

**SKY STORIES AND ADDITIONAL MATERIAL FROM NEWSLETTERS
SEPTEMBER 2005 THROUGH AUGUST 2008**

The constellations featured in the stories are available in the early-to-middle evening in the season specified. As the year progresses, these same constellations are available earlier in the evening. Sun and Moon legends are useful in any season.

SUMMER AND FALL

Suitable for use from about July through October
Story retelling and additional material by Nancy Lebofsky

Story: King of the Stars

Source: Marshall Islands

Celestial Objects: Antares (Scorpius), the Pleiades (Taurus)

The mother of all the stars lived on an atoll in the Pacific Ocean. All of her sons came down from the heavens to visit her. They suggested a canoe race and whichever son reached a certain island first would become King of the Stars. All the sons got busy, readying themselves for the race.

The mother first asked her eldest son to take her with him, but he refused. His mother had too many possessions to bring along and the weight would slow him down. So she asked each of her other sons in turn, and none was willing to take her. Only the youngest son, Pleiades, was willing to take his mother. He took his mother and her seven possessions into his canoe. She showed him how to place each possession.

When the race started, the youngest son's canoe flew forward. The possessions were a new kind of sail and rigging. The oldest brother used his right as the first-born and ordered Pleiades to give him the canoe. Pleiades obeyed, but his mother played a trick on her eldest son. As she and Pleiades jumped into the ocean, she took with her the yardarm of the sail. She and her youngest son began to swim to the island.

In order for the eldest son to sail the canoe, he had to fasten the sail to his shoulders. Look at the shape of Scorpius and you will see his bent back. By the time he got on course and reached the island, Pleiades had become King of the Stars. The eldest brother was so angry he said he wished never to see Pleiades again. So when Pleiades rises in the east, the eldest brother (represented by the star Antares in Scorpius) sets in the west.

Story: Magpies and the Milky Way

Source: China and Japan

Celestial Objects: The Summer Triangle—Vega (Lyra), Altair (Aquila), Deneb (Cygnus)

Background

The story of the Weaving Princess and the Shepherd (or herdsman or farmer) can be found in both Chinese and Japanese traditions. Below is a summary of the story. Other versions of this story are found in Tom Birdseye's *A Song of Stars* (1990) and Jeanne Lee's *Legend of the Milky Way* (1982), a Reading Rainbow Book which tells the Chinese version of the legend.

Vega, the star represented by the Weaving Princess, is a prominent star in the constellation Lyra (the harp). Altair, the star represented by the Shepherd, is a prominent star in the constellation Aquila (the eagle). In the summer these two stars can be seen separated by the Milky Way. Vega and Altair are part of an *asterism* — a prominent group of stars, but not one of the 88 designated constellations — called the Summer Triangle. The third star in the triangle is Deneb, located in the constellation Cygnus (the swan), or the Northern Cross. Another common asterism is the Big Dipper, seven prominent stars within the constellation Ursa Major (the Great Bear).

Following is an explanation of the festival associated with the Summer Triangle:

“Tanabata, also known as the "star festival", takes place on the 7th day of the 7th month of the year, when, according to a Chinese legend, the two stars Altair and Vega, which are usually separated from each other by the Milky Way, are able to meet.

Because the 7th month of the year roughly coincides with August rather than July according to the formerly used lunar calendar, Tanabata is still celebrated on August 7th in some regions of Japan, while it is celebrated on July 7th in other regions.

One popular Tanabata custom is to write one's wishes on a piece of paper, and hang that piece of paper on a specially erected bamboo tree, in the hope that the wishes come true.

Colorful Tanabata festivals are held across Japan in early July and August. Among the biggest and most famous ones are the Tanabata Festivals of Sendai in August and Hiratsuka near Tokyo in July.” (<http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2283.html>)

Story Summary: Magpies and the Milky Way

Long ago there was a beautiful princess, the daughter of the Sky God. She was the most skillful weaver in the land, weaving beautiful cloth at her loom every day. One day she looked up from her loom and saw a herdsman at work. She fell in love with him at once. When the herdsman saw the princess at her window, he also fell in love.

The Weaving Princess begged her father to allow her to marry the poor herdsman. The Sky God agreed, and the two were very happy together. They were so happy that they each neglected their work. The princess forgot to weave her beautiful cloth, and the herdsman neglected his animals. The Sky God decided to punish them.

