

Star Stories

Program Purpose

The purpose of this program is to give students the opportunity to study constellations and the stories that go with them as well as to create their own star stories.

Program Length

1 hour

Age

Grades 2nd -8th

Maximum Number of Participants

40 including adults (max for room)

Objectives

After completion of this activity students should be able to:

- Identify at least 3 constellations in the night sky
- Recognize some of the myths surrounding the constellations
- Create their own constellation and myth

Preparation

Before the class arrives:

- Know how to operate the star dome and which constellations are burnt out.
- Photocopy enough “Make your own constellation” sheets for your class. This activity works well in groups of 2 or 3.
- Bring crayons or markers to the exhibit room for the “Make your own constellation” activity.

Basic outline

- I. Introduction (10 min)
- II. Star stories (25 min)
- III. Make your own constellation (20 min)
- IV. Conclusion and clean-up (5 min)

Materials

Star dome

“Make your own constellation” sheets

Crayons or Markers

Introduction

As students enter the exhibit room have them take off their shoes and find a seat on the floor. If it is a smaller group there are some carpet squares in the Tree of Life that they can sit on. When everyone is seated, introduce yourself and ask the students what they see when they look up at the night sky. Allow them to come up with many answers (stars, moons, planets, comets, shooting stars, northern lights, airplanes, satellites, galaxy, nebula...)

Next ask them what a star is. (“A burning ball of gas millions of miles away” – according to Pumba in [The Lion King](#).) Explain that stars are composed of gasses, mainly hydrogen and helium, and dust. When the gasses and dust get close enough they begin reacting, creating energy in the form of light, and thus forming a star. Stars appear to twinkle because this light-forming reaction is not taking place at a constant level.

Ask the students to define a constellation (a group of stars either forming a picture or named for someone/something). Ask the

class why people decided to make up constellations?

1. They were bored and this was a form of entertainment.
2. To explain things they did not understand.
3. To honor someone.

Tell the students that you are going to share some star stories with them now, and that when you are done they will have the opportunity to create their own story.

Star Stories

See Appendix A for stories about the constellations on the dome.

See Appendix B for the interactive story of the fall constellations.

It is interesting to tell more than one story about the same constellation (there are several stories in Appendix A about Ursa Major) to show how different cultures thought of the constellations.

Make Your Own Constellation

Inform the students that during the next activity they will be able to create their own constellation and a myth to go with it. Have the students get into small groups (this can also be done as an individual activity) and hand out a crayon or marker and a “make your own constellation sheet.” Tell the students they are allowed to connect the dots on the paper, which represent stars in the sky, in any way they would like. Remind them that they need to come up with a story to go along with their picture. Have them write the story on the back of the paper.

When it looks as though most of the students have finished their myth, ask for volunteers to show the class their constellations and share their stories. This is an activity where the goofier the story is, the better. Creative students will often try to top one another’s stories.

Conclusion

Ask the students for any final questions they may have about astronomy. Answer any questions, collect the crayons or markers, and have the students put away the carpet squares if they used them.

References

Hahm, Julie. (2001). “Star Stories” lesson plan. Upham Woods 4-H Environmental Education Center.

Miller, D. (1997). Stars of the first people. Boulder, CO: Pruett Publishing Company.