

# Constellation Legends

For much of human history, people have looked up at the skies and gave meaning to why the stars are the way they are. Tales from the Greeks, Chinese, Maya, and many other cultures describe their meaning. Below is a constellation story from the Maya for you to read and be inspired by!

## Seven Macaw (The Big Dipper)

At the latitude where the Maya people live, the Big Dipper (or Ursa major in Greek mythology) dips below the horizon for part of each night due to the tilt of the Earth's axis. To the Maya, what is called the Big Dipper, is a parrot named "Seven Macaw." Seven Macaw has long tail feathers, similar to the shape of the handle of the Big Dipper.

The Seven probably refers to the number of bright stars in the constellation. Seven Macaw's wife is Chimalmat or "shield", which is the Little Dipper (or Ursa minor) in Greek mythology.

According to Popol Vuh (the creation story of the Maya), Seven Macaw thinks he is very important because the light from his stars guides people to their destination. He makes some very boastful claims. The twin heroes of the Popol Vuh decided to teach Seven Macaw a lesson for his bragging.

The Twins discovered that Seven Macaw is a creature of habit. He flies into the World Tree below the horizon each day to eat its fruit. When the bird is in the tree, one of the twins, who is named Hunahpu, aims his blowgun at the parrot to knock Seven Macaw to the ground. The dart breaks open Seven Macaw's beak, and knocks him out of the tree.

Seven Macaw's rising at dusk is a sign of the dry season. When Seven Macaw descends below the horizon at dusk the rainy season has arrived.

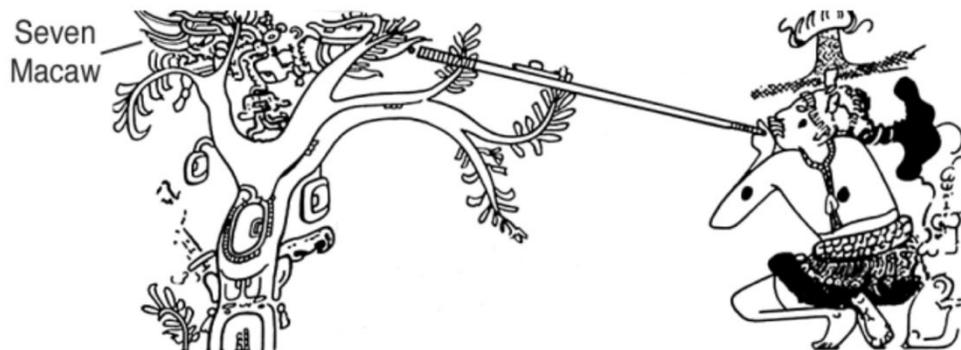
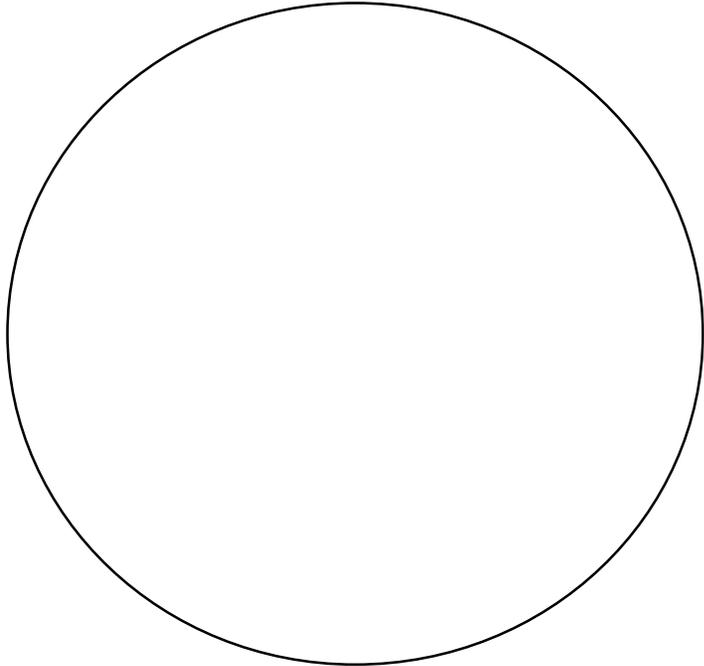
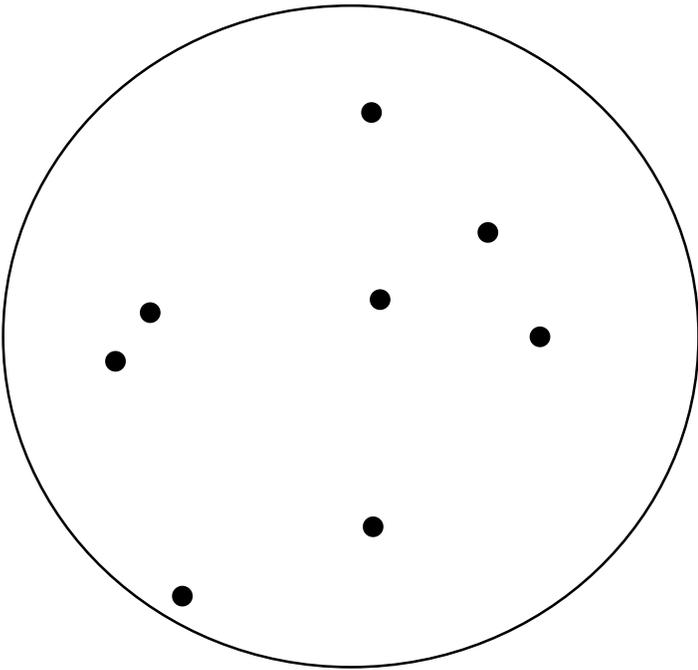