The Sky God placed the princess in the sky in one place, and the herdsman in the sky in another place. She was called Orihime Boshi (Weaving Princess Star) and he was called Hiko Boshi (Puller of Cow Star). Between them the Sky God put a river of stars. They could see each other, but could not cross the river. The princess and herdsman returned to their work with great sadness.

The Sky God took pity on them and decided that if they worked hard at their tasks, he would allow the princess and the herdsman to meet one night each year. Toward the end of summer, a great flock of magpies flew to the river of the stars. They settled onto the water and formed a bridge for the princess and herdsman to cross. The next night the magpies were gone, and the princess and herdsman returned to their work for another year.

Additional Information:

Scorpius:

As Scorpius begins to set and the “Rabbit Tracks” or “Three Ducks Swimming” (i.e., the tail of Scorpius) disappear from the night sky, the traditional storytelling time begins. This is the time when the birds fly south, animals begin to hibernate, and ice begins to form on the rivers. Speaking for us in southern Arizona, thousands of butterflies have been migrating through town for the past few weeks, the white wing doves are beginning to leave, and the scorpions are no longer strolling down the sides of the streets after dark, so we are definitely seeing the beginning of a seasonal change despite daytime temperatures in the 90s.

While Scorpius is still available in the early evening, try to picture these stars as something other than a scorpion. In his book *The New Patterns in the Sky*, author Julius D. W. Staal shows illustrations from other cultures in which Scorpius is viewed as: (a) a mother with baby (Brazil, picture the baby in a basket on the mother’s back with the basket fitting into the body and curve of the scorpion’s tail); (b) a palm tree (Borneo, Java, Bali, picture the tree bending to the west in the sky); (c) a goose hatching its eggs under the palm tree (Java, picture the goose nestled in the scorpion’s tail at the base of the palm tree on the leeward side with the dangerous coconuts hanging on the windward side); (d) a ray (East Indies, western Pacific); and (e) a snake or serpent (Java, Brazil).

Another interpretation sees Scorpius as Maui’s Fish Hook. Maui legends come from both New Zealand and Hawaii, where Maui is associated with Mt. Haleakala on the island of Maui. A summary of the story of Maui’s Fish Hook from New Zealand follows:

One day Maui was fishing when he felt his fish hook snag on something on the bottom of the sea. He tugged and pulled as hard as he could until the hook broke free and rushed to the surface. Along with the hook there came a fish-shaped island. On the island were grass, trees, and people. The men were hunters and the women cooked on open fires. Maui warned his own people not to harm the fish-island, but of course they did not listen. Soon they were hacking pieces out of the island. This left the island with a ragged coast line, and eventually the island

broke into two islands. We know these as the North and South Islands of New Zealand. The fish hook came up from the bottom of the sea so rapidly, and broke the surface with so much speed and strength, that it flew up into the sky. Today we see Maui's fish hook in the stars of the constellation Scorpius.

The Summer Triangle:

Not all cultures through the ages attached the same names or significance to the constellations. For example, let's look at the three constellations of the Summer Triangle. According to Greek mythology, Lyra (the lyre) was created by Mercury from an empty tortoise shell and some strings. Apollo admired this instrument and traded his staff (called the caduceus) to Mercury for the lyre. Apollo eventually passed on the lyre to his son, Orpheus, with whom the lyre is usually associated. In Persia, this constellation is seen as a tortoise or clay tablet, while Roman tradition sees it as a vase.

Aquila (the eagle) was Jupiter's bird and carried out many difficult tasks for his master, including carrying the handsome youth Ganymede to Olympus to become the cup bearer and wine pourer to the gods. In India, this constellation is seen as the three footsteps of Vishnu or a shoulder yoke with two hanging baskets.

In ancient Greece, Cygnus was known as the Bird, more specifically the Swan in Roman tradition. Other variations for this constellation are the Duck and the Hen. The Swan was the personal bird of the goddess Venus.

WINTER

Suitable for use from about November through March

Story retelling and additional material by Nancy Lebofsky and Thea Cañizo

Story: The Brave Cooks

Source: Native American

Celestial Objects: Auriga and Perseus

A Native American story from the northwest involves the constellations Auriga and Perseus. Nancy's retelling follows:

Long ago the Couer d'Alene men and women lived all across the northern plain. The men were hunters, who worked very hard all day and came home very hungry. The women collected nuts, roots, and berries.

In the summer the people dug camas roots. Then the women made a meal from these delicious roots. First they built a large pit called an earth oven. They filled the pit with rocks, which they heated. Then they cooked the camas roots on the hot rocks. The men of the village were

forbidden to approach the oven. If they came close, the roots would not cook the way they should!

