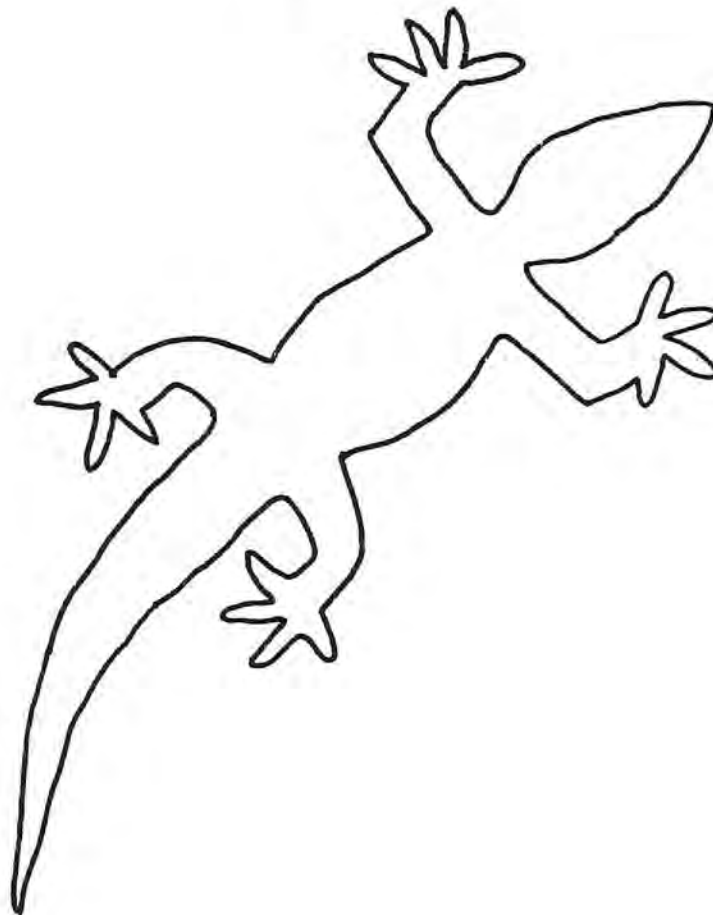
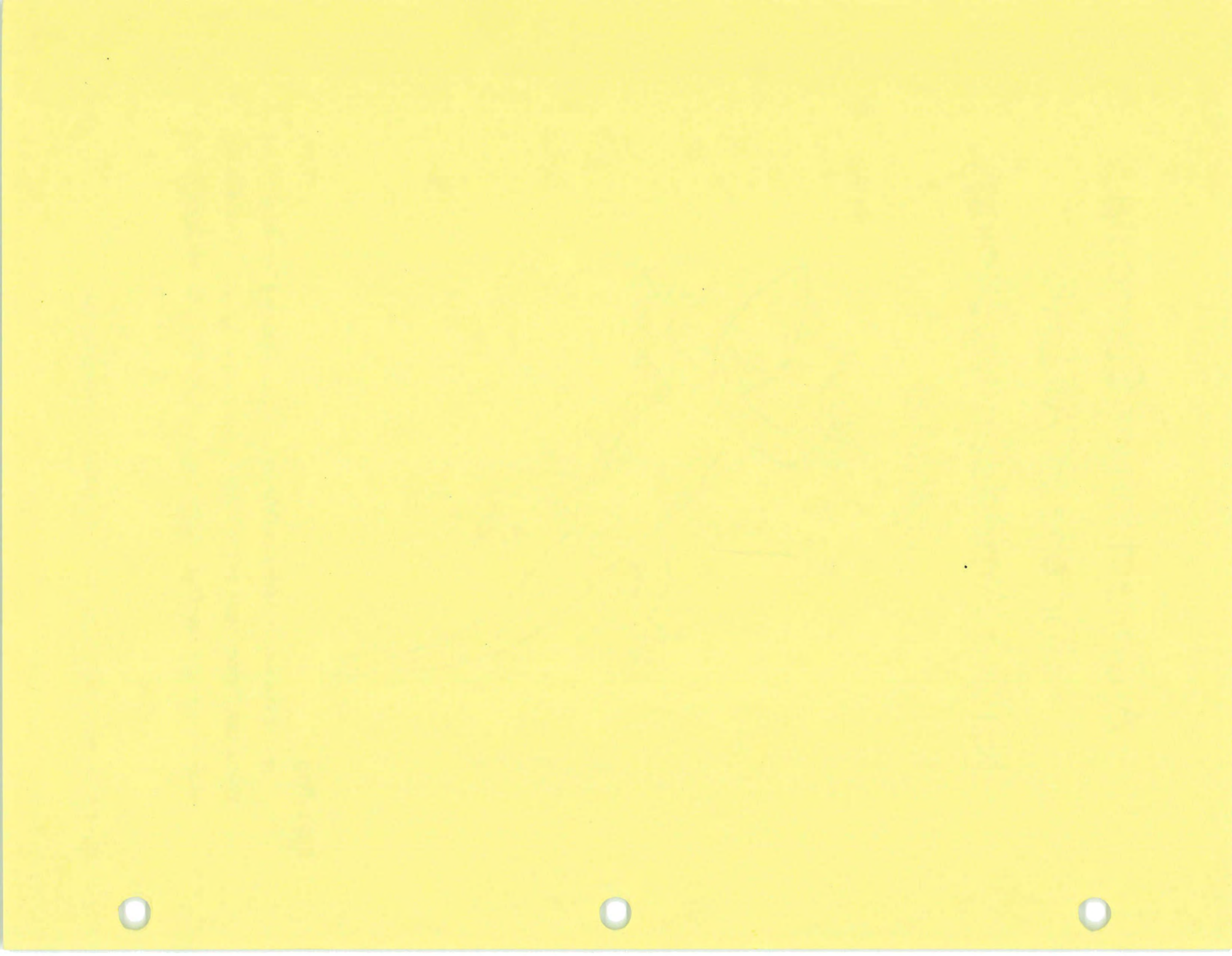


