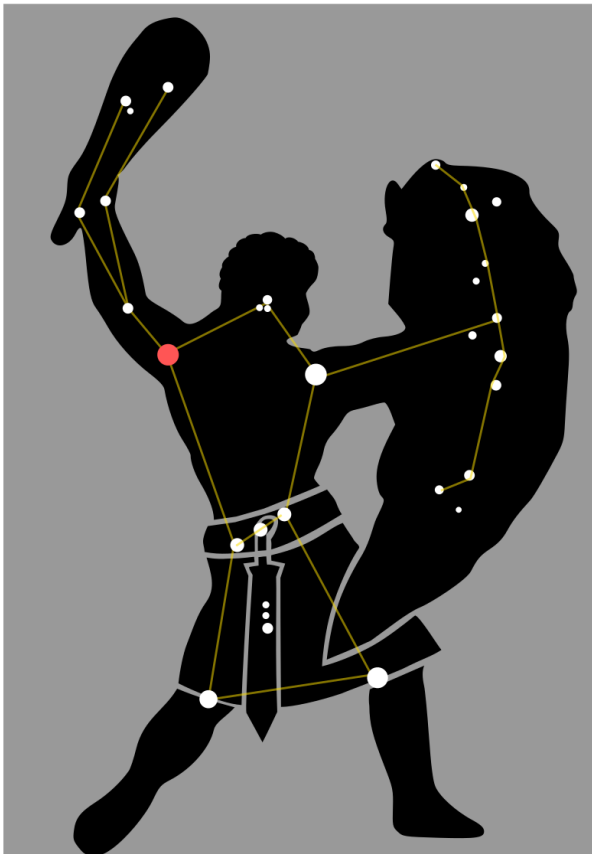


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The easiest way to spot Orion in the sky is to look for the three stars that make up his belt. He also has a bright red-orange star named Betelgeuse that is his right shoulder. Can you see them on the right? Orion is often easiest to see in January and the other winter months.

Here is one story often told about Orion: Orion is the son of Poseidon, god of the sea, and Euryale. Orion was a giant man who used an unbreakable club of bronze. He claimed that he could hunt any beast or animal and this angered the earth. From a crack in the ground crawled a scorpion. The scorpion stung Orion and he died. To remind everyone to be humble, the gods placed both Orion and the scorpion in the stars. The scorpion rises in the east and pursues Orion across the sky night after night.

Taurus

Not far from Orion is the constellation Taurus. Taurus is the bull and has been called such for a very long time and across the world. There's even some studies that compare cave paintings labeled as the bull to the constellation we see now! Like many of our constellations, there is a Greek story about Taurus, but it's far from the only one. As long as people have been around, we've kept cows with us.



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Like Orion, Taurus has a bright red-orange star as part of it. This is Aldebaran and is usually seen as the base of the horn or the bull's glowing eye! The bull also has the Pleiades star cluster near his shoulder. Since they are close neighbors, Taurus also appears in the winter sky. You can look up at night starting in late November to find the bull charging through the stars. If you find Orion, look up and to the right and you should find Taurus.

One of the old stories about the Bull is this:

To the Egyptians, the sacred bull in the stars was a sacrifice for spring. All winter he stood proud in the sky, but as spring came the bull was swallowed by the sun. Thanks to his sacrifice, spring and all life would grow and renew itself. Thus each year, the bull did return in the winter and then give himself up for spring, ensuring that life would continue each year.

Lyra

Besides people and animals, there are items that are thought to be powerful or important that are remembered in the stars. Our next constellation is the lyre or harp called Lyra. It's a small constellation, made up of only five very close stars. In Wales, they called Lyra King Arthur's harp. In Arab cultures, the stars around Lyra were seen as a vulture or an eagle carrying a lyre in its wings.



Image Sources: By Till Credner - Own work: AlltheSky.com, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=20041716>, Lyra Constellation in the Star Walk 2 app, <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/star-walk-2-night-sky-map/id892279069?mt=8>

Lyra's brightest star is Vega and it makes up the top part of the lyre. It is considered the sixth brightest star in the sky around us! Number one is the sun. You can see Lyra in the night sky in summer, along with her neighbors: Cygnus the swan and Hercules the hero.

The Greek story about Lyra goes like this:

The god Hermes made the lyre from a tortoise shell and then gave it to Apollo, the god of music, as the very first lyre. Sometime after that a man named Orpheus was given the lyre. He was one of the greatest musicians and poets that ever lived. He charmed people and animals both with his lyre playing. He was even able to stop the voices of the dangerous sirens who tried to lure him and other men into the sea to drown! Lyra even went down to the Underworld with Orpheus as he tried to rescue his wife. When Orpheus died, Lyra was placed in the stars to remember his story.

Ursa Major

Also known as the Great Bear, Ursa Major gets the core of its shape from the Big Dipper! It's one of the biggest constellations in our sky which is why we call it major or great. And it's been looked at as a big bear for a very, very long time. It might have been thought of as a bear as far back as 13,000 year ago! However in South Korea, the seven main stars of this constellation are called "the seven stars of the north." They come from a story about seven stones laying out seven stones to help their mother cross a river. She blessed the stones in thanks and they became the constellation.