The roots gave off a wonderful, sweet fragrance as they began to cook. The wonderful sweet fragrance drifted with the breeze and soon reached the nose of a very naughty skunk. He decided to follow the sweet smell and see what he could find.

He followed the smell to the edge of a village. He crept quietly through the village, sniffing and following the fragrance of the cooking roots. At last the skunk found the cooking pit.

Skunk did not like people and they did not like him. He decided to ruin the camas roots cooking in the earth oven.

Skunk knew that people ran the other way when they saw him coming. He walked right up to the edge of the cooking pit. Some of the women were frightened and ran away. Soon only a few brave women and the naughty skunk faced each other across the cooking pit. The women knew that Skunk could release his foul smell to ruin their dinner. His smell would get into their food, their clothes, and their hair. But they had worked very hard digging roots in the summer sun. They had worked very hard digging the cooking pit and heating the stones. They did not want Skunk to ruin their dinner.

The women sat down in a tight circle all around the edge of the earth oven. Skunk glared at the women and tried hard to look very fierce. They glared right back at the skunk.

Story: Matariki: The Little Eyes

Source: Polynesian

Celestial Objects: Sirius (Canis Major), Aldebaran (Taurus), and the Pleiades (Taurus)

There was once a most beautiful star, far brighter and more beautiful than any other in the heavens. This star was not content to be silent; it constantly bragged about how much brighter it was than any other star, and even suggested that its beauty was greater than that of the gods themselves! This kind of talk had disastrous consequences for the star. The sky god Tane heard of the star's boasting. He decided to do away with it by forcing it into the area of darkness from which no light can ever be seen.

The god Tane got help from two other stars named Mere (Sirius) and Aumea (Aldebaran). They were eager to help Tane because they would become more important once the beautiful star was eliminated.

One night when the Moon was not up, the sky was dark and quiet. Tane and his two helpers crept up to the beautiful star and screamed, "Now you will be gone!" The beautiful star jumped up in terror and ran to hide behind the stars of the river of the Milky Way. Mere climbed to the source

of the river, built a dam, and changed the path of the water so that the beautiful star could no longer hide behind it. The star took off in fright again and quickly put a good distance between itself and its three enemies. Seeing that the star was escaping, the god Tane picked up Aumea, took careful aim, and threw Aumea with all his might at the fleeing star. Smash! Aumea struck with such force that the beautiful star split into six pieces.

Tane, Mere, and Aumea gleefully celebrated their success and returned to their places in the sky. Mere, now called Sirius, is the brightest star of all. Aumea, now called Aldebaran, stands proudly without any competitor close by. The six pieces of the former beauty traveled together to a new part of the heavens. There they can be found today. They form a beautiful cluster called Matariki, or Little Eyes (the Pleiades). They, like the beautiful star they came from, are very vain, but they have learned not to be so boastful. People in Polynesia, however, say that from time to time soft whispers can be heard coming from the cluster. “We’re still the loveliest sight in the sky, aren’t we?”

Story: Beaver and Rock: The Twins

Source: Native American

Celestial Objects: Castor and Pollux (Gemini)

Once long ago in the lands of the Blackfoot, twin sons were born to a man named Smart Crow and his beloved wife. The wife fell ill soon after the birth of the babies and within a short time, she died. Smart Crow grieved very much for his lost wife. He had no interest in his two infant sons and abandoned them to be raised by others.

As the years passed the brothers, named Beaver and Rock, were allowed to do exactly as they pleased. Rock especially grew to be wild and foolhardy. The boys roamed and ran throughout the land, playing, exploring, and learning how to use their bows and arrows.

At that time all Blackfoot children were forbidden to shoot at a kind of bird named the morning bird. Rock, however, would not be bound by any of the rules of his people. One day he spied a morning bird flying high above him. Taking careful aim with his bow, he hit the bird on his first try and watched as it fell into the high branches of a nearby tree. He was eager to show off to the other children, so he climbed into the tree to get the fallen bird. But each time he was within grasp of the bird and reached out for it, the branches of the tree grew higher and higher. Rock kept on climbing. Soon Beaver, left behind on the ground, could no longer see his twin or even the top of the tree. It seemed to reach into the sky.

Poor Beaver was now all alone! But he learned to get along on his own and grew up to be a fine young man. Eventually Beaver married the younger daughter of a Blackfoot chief. They lived happily together and Beaver was able to teach her all he had learned about living from the land.