A Collection of Curricula  
for the STARLAB  
Native American Mythology  
Cylinder



**Including:**

- A Look at the Native American Cylinder ..... Learning Technologies, Inc.
- Background Information on the Navajo ..... Gloria D. Rall
- More Native American Star Legends ..... Doris Ferror/Joyce Klencz



# A Look at the Native American Mythology Cylinder

## from Learning Technologies

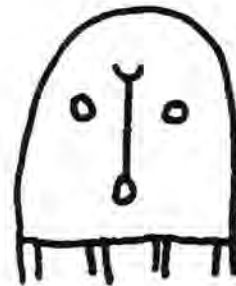
### ✓ **Campfire of the North** (called **Náhookis Bikq'ii** by the Navajo)

This is the North Star or home star. It never moves and acts as the traveler's guide or lode star. Look for it if you are lost; it will help you find your way. All the other stars will revolve around it.



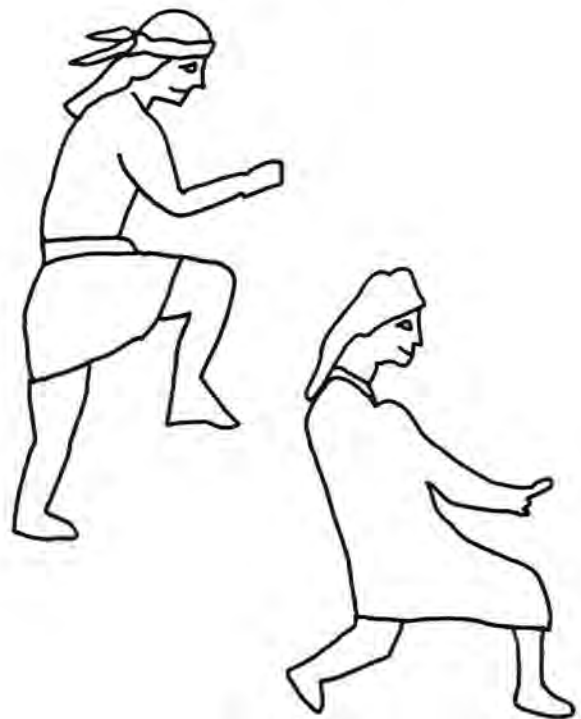
### **Black God** (called **Hasheh'ééshzhini** by the Navajo)