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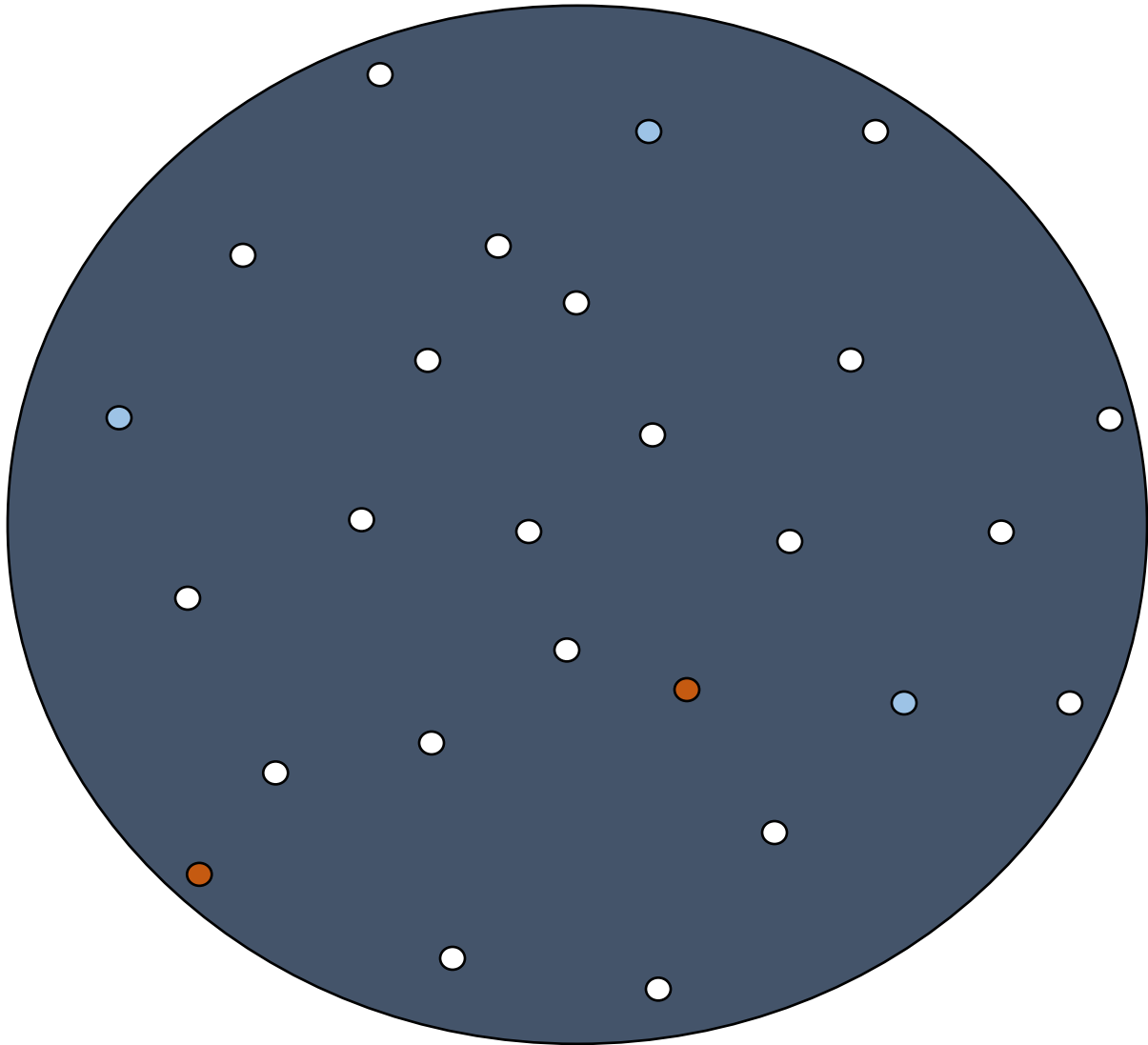
The Big Dipper is often the easiest part of Ursa Major to see. Historically, people have looked at the handle of the Big Dipper as the bear's tail. But not always because bears don't actually have long tails. The Iroquois people saw the three stars of the handle as three hunters following after the bear.

The story most often told about the Great Bear goes like this:

The King of the Gods saw a beautiful woman named Callisto. The King's wife finds out and turns Callisto into a bear so that the King will no longer think that she's beautiful or try to take her as a new wife. Later, Callisto's son is out hunting and almost shoots his mother, unable to recognize her now that she's a bear. To save them both, the King of the Gods turns her son into a bear too and then puts them both in the stars.

MAKE YOUR OWN CONSTELLATION!

Now that you know some of the stories told about the constellations we see, you can make up your own. Use the space below to draw your constellation in the stars. Then, write its story on the back of the page. Remember, people, animals, or objects are all in our stars already. You can even make up your own creatures to put in the stars! What story do you want to tell about the night sky?



Constellation Name: _____

Season you can see it: _____

Brightest star: _____