During these years Beaver performed many good deeds for his tribe. One season, when the buffalo hunted by the Blackfoot seemed to be disappearing from the Earth. Beaver was able to

find the herds and thus saved his people from starvation. He returned to camp as a hero, happy to be with his wife again.

Then one day his wife forgot what Beaver had taught her about good and bad medicine and did something Beaver had told her she must never do: she threw sagebrush on the campfire. This was a terrible mistake. It meant that Beaver's life on Earth must end. When Beaver saw what his wife had done, he said, "Now I must leave you and go to live with my brother."

He put on a white robe and taking a plume in his hand, he blew on it and was lifted into the sky. He followed the path of the tree that his twin had climbed years before. Beaver reached the heavens and came to rest at the side of his brother. The twins were together once again. The two stars seen side by side in the sky are Rock and Beaver, also known as Castor and Pollux.

Story: The Sisters and the Milky Way

Source: Ancient Arabia

Celestial Objects: Sirius (Canis Major), Procyon (Canis Minor), and Canopus (Carina)

Long ago a young man named Suhail fell in love with a girl named Al Jauzah. He was so smitten with her that he left his home in the southern sky and pursued her up to her home in the north. But Al Jauzah had no interest in Suhail. Suhail proposed marriage time and again, but Al Jauzah always refused him. Finally, she became furiously angry at him because he would not give up. She gave him a mighty kick that sent him reeling through the sky. "Go back where you came from!" she shouted as Suhail flew across a great river and into the far away southern sky.

It happened that Suhail had two sisters who had followed after him on his trip to woo Al Jauzah. When they saw him being hurled homeward, they hurried after him. They quickly came to that part of the sky which has the great river running through it. The sisters would have to swim across it.

The first sister was older and stronger, so she led the way. She jumped into the river, swam across it, and then turned to wait for her sister. The younger sister was timid and not as good a swimmer. She tried and tried to swim across, but she grew tired and weak and became afraid of drowning if she jumped into the water one more time. She fell to the bank of the river and wept and wept.

Both sisters are still in the sky. The older one who crossed the river is Sirius, the brightest star in the sky. The younger sister is Procyon, who to this day sits crying on the opposite bank of the river. Procyon shines less brightly because she is younger and weaker and her tears dim the light. The great river that separates them is the Milky Way. Their brother Suhail is now called Canopus and shines brightly in the southern sky, ever waiting for his sisters to arrive home. The princess is probably represented by Capella in the constellation Auriga.

Story: Yu Shih: The God of Rain

Source: Ancient China

Celestial Objects: The Hyades (Taurus)

In the far, far past before Earth was the home of living things, and even before there was an Earth, the great Chinese goddess Nu Kua looked about at the loneliness of space and decided to create our world. Nu Kua used her powers to create the land with its mountains, valleys, and plains, and the oceans, rivers, and seas. Four gigantic pillars held up the sky, and at each pillar she placed an enormous animal as guardian: a dragon, a bird, a tiger, and a tortoise. Nu Kua's new Earth was a beautiful place with fertile land and sparkling oceans.

But there were evil beings jealous of Nu Kua's creation. These were the dragon kings. Led by a fearsome giant named Kung Kung, they caused the water of the oceans to rise up and wash over all the land. The whole planet was flooded! Luckily Nu Kua had one ally, the God of Fire. Together they worked furiously to move back the waters and overpower Kung Kung's forces. The God of Fire used his scorching heat to dry up the flood waters, and Nu Kua repaired the damages to the land.

Nu Kua and the God of Fire were victorious. They banished Kung Kung to the distant regions of space. As the giant started to leave, he fell onto the sky, and the four pillars holding it up came crashing down and shattered. Nu Kua quickly rescued the Earth again. She took the tortoise's legs to prop up the sky as the pillars had done before. That is why tortoises have such short and stumpy legs today.

As a last act, Kung Kung granted his power over water to his child, a son named Yu Shih. Although very young, Yu Shih had great wisdom. He saw that the Earth created by Nu Kua was a good place. He swore to be a friend to the Earth and to the plants and animals on it. Nowadays when we need water for drinking and for our crops, Yu Shih sends the blessing or rain to us. We see Yu Shih, son of the giant Kung Kung, in the five stars of the Hyades cluster.

Story: A Thief Thrown to the Buzzards

Source: The Moche and Chimu Cultures, Peru

Celestial Objects: Orion

Long ago in ancient Peru a man spent all his time making mischief, causing problems, and stealing from his friends and neighbors. The Moon Goddess looked down from her home up above and saw this trouble-maker. She gave the thief many warnings and told him he must behave as all good people do, but he paid no attention to her. The Moon Goddess at last grew tired of his wicked ways, and decided to make an example of him to put in the sky so all her people on Earth would know what happens to those who misbehave.

