

Constellation Facts for Kids

Have you ever looked up in the sky and seen a bright pattern of stars? Maybe you saw a swan? Or a hunter? What about a lion? Or a snake? These are all constellations.

WHAT ARE CONSTELLATIONS?

Constellations are groupings of individual stars that form patterns in the sky. They have been used for centuries to help navigation at sea, and even today people enjoy looking at them for fun. Which ones have you seen?

Orion, the hunter, is one of the easiest constellations to spot in the night sky. The Big Dipper contains the brightest star, Polaris. You may know Polaris as the North Star and it is always located in the North. Some constellations can only be seen in the northern sky while others can only be seen in the southern sky.

No matter if you're in the northern hemisphere or the southern hemisphere, look up to the constellations and try to see if you can spot them all. Remember the constellations span the entire sky – Orion and the Big Dipper are just two of the 88 official constellations. So, what are you waiting for? Grab a telescope and get spotting! While your eyes are in the sky, think about these 10 fun constellation facts for kids.

HISTORY OF CONSTELLATIONS

The Greek astronomer Ptolemy discovered more than half of the current list of ancient constellations. The ancient constellations are also known as the original constellations and include the constellations of Lyra and Eridanus. Ptolemy also discovered Orion, the famous hunter constellation, and Taurus, the bull.

Based on the star patterns and location of constellations, it appears Orion is hunting Taurus. If you see a hunter in the sky, keep your eyes open for a bull too!

The swan constellation is called Cygnus and is located in the Milky Way Galaxy. It can be seen in the northern sky and is more clearly visible in the summer and early fall months. Some people refer to Cygnus as the Northern Cross constellation. There is a story in Greek mythology that the Greek God Zeus once transformed himself into this cross-shaped constellation.

o Hercules, a warrior constellation.

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CONSTELLATION NAMING

Some star constellations are named after animals, such as Leo (the lion) and Scorpius (the scorpion). Canis Major and Canis Minor are also animal constellations. Canis Major is a big dog and Canis Minor is a little dog. These two constellations can be found near each other in the southern hemisphere of the sky.

Different constellations are named after objects, such as Andromeda (the princess) and Cassiopeia (the queen). These constellations have had their names since ancient times. Remember Ptolemy? He discovered and named both Andromeda and Cassiopeia.

CONSTELLATIONS IN THE SKY

The big dipper and little dipper are part of the group of stars in the Ursa major family. When put together with other patterns of stars, the big dipper can transform into a big bear in the sky, also known as the great bear. The little dipper, also known as Ursa Minor, can be seen as a small cup in the sky or a little bear.

Orion is one of the most recognizable and well-known constellations. It can be seen with the naked eye on a clear night. Have you ever seen Orion? He appears as a hunter in the night sky. Be careful, though. Orion appears very similar to Hercules, a warrior constellation.

Some constellations have more than 100 stars! The largest constellation is Hydra with 238 bright stars. The constellation covers three percent of the celestial sphere. The smallest constellation is the Crux. The Crux, also known as the southern cross, can be seen in the southern hemisphere. Although it's small, it contains five of the brighter stars in the southern sky and is actually one of the most recognizable constellations.

Polaris is the North Star. It is one of the brightest stars located in the constellation Ursa Major. It is the tip of the Big Dipper and can be seen from anywhere in the Northern Hemisphere. Many travelers and sailors would look up and find Polaris to guide them to the North. Constellations can be used to tell time. For example, the Big Dipper can be used to find Polaris, which is in the north.

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ZODIAC CONSTELLATIONS

Aquarius is a water bearer constellation that can only be seen in the night sky during specific times of the year. It is also one of the 12 zodiac constellations. The other 12 zodiac constellations are Pisces, Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpius, Sagittarius, and Capricorn. Do you know what zodiac constellation you are? Hint: It's based on your birthday.

LOOKING FOR CONSTELLATIONS

Which constellations have you seen? If you're new to stargazing, look for the Big Dipper first. Then look for Orion, the hunter. Chances are if you find Orion, you will find Taurus too. If you live in the southern hemisphere, keep an eye out for the Crux – the smallest yet one of the brightest constellations.

No matter where you are in the world, you have the chance to see constellations each and every night. If you just look up, I guarantee you will at least find Polaris or the North Star. And, if you can find Polaris, you can find the Big Dipper.

Keep an eye out for a Little Dipper too. It appears to be pouring stars into the Big Dipper. Do you see the bears too? The big bear is part of the Big Dipper and the little bear is part of the Little Dipper.

Canis Major and Canis Minor are also animal constellations representing a big dog and a little dog. Keep looking for them in the sky if you haven't found them yet. They are located right next to each other!

Constellations are everywhere, so don't give up searching. If you're looking for a challenge, try finding Cassiopeia or Andromeda. Count how many constellations you see and share with your friends what your favorite constellations are.

CONSTELLATION WORD SEARCH

ORION	PTOLEMY	HYDRA	STAR	SKY
BIG	CYGNUS	CRUX	HEMISPHERE	VIRGO
DIPPER	GALAXY	AQUARIUS	TAURUS	LEO
POLARIS	SCORPIUS	NORTH	TELESCOPE	PISCES

P	P	T	S	N	A	I	B	H	H	F	I	J	H
T	V	A	E	P	V	S	O	H	Y	O	I	P	E
O	I	V	S	L	N	O	R	T	H	D	O	Q	M
L	R	G	C	P	E	X	C	L	J	C	R	N	I
E	G	Y	O	R	R	S	M	Z	S	S	I	A	S
M	O	C	R	T	U	C	C	I	T	S	O	C	P
Y	F	S	P	X	O	X	F	O	W	K	N	Y	H
H	P	T	I	L	E	O	S	J	P	Y	C	G	E
L	T	A	U	R	U	S	B	G	I	E	C	N	R
B	B	R	S	E	I	C	P	A	S	X	W	U	E
I	P	O	L	A	R	I	S	L	C	D	S	S	E
G	S	K	S	N	P	C	A	A	E	I	M	O	M
A	Q	U	A	R	I	U	S	X	S	P	A	W	Q
T	S	K	B	U	V	R	S	Y	K	P	M	Q	K
Y	O	J	Z	D	E	L	B	A	F	E	E	M	I
R	N	S	X	O	Y	B	F	K	L	R	Q	S	O

