

Name: _____

Pictures in the Stars

by Kelly Hashway

Have you ever stared at the clouds and tried to see pictures in them? Well, this is very similar to how ancient astronomers named the constellations.

Constellations are groups of stars, and today there are 88 officially recognized constellations. Each is named for a figure or object that astronomers saw when they viewed the star group. Most of the constellations are named after characters in mythology. Hercules, Draco, Orion, and The Great Bear are just a few. Others are named after the signs of the zodiac, like Sagittarius, Capricorn, and Scorpius. But the way they were named is very similar. Just like we look at clouds today and see





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“Big Bear”. The ancient Irish and French called the Big Dipper the “Chariot,” and the British referred to it as the “Plough”. So you can see how star gazing and studying the constellations to find shapes in the patterns can cause a single constellation to have multiple names.



Another thing that contributes to these differing names is the expansion of the universe. The stars are moving and changing positions in the sky, which can make them look less like what they were originally named and more like something completely different. The constellation Cassiopeia originally looked like a W, but today it appears to be a squiggly line. Astronomers believe that the Big Dipper will look like a number five in 50,000 years.

Imagine what you will see the next time you look at the stars.

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1. What is a constellation?
- a. a group of stars that are close to Earth
 - b. a group of stars that is named after a zodiac symbol
 - c. a group of stars that was named for a figure or object that ancient astronomers saw
 - d. a group of stars shaped like an unusual animal



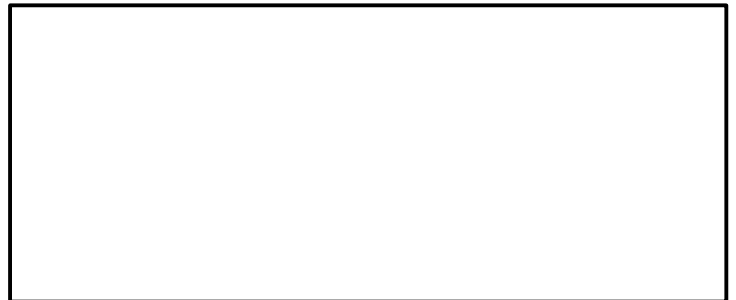
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4. Complete each sentence below.
- The ancient Greeks thought the Big Dipper looked like a _____.
- Long ago, people of Britain thought the Big Dipper looked like a _____.
- Ancient Irish and French people thought the big dipper looked like a _____.

5. In the box, draw a picture of what the Big Dipper Will probably look like in 50,000 years.

(note: The Big Dipper has seven stars.
Be sure there are 7 stars in your picture.)



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Vocabulary Activity



The words below are scrambled words from the article.
Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Look
back in the article to be sure each word is spelled correctly.

1.

c	a	n	n
t	e	i	

Clue: from long ago

2.

n	m	i	i
a	g	e	



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4.

n	m	r	e	s	s
r	r	o	o	a	

Clue: people who study stars and outer space

5.

a	o	s	x	i
n	n	e	p	

Clue: growth; getting bigger

6.

l	l	o	o	i	a	c
e	t	t	s	n	n	s

Clue: the 88 group of stars that makes an officially recognized shape

ANSWER KEY

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1. What is a constellation? **c**
- a. a group of stars that are close to Earth

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(note: The Big Dipper has seven stars.
Be sure there are 7 stars in your picture.)

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Vocabulary Activity



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1.

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3.

4.

5.



6.

l l o o i a c
e t t s n n s

constellations

Clue: the 88 group of stars that makes an officially recognized shape