She sent two stars who grabbed hold of the thief and carried him up to the sky. Each star now holds tight onto one of the thief's arms. He can never escape! Around the group of three she

placed four buzzard stars who wait in place, eager to get their talons on him. This is what awaits those who are guilty of evil deeds!

These same seven stars represent the belt, shoulders, and knees of Orion the Hunter: the thief and his guards are the three belt stars and the buzzards are the four outer stars.

Additional Information:

The Winter Hexagon:

These stories feature the constellations of the Winter Hexagon (Canis Major, Canis Minor, Auriga, Orion, Taurus, and Gemini). Canis Major and Canis Minor are Orion the Hunter's faithful dogs, helping him to track and retrieve game as he hunts across the night sky. Sirius is in the larger dog, standing alert and ready for action at the feet of Orion. The dog's bright eye (Sirius) looks at the constellation Lepus, the Hare, which crouches below the hunter's feet. Procyon is the puppy and the name means the dog which rises before Sirius. As the Winter Hexagon rises, we see Canis Minor appear in the sky before Canis Major. Sirius is not only the brightest star in its constellation; it is also the brightest star in the night sky. Both Sirius and Procyon are double stars. Taurus, the Bull, contains two open star clusters: the Pleiades (the Seven Sisters) and the Hyades. The two brightest stars in Gemini are Castor and Pollux, the Twins. Capella is the brightest star in Auriga, the Charioteer.

Taurus, the Pleiades, and the Hyades:

Both Roman and Greek traditions relate the story of the gentle white bull that carried the beautiful Europa across the sea to the island of Crete. In one version, the bull turned out to be the great god Jupiter in disguise; in the other, the bull was the great god Zeus in disguise. Other traditions tell of an unending battle between Taurus the Bull and Leo the Lion. Leo is the victor and rules the night sky in the spring and summer; Taurus wins the battle and rules the night sky in fall and winter. But in addition to the bull itself, there are two important features within the constellation: the Pleiades and the Hyades.

The Pleiades were seven sisters, the daughters of Pleione (a sea nymph) and Atlas (a Titan). The Pleiades were chased by Orion the Hunter for many years. Some stories say that the goddess Artemis took pity on the girls and turned them into doves so they could fly away from Orion. Other stories say that Zeus heard the girls crying and placed them safely among the stars. Some stars in the cluster are said to be dim because the tears of the sisters blurred their light.

Many stories about the Pleiades say that one of the seven sisters is missing. The six remaining Pleiades cry because their lost sister married a mortal and was not allowed into the constellation.

The Hyades were also daughters of Atlas, and half-sisters to the Pleiades. Some legends say they were also seven; other legends say there were only five or six sisters in the Hyades.

The Hyades cared for the baby Dionysus, son of the god Zeus. Zeus rewarded their service by placing them among the stars. The Hyades had a brother named Hyas who was drowned in a well. His grieving sisters shed so many tears that they caused very heavy rain to fall on Earth.

The Pleiades and Hyades together are called the Atlantides. Both groups of stars are open star clusters in the constellation Taurus. An open star cluster is a group of stars that formed within a nebula. In some clusters such as the Pleiades, wisps of gas can be seen through a telescope. The poet Tennyson describes this vision in his poem "Locksley Hall" as follows:

Many a night I saw the Pleiads rise, rising thro' the
mellow shade,
Glitter like a swarm of fire-flies tangled in a
silver braid.

Water Legends:

Part I: Water and Rain

Many legends associated with the constellations and stars of the Winter Hexagon are connected with water or rain. The eyes of the seven sisters blur the light of the Pleiades as the cry in fear of Orion. The tears of the Hyades bring rain to the Earth as they mourn their drowned brother. The light of Procyon is dimmed by the tears of Suhail's youngest sister when she cannot swim across the Milky Way. The Chinese god Yu Shih (in the Hyades) provides rain for drinking water and crops.

These stars and constellations often had practical meanings for ancient observers, also often associated with water. Capella was considered a bad omen for sailors, since its rising coincided with the beginning of the stormy season in the Mediterranean. The appearance of the Hyades in the morning sky signaled the spring rainy season, and their appearance near the horizon was said to cause storms on both land and sea. Another name for the Hyades is the Little Pigs, since their appearance meant muddy roads!

