

NATIVE AMERICAN EDUCATION FOR ALL RESOURCES

Partnership of IllumiNative and the National Indian Education Association



ILLUMINATIVE



Grade Level

PK-2

Subject

**Social Studies
Astronomy
Art**

Lesson Title

**Native Night Skies: How
Constellations Got Their Names**

Activity Description: In this activity, students will listen to a Native storyteller talk about how the constellations came to be, and discuss why we have constellations. Students will then have the opportunity to create and name their own constellations.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- ["Why Coyote Howls: A Star Story"](#) retold by Lynn Moroney (Chickasaw)
- [Images of Constellations](#)
- Crayons, colored pencils, or markers
- Paper
- Marshmallows
- Toothpicks or dry spaghetti
- Optional Items:
 - Glue
 - Paint
 - Tissue Paper
 - Scissors
 - Construction Paper

STEPS

This activity is for children to do with a person from the family or community. It is advised that younger children have an adult to supervise the activity, but older children can do this alone if they wish.

1. Listen to Lynn Moroney read ["Why Coyote Howls: A Star Story"](#) (a blend of tales found in Native American oral narratives).
2. After reading the story, show your child [images of constellations](#) and note their names.
 - a. Consider looking for these constellations when it gets dark outside.

Making Your 3D Constellation

1. Using toothpicks, or dry spaghetti, and marshmallows, ask your child to then create their own 3D constellation and give it a name.

Illustrate the Story

1. Using paper and drawing utensils, encourage your child to create a story about how their constellation came to be.
2. Optional: Provide the optional items in the materials list above to your child to encourage to use more creativity in their illustrations.

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HELPFUL TIPS

Parents and caregivers: This activity helps children encourages children to use their imagination, while also learning the significance of Native American storytelling when talking about various things in nature.

- You may want to put newspaper down on the table while your child is completing this activity.
- After you finish listening to the story with your child, prompt them with the following questions:
 - What did the night sky look like before the animals spoke with the Creator?
 - What did the Creator offer the animals?
 - What did the animals do?
 - Why are some star pictures "unfinished?"
 - Why was Coyote the only animal that did not make a picture?
- While your student is completing their 3D constellation model, prompt them with questions, such as:
 - "Why are you making the constellation this way?" or "What inspired you to make it that way?"
- Ask your child to share their story with you or other family members.
 - Encourage family members to ask your child questions about the story, such as "Why did you give it that name?"

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Families and Educators: This activity may open other talking points around constellations, stars, and even other planets and moons. Perhaps your child will also want to hear more Native American stories about stars and constellations.

- [This resource](#) provide additional activities for children to explore more about constellations using the story they listened to in this activity.
- For more Native American stories about stars and constellations, read this Ojibwe story from the Great Lakes Region entitled ["How Fisher Went to the Skyland: The Origin of the Big Dipper"](#)

Activity Resource Links:

- **Adapted from:**
 - "Drawing Conclusions: How Constellations Got Their Names": <https://www.lpi.usra.edu/education/skytellers/constellations/activities/conclusions/>
 - "Images of Constellations and their Names": <https://www.space.com/23309-constellations-night-sky-star-patterns-images.html>
 - "Why the Coyote Howls: A Star Story": <https://www.lpi.usra.edu/education/skytellers/constellations/preview/>
 - "Native Night Skies": <https://intersectingart.umn.edu/?lesson/38>
- Additional Constellation Activities: <https://www.space.com/23309-constellations-night-sky-star-patterns-images.html>
- "How Fisher Went to the Skyland: The Origin of the Big Dipper": http://www.ojibwe-dakota-in-mn.com/uploads/5/2/5/8/52587125/how_fisher_went_to_the_skyland.pdf