Figure 1

# Create your Own Constellation!

Connect the dots on the left to create your own character in the night sky. On the right, draw your own pattern to make an individual character. In the lines below, write their constellation origin story of how they came to be.



Origin Story

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Make a telescope for viewing your constellation!

For this project you will need:

- Scissors
- A 3" x 3" square of dark paper or paper painted dark
- Sharpened pencil
- Tape or rubber band
- A paper towel roll



1. Trace one end of the tube on the paper square.  
Using a regular leaded pencil will show up best on the dark paper.

2. Draw the constellation of your choosing from the page below.

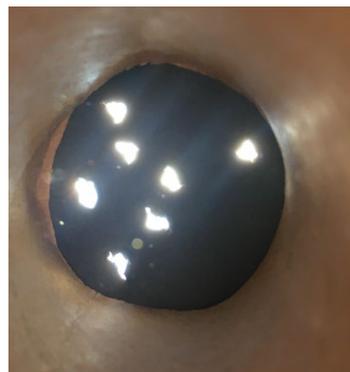
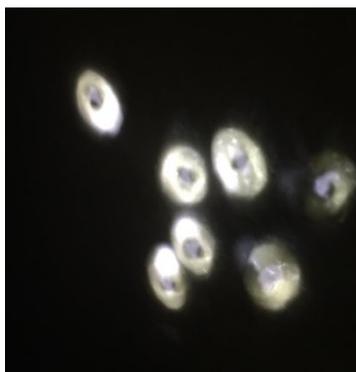
3. Be sure to make the stars nice and big, inside the circle you traced.