In Africa, the rainy season begins when Sirius disappears from the evening sky in May. In South America, the disappearance of the Pleiades in April signals the beginning of the rainy season and the end of boat travel. Their appearance in November signals the beginning of the dry season.

The constellation Gemini was known as the protector of sailors. It was supposed to rid the seas of buccaneers and pirates. Gemini was often seen as flames above a ship's mast (St. Elmo's Fire). When Gemini rises just before sunrise, the calm weather of summer begins.

Castor and Pollux were among the heroes on Jason's ship, Argo. They were said to have protected the Argonauts during a storm at sea, and Gemini is still associated with electrical phenomena often seen during storms at sea. A double light was considered favorable to sailors, while a single light was a bad sign associated with Castor and Pollux's sister, Helen.

Castor and Pollux:

So who exactly were Castor and Pollux? According to legend, these twin brothers lived in Sparta in Greece. They loved each other very much and grew up inseparable friends. Castor and Pollux were sons of the god Zeus in Greek mythology. Both brothers loved sports. Some stories

say that they even won prizes at the Olympic Games! Castor grew up to be an expert horseman, and Pollux was the best boxer in Greece.

Castor and Pollux were heroes who sailed with Jason on his famous ship, *Argo*. They had twin cousins, Idas and Lynceus. These twins also loved each other very much. The four cousins captured a herd of cattle from an enemy town. They decided to divide the herd among the four. But Idas proposed a contest to see who should get the largest share of the herd. Whoever ate an enormous portion at their feast would get half the herd. Whoever finished second would get the rest of the herd.

Idas ate very quickly. Seeing Lynceus falling behind, he ate part of his brother's meal. Idas and Lynceus claimed all of the cattle for themselves. The cousins got into an argument and began to fight. Lynceus and Castor were killed.

Pollux was inconsolable at the death of his beloved brother. He asked their father, Zeus, to take his own life so that Castor might live again. Zeus took pity on Pollux and declared that the two should spend half their time under the Earth and half their time in the heavens. Even now, the mortal Castor sets first with his faithful brother, the immortal Pollux, following close behind.

Maui and Rona:

We discovered during a trip to New Zealand that much of the Maori star lore has been lost. However, the story of Maui and the Sun (see the Fall Sky section) and Rona and the Moon are still available. Both stories appear in Eric and Tessa Hadley's *Legends of the Sun and Moon* (Cambridge University Press, 1983, third paperback printing 1992). Peter Gossage wrote *How Maui Slowed the Sun*, including a translation into Maori (first published by Lansdowne Press in 1982 with a 1994 edition produced for Ashton Scholastic Ltd.). These are older books and may be hard to come by. We recently purchased *Maori Myth and Legend* by A. W. Reed, a prolific author of Maori lore. We also found *Matariki*, a Maori perspective on the legend from the Winter Sky section. Both books are from Reed Publishing. Below is a summary of the Rona legend.

Rona was married to a fisherman. One moonlit night he decided to take their sons to go fishing. He told Rona they would return the next day and told her to have a good meal waiting for them. The next night, before they returned, Rona prepared the meal. Soon she heard the song of the fishermen. The stones of her oven were hot and the leaves to cover the food were ready. But suddenly she realized she had no water to sprinkle over the hot stones to make steam.

Rona grabbed two calabashes and ran to the spring. The moonlight provided a clear view until a cloud drifted by and the light was cut off. Rona continued to run along the path, but she could no longer see where she was going. She stubbed her toe on a tree root, then stumbled and scraped her shin on a rock. She screamed at the Moon, angry that the Moon had put out its light. The Moon came down from the sky, picked up Rona, and carried her up into the sky. Rona grabbed the branch of a tree and tried her best to hang on. The Moon pulled harder, but still Rona hung on to the tree. At last the tree cracked and its roots came out of the ground. Rona and the tree were carried up into the sky.

When her husband and sons returned home, they found only uncooked food and cold cooking stones – no Rona! Looking up into the sky, she saw Rona on the full Moon. Rona still held onto her calabashes and the tree, and she is now the Woman in the Moon.

Remember: the perspective is different from the Southern Hemisphere, so it will be much harder for us to see Rona! Much like Orion, the Moon appears upside down to our Northern Hemisphere point of view.

