

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 figures and other objects, the astronomers looked at the stars and saw things.

But if you've ever played this cloud gazing game with your friends, you've probably noticed that different people see different things in the clouds. You may see a bear, while your best friend sees a lion in the very same cloud. This was also the case with naming the constellations. And as a result, the same constellation can be known by different names across the globe.

One of the best-known constellations is the Big Dipper. If you've ever seen it in the sky, then you know it looks like a scooper or a dipper. But the ancient Greeks called the Big Dipper "Ursa Major" or "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

2. How many officially recognized constellations are there? _____

3. Long ago, the constellation Cassiopeia was shaped like a W. Today it is shaped like a squiggly line. Why does it look different today than it did many years ago?

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.)

Name: _____

Pictures in the Stars

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	

Clue: to form a picture in the mind

3.

a	c	r	h
t	o	i	

Clue: two-wheeled vehicle pulled by a horse

4.

n	m	t	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
 - 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
2. How many officially recognized constellations are there? **88**
3. Long ago, the constellation Cassiopeia was shaped like a W. Today it is shaped like a squiggly line. Why does it look different today than it did many years ago?

Because the universe has expanded since then.

4. Complete each sentence below.

The ancient Greeks thought the Big Dipper looked like a **big bear**.

Long ago, people of Britain thought the Big Dipper looked like a **plough or plow**.

Ancient Irish and French people thought the big dipper looked like a **chariot**.

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.)

Picture should consist of stars shaped like the number five.

Name: _____

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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	

ancient

Clue: from long ago

2.

n	m	i	i
a	g	e	

imagine

Clue: to form a picture in the mind

3.

a	c	r	h
t	o	i	

chariot

Clue: two-wheeled vehicle pulled by a horse

4.

n	m	t	e	s	s
r	r	o	o	a	

astronomers

Clue: people who study stars and outer space

5.

a	o	s	x	i
n	n	e	p	

expansion

Clue: growth; getting bigger

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