4. Tape the paper to cover one end of the tube, making sure not to leave any openings.

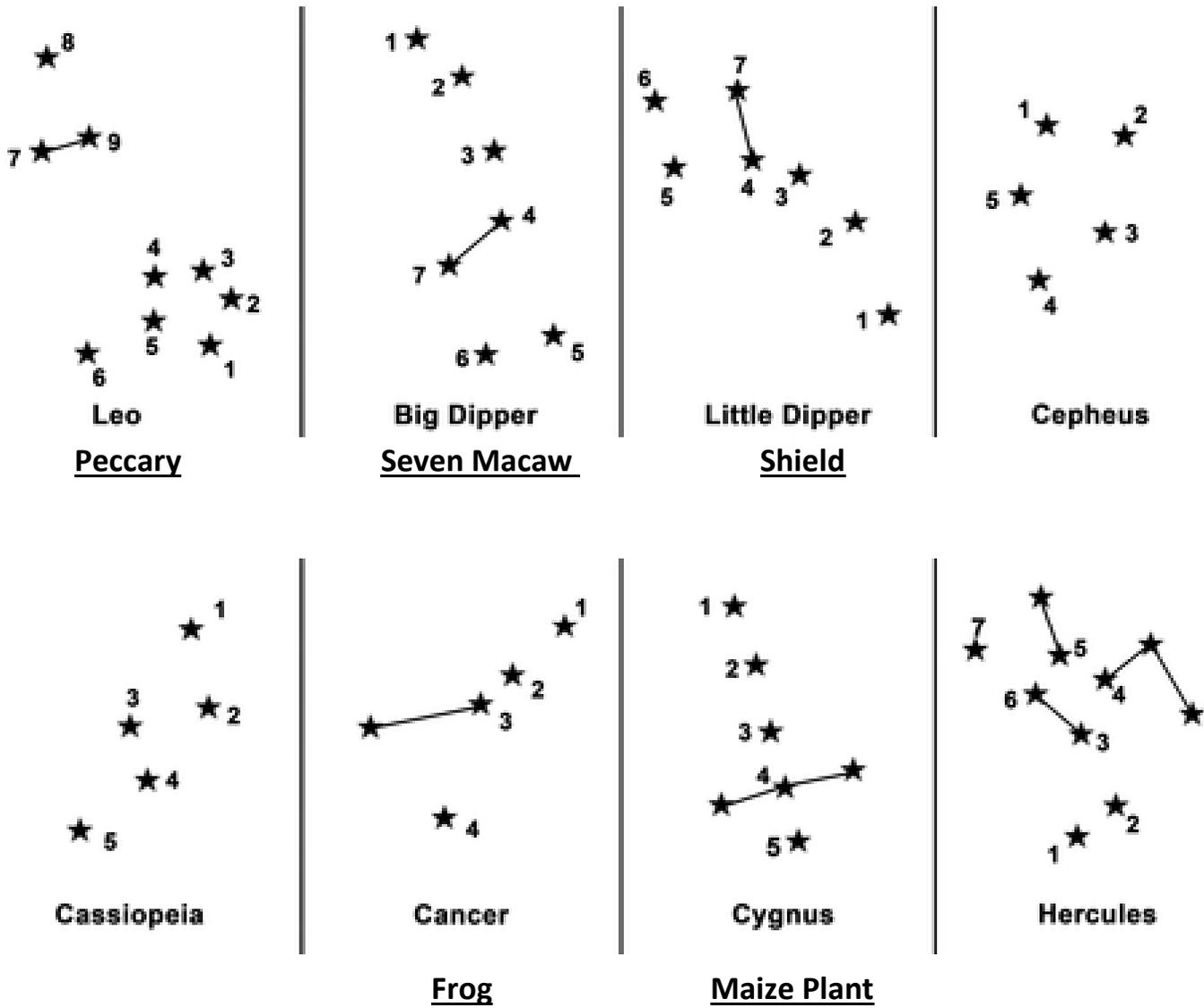


5. Use your pencil to carefully poke a hole for each star in the constellation.

6. Turn the lights out and shine the flashlight through the open end of the tube onto a surface to illuminate your constellation in the dark. You can also use your tube to look up at the blue sky, to see your constellation even during the day, but be careful to never look at the sun to protect your eyes!



Here are some constellations we can see in the night sky along with their names from Greek mythology. Underlined, are the Maya names for the constellation.



You can see more constellation patterns identified by different cultures at <https://figuresinthesky.visualcinnamon.com/#sky-cultures> for more inspiration to make your constellation telescope!

## References and Additional Resources

Learn about how and why the Maya track the stars!

<https://maya.nmai.si.edu/the-maya/connecting-earth-and-sky>

Learn about constellations around the world and view more constellations!

<https://figuresinthesky.visualcinnamon.com/>

STARLAB teacher's curriculum – Maya Skies

<https://www.starlab.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/D.-15.-Maya-Skies-v616.pdf>