SPRING

These stories were used in the April and May Newsletters, but are appropriate year round.
Story retelling and additional material by Nancy Lebofsky

Story: Coyote and the Wolf Brothers

Source: Native American

Celestial Objects: The Big Dipper (Ursa Major)

At one time, Coyote lived with five Wolf Brothers. Every night the Wolf Brothers would share the meat from their hunt with Coyote. But they had a secret they would not share – a secret about a strange thing they had seen in the sky. Every night as they whispered together, Coyote became more and more curious.

Finally, Coyote just had to know. One day he asked the oldest Wolf Brother, “What is it you saw in the sky?” But the oldest Wolf Brother did not answer.

Coyote asked the second-oldest Wolf Brother, “What is it you talk about every night? What did you see in the sky?” But the second Wolf Brother did not answer.

Coyote asked the third Wolf Brother the same question. No answer. Coyote asked the fourth Wolf Brother. No answer.

But the fourth Wolf Brother gathered his brothers and asked, “Should we tell Coyote what we have been talking about? Should we tell Coyote what we have seen in the sky?”

“Yes, yes,” said the youngest Wolf Brother. “They cannot hurt us or Coyote.”

“True,” agreed the second Wolf Brother. “They are high in the sky. They cannot hurt us or Coyote.”

“We’ll tell him tonight,” said the oldest Wolf Brother.

So that night the Wolf Brothers told Coyote what they had seen: two strange animals, high in the sky, too high for the Wolf Brothers to reach them. Coyote was even more curious now. He wanted to see the creatures for himself. But how would they all get high up into the sky?

Coyote had an idea. He gathered together as many arrows as he could find. One after another, he shot the arrows into the sky. The first arrow stuck to the sky. The second arrow stuck to the first, the third arrow stuck to the second, and so on until Coyote had made a long line of arrows from the sky to the Earth.

Early the next day, Coyote, the five Wolf Brothers, and their dog began to climb the arrows to the sky. For many days and nights they climbed, until at last they reached the sky. There they saw the two strange animals – two huge, fierce grizzly bears!

Now the two youngest Wolf Brothers were curious. They walked toward the two fierce grizzly bears. When nothing happened, the two older Wolf Brothers followed. But the oldest brother and his dog stayed behind. The four brave Wolf Brothers walked even closer. But the grizzly bears just looked at them. The four Wolf Brothers looked back. Finally, the oldest Wolf Brother and his dog joined them.

Coyote admired the beautiful picture they made. He thought the grizzly bears and the Wolf Brothers and their dog should stay in the sky, making a sky story for all time.

Then Coyote had another idea. He climbed back down the line of arrows, breaking off the arrows as he hurried toward the ground. Now the five Wolf Brothers and their dog could not return to Earth. They stayed in the sky and made a beautiful picture story for everyone to see.

We still see Coyote's picture today, but we call it the Big Dipper. The two bowl stars (Dubhe and Merak) that point to Polaris, the North Star, are the grizzly bears. The two bowl stars opposite (Megrez and Phecda) are the two younger Wolf Brothers. The first and last stars in the handle (Alioth and Alkaid) are the two older Wolf Brothers. The oldest Wolf Brother and his dog stand in the middle place in the handle (Mizar and Alcor).

Story: The Never-Ending Bear Hunt

Source: Native American

Celestial Objects: The Big Dipper (Ursa Major), Boötes, Corona Borealis, and Polaris (Ursa Minor)

Throughout history people around the world have looked up at the night sky and imagined stories about the stars. Early cultures used star positions and stories to teach lessons, navigate ships, and mark seasons—especially planting and harvesting times. Even though the stories might not be as accurate as our current scientific knowledge, they can be interesting to share. The stories provide an opportunity not only to discuss the rotation of the Earth on its axis (daily motion) and its revolution around the Sun (yearly motion), but also to enjoy literature from different cultures.

This story has been attributed to two different tribes from eastern Canada, the Micmacs and the Iroquois. The story is about seven bird hunters who track huge bear across the sky every year. As Earth orbits the Sun, most stars *appear* to move across the sky from east to west at a rate of 1° per night. However, the stars nearest to the North Star, also known as Polaris or the “pole star,” *appear* to circle counterclockwise around it; these are the circumpolar constellations. The Bear Hunt story follows the yearly apparent motion of three circumpolar constellations: Ursa Major, Boötes, and Corona Borealis.

The Never-Ending Bear Hunt

Many years ago people looked into the night sky and imagined wonderful stories in the stars. One story takes place during the course of an entire year and tells about the adventures of the Great Bear and the Bird Hunters.

