

Constellations of Beloved Things: Creating New Constellations and the Legends Behind Them

Objective: To explore the different ways in which various cultures have explained and named the constellations, particularly the Big Dipper, and to use these legends as inspiration for creating new ones.

Materials: Constellation legends (attached)
Planning sheet (attached)
Constellation template (attached)
Scrap paper for narrative
Final paper for narrative
Black construction paper
Construction paper crayons (white, yellow)

Activities:

Use the constellation legends information to discuss with students the concept that our familiar constellations may have different names, identities, and legends in other cultures. Discuss the idea that these representations say something about what is important or present to a particular culture.

Distribute the planning sheet and constellation template; have students complete the planning sheet and begin to design their new constellations on the template.

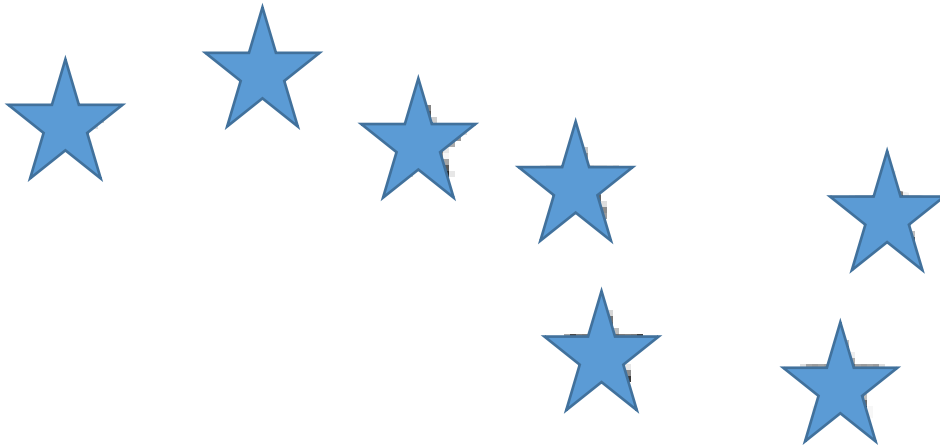
On scrap paper, have them begin to write the legend of their constellation. Work with them to revise and edit; also have them read aloud to the class and have the class workshop their writing, perhaps using Compass Responses (N = Need to know; S = Suggestion; E = Excited about; W = Wonder about).

Have them write their final version on star paper; have them draw and label their constellation on black paper. Use construction paper crayons for the best result. Display the narrative and drawing side by side.

LESSON PLAN



BLUE PLANET
WRITERS' ROOM





Constellations of Beloved Things

What will your constellation represent? A thing? A scene? A person or animal?

What will your stars represent? Things? People? Animals? Ideas?

Name your constellation: _____

Name your seven stars:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

On the back of this sheet, draw and label your new constellation!



Big Dipper Legends From Around the World

What we call the Big Dipper is not actually a constellation—it is an *asterism*—a part of a larger constellation. In the West, we call that constellation Ursa Major, or The Great Bear. Read on to learn what other people through time and across the world have called it!

Greek and Roman Mythology

Zeus (Jupiter in Roman Mythology) was married to Hera (Juno), but was in love with Callisto. Hera (Juno) discovered them together in the forest, and to save Callisto from her wrath, Zeus (Jupiter) turned Callisto into a bear. One day, Callisto's son Arcas was hunting in the forest, saw a great bear, and shot it with an arrow. As it lay dying, it turned back into his mother. Arcas cried out to Zeus in anger and grief, and the god turned Callisto back into a bear and placed her in the sky, where she could remain forever as Ursa Major, the great bear. He also changed Arcas into a smaller bear and placed him in the sky as well, so that he could always be with his mother. We call him Ursa Minor, the small bear.

Basque Region of Spain and France

Two thieves robbed a man of his two oxen, and the man set out after them, accompanied by his housekeeper, his servant, and his dog. As punishment for the crime—and for the impatient way in which the man chased the thieves—everyone was taken up into the sky and set there as a constellation. The first two stars in the ladle part of the dipper are the two oxen; the next two are the thieves, right behind them; and the servant, the housekeeper, and the man form the “handle.” The dog is the faint star in the ladle part of the constellation.

Arabian Mythology

The ladle part of the dipper was a coffin to the Arabians; the sons of the dead man make up the handle.

Germany

The Germans see the constellation as a big wagon.

England

The constellation is King Arthur's chariot, slowly circling the pole.

Ireland

The constellation is a chariot in Ireland, too, but it belongs to the Biblical King David rather than to King Arthur.

China

The bowl of the dipper was the home of the god of literature—a young man who was so ugly that even when he won the grand prize for literature, the emperor was so stunned by his ugliness that he dropped and broke the prize before handing it to the young man. Devastated,



the young man tried to drown himself, but was saved by a sea monster who raised him up and placed him in the sky, where he watches over the literary affairs of the world.

Ancient Maya Mythology

The Yucatec Maya, from the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico, call the constellation “The Seven Sacraments,” and they warn that if you count the seven stars, your spouse will die.

The Tzotzil see the constellation as part of a turtle that extends through other nearby constellations.

The Quiche see it variously as a bird, a cupped hand, or a spoon.