

## Constellations

Introduction

As the sky darkens at night, you can see that some stars “come out” and appear to form patterns. Ancient people called these “constellations”: “con-” meaning “with” and “stella” meaning “stars,” or “stars that go together. Using imagination, people thought of these as objects and made up stories to explain them.

In reality, the stars are not really together or near each other, but rather are separated by great distances and have no connection. They only look this way from our viewpoint on Earth. Nevertheless, they are useful as “skymarks” (like landmarks) to understand where in space we are looking.

In this activity, you can find out more about them and some of the legends behind a few familiar constellations. Use your internet resources and print materials to answer these questions. Here’s a starting link: <http://www.astro.wisc.edu/~dolan/constellations/>

Q1. The Big Dipper and Little Dipper

One of the most familiar pair of constellations to us in this area is the Big Dipper and Little Dipper, also called *Ursa major* (*The Great Bear*) and *Ursa minor* (*the Little Bear*). In the space below, draw how these look.

How can you tell which way is north using these constellations?

Why can we see them all year round?