When the winter ended the Great Bear left her cave. After her long sleep, she was hungry and anxious to find food. As she hunted for food, other hunters were following her. Seven brave Bird Hunters followed the Great Bear across the Sky. Robin led the hunt, followed closely by Chickadee and his cooking pot and Moosebird. Farther behind were their friends: Saw-whet, Horned Owl, Blue Jay, and Pigeon. The bear looked big and clumsy, but she moved across the sky rapidly. The hunters followed her all summer, but as autumn approached they had still not caught up to the Great Bear.

Some of the hunters became tired and discouraged. Saw-whet, the last hunter in line, left the hunt. Soon Horned Owl also gave up and went to search for Saw-whet. Blue Jay and Pigeon tried to keep up with the leaders, but soon they also left the hunt and flew home.

Only Robin, Chickadee, and Moosebird followed the Great bear into autumn. The bear grew angry and rose up on her hind legs. She growled loudly and clawed the air to scare the hunters. But Robin was a brave hunter. He shot an arrow and hit the Great Bear. Drops of her blood fell on Robin’s feathers, turning his breast bright red. Other drops fell on the autumn leaves coloring them bright red.

When winter came, the dead bear lay on her back up in the sky. But her spirit returned to the cave and entered another bear. In the spring, the bear will leave the cave again to travel across the spring and summer sky, always pursued by the Bird Hunters.

Story: Sun and Moon Leave the Earth

Source: Nigeria

Celestial Objects: Sun and Moon

A very long time ago, Sun and his wife Moon lived on the earth. Sun's best friend was Water, and Sun visited Water frequently.

One day Sun asked his friend, "Why do you never visit me? I visit you frequently."

Water replied, "Your house is not big enough to hold me and all of my people who always come with me."

But Sun persisted and Water finally agreed to visit if Sun could build a house big enough. Sun and Moon were both delighted, and soon Sun began to build a huge kraal – many huts surrounded by a fence. The invitation was made and Water agreed to visit.

Sun and Moon waited anxiously for their friend. They could see Water coming for many miles, flowing over and around everything in his path. Water was pleased to see the huge kraal and soon began to fill the space. All of Water's people flowed in with him: small fish, big fish, sharks, whales, and all the creatures of the sea.

As the kraal filled, Water asked, "Are you sure there will be room for all of us?"

Moon was alarmed. Water was rising into and even above the huts. But Sun kept smiling and told Water there was room for everyone. Once Water and his people were over the roof tops, Sun and Moon had to escape. To do this, they made a tremendous leap into the sky.

This was the last time Sun and Moon lived on the earth.

SOURCES:

Why the Sun and the Moon Live in the Sky by Elphinsone Dayrell

"Sun, Moon and Water" from *Legends of the Sun and Moon* by Eric and Tessa Hadley

Additional Information:

So What do You See on the Moon?

In the USA, we've all heard of (and probably looked at) the Man in the Moon. But this is not a universal tradition. In her book *Moon Rope (Un lazo a la luna)*, Lois Ehlert uses beautiful collage illustrations to retell the Peruvian legend of why we see a fox on the Moon. Fox tricks his friend Mole into helping him braid a long grass rope to reach the Moon by promising Mole that there are lots of worms to eat on the Moon. Fox then convinces some birds to fly the end of the rope to the Moon. He begins to climb, with Mole following. When Mole slips and falls back to Earth, all the other creatures laugh at him, so Mole digs a deep tunnel and stays underground, only coming out at night. But Fox never returned, and the birds say you can still see him on a clear, dark night right there on the Full Moon.

Lynn Moroney's book *Moontellers* notes that for the ancient Aztecs, the dark lunar mare which we see as the Man in the Moon formed the image of a rabbit, while in parts of South America it is the image of a jaguar. In India, the Earth mother decided to make her two beloved children immortal. Her son became our Sun and her daughter became the Moon. The daughter Moon rose into the sky before her mother could embrace her, leaving only the mother's handprints as she caressed her daughter's cheek one last time.

Lynn Moroney's book also relates stories about the changing shape of the Moon. In Scandinavia, two children were forced to gather water day and night. The Moon took pity on them, and now they gather their water on the Moon once a month. When the Moon is full, we see both children and their bucket. As the Moon begins to wane, first one child, then the other, falls from sight and the Moon becomes dark. When it begins to fill again, we begin to see the children one by one.

My favorite is the Weaver and the Cat, a Native American legend. An old woman and her wildcat live on the Moon where she is weaving a headband. As she finishes her project, the Moon becomes full. But when she looks away, the cat claws at the weaving and as it unravels, the Moon grows smaller. Every month, the old woman begins her project anew.