For thousands of years, the night skies have sparked with reminders of magical creatures. Ancient people told stories about the patterns they saw in the stars. These stories are called constellations.

To learn more, The Mini Page talked with an expert from the National Air and Space Museum at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

Starring the real stars
Different cultures made up different stories to go with the same star patterns. For example, a row of three bright stars shines especially brightly in the winter night sky. To the ancient Greeks, these stars looked like the belt worn by a mighty hunter named Orion (oh-RI-uhn) in one of their myths (myths), or stories. The constellation containing these stars is called Orion.

Other cultures have seen those same three stars as being the rod of Jacob from the Bible story about Jesus’ birth, or the three Marys in Bible stories.

In the sky
A star is a big ball of gases crammed together in a cloud. The gases are mostly hydrogen, with a small amount of helium. New stars are formed when the gases and dust gets so great that the heat at the core of a cloud reaches millions of degrees.

The star begins to shine when the hydrogen atoms are fused, or joined together, to form helium atoms.

Reaching for the stars
In some cultures, such as ancient China, people did not make up stories to go with the star patterns. Star patterns with no stories attached are often called asterisms (AH-stuh-ri-zums).

Asterisms are usually smaller patterns than constellations. For example, the Big Dipper is an asterism inside the bigger constellation Ursa Major, or the Big Bear. Orion’s belt is an asterism in the constellation Orion. Sometimes, “asterism” is just another name for “constellation.” Both mean groupings of stars that can be seen as a design from Earth.

The supergiant stars in Orion’s belt are bright and much larger than the sun. The lifetime of a supergiant star is estimated to be around a few million years, which is considered short for a star. Supergiant stars can be red or blue.

Constellations Light Our Way

Try ’n’ Find
Words that remind us of gravity are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward, and some letters are used twice. See if you can find:

ASTERISM, BELT, Big Dipper,
COORDINATES, CONstellations,
CROPS, DIRECTION, Earth,
EQuA LiONS, MYTHS, Orion’s Belt,
PATTERNS, Plant, SHine,
SKy, Star, Supergiant,

Cook’s Corner
Roasted Broccoli
You’ll need:
• 1 cup sliced mushrooms
• 1 1/2 tablespoons olive oil
• 4 cups broccoli florets
• 2 teaspoons garlic powder
• 1 teaspoon lemon
• pepper
• cooking spray

What to do:
1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Line a baking pan with cooking spray.
2. Sprinkle the broccoli with the garlic powder and oil.
3. Roast at 400 degrees for 15 minutes until vegetables are slightly crispy.

7 Little Words for Kids
Use the letters in the boxes to make a word with the same meaning as the clue. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of letters in the solution. Each letter combination can be used only once, but all letter combinations will be necessary to complete the puzzle.

1. country north of the U.S. (6)
2. cute rabbits (7)
3. dachshund (5)
4. duplicate (6)
5. ice cream treat (6)
6. cutting the grass (6)
7. chocolate or vanilla (6)

Mini Fact:
The three stars making up Orion’s belt are blue supergiant stars. They are hotter and much larger than our sun.

Star signs
Travelers often used stars and constellations to help them find their way. Modern spacecraft also use the stars to navigate.

Constellations helped ancient people plan their year. They noticed that different constellations were visible at night during different times of the year. Ancient people used these apparent changes to help them figure out when to perform certain tasks, such as planting crops. For example, ancient Mayan people watched for the spring constellations to predict the return of the rains.

Star search
The star-forming region closest to Earth is called the Orion Nebula. From Earth, the naked eye looks like the brightest star in Orion’s sword. It is not just one star, however, but a region with about 1,000 young stars.

Astronomers have given all the stars within a constellation certain coordinates (ko-OR-din-uhnts), or numbers that tell a position. That way, we can tell where objects are in connection with other items.

On the Web:
• spaceplace.nasa.gov/ constellations/en

At the library:
• “Wishing on a Star” by Fran Lee
• “Constellations for Kids” by Kelsey Johnson

For later:
Visit The Mini Page® for more information. Mail payments to Andrews McMeel Publishing, P.O. Box 800368, Kansas City, MO 64180.

Eco Note
A new study suggests that the last remaining sanctuary of high Arctic sea ice north of Greenland and Canada may soon disappear in summer. A similar disappearance occurred during a warming period around 10,000 years ago. While it has been uncertain whether the predicted disappearance will happen again in the next 20, 30 or 40 years, Danish researchers at Aarhus University say they have projected that we are very close to that scenario, and that temperatures will have to rise only a little more before the Arctic will become ice-free in summer.

Mini Jokes
Corner: Why can’t aliens play golf in space?
Carla: Too many black holes!

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