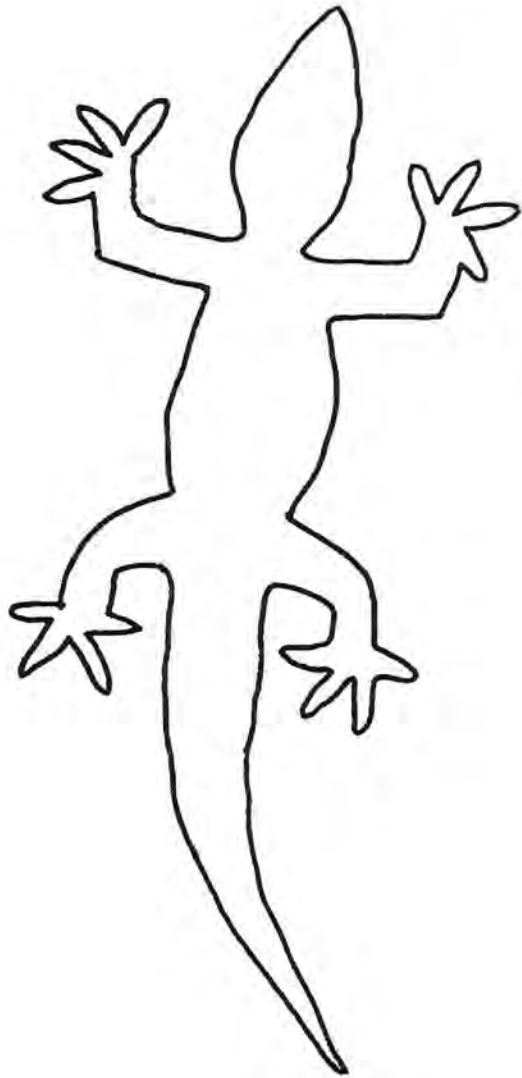
Black God (or Black God and His Pleiades) is the Creator of fire and light. When Black God entered the Hogan of creation, Pleiades was lodged by his ankle. In the Hogan, Black God stamped his foot vigorously causing the Pleiades to jump to his knee. Stamping his foot again caused the Pleiades to jump to his hip. The third time brought the Pleiades to his right shoulder, and on the fourth to his left temple where the Black God declared "it would stay." His feat of locating the Pleiades where he wanted it, confirmed to the creator group that the Black God alone had the power to produce constellations for beautifying the dark upper or sky.



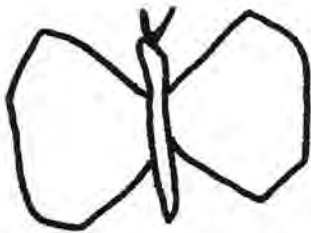
### ✓ **Revolving Male (called Ná hopkos Bikq'ii by the Navajo — the Big Dipper)** **Revolving Woman (called Ná hopkos bi á adii — Cassiopeia)**

These two constellations are located on either side of the North Star or home fire. They are the official leaders of all other constellations. They never leave this area of the sky and no other constellation interferes with their routine. This arrangement of constellations established a law that has persisted to this day. This law stipulates that only one couple may live by one home fire.





**Lizard (called Na'ashoii by the Navajo)**



**Butterfly (called K'aalogii by the Navajo)**

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**Note**

No folklore was found on either of these two Navaho constellations.

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**The First Great in Size (called Átshé 'ATsoh by the Navaho)**

This constellation seems to be part of Scorpio. Its human form suggests an application to First Man. This constellation, a male, represents strength and daring. He is a provider and protector. The cane that he carries represents stability. Canes are often used in sacred ceremonies and are made according to very strict rules.



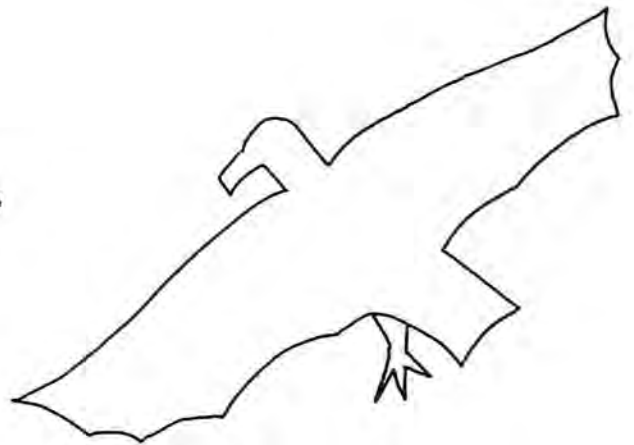
**Male with Legs Apart (called Hastçç Sik'a'i by the Navaho)**

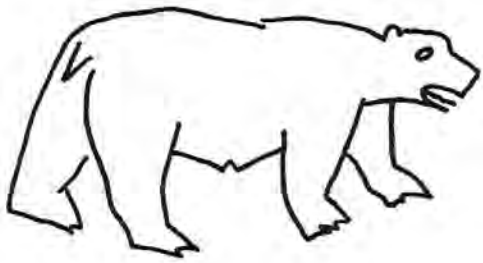
This constellation is part of Corvus and represents adulthood, old age and wisdom. He is the leader who presides at meetings.



**Thunderbird (called i'ni by the Navajo)**

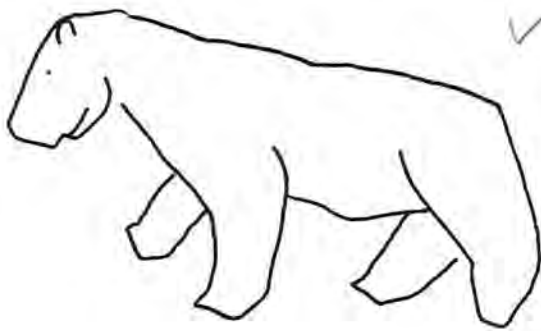
The Navaho legends hold that the Thunderbird constellation carried all the clouds in his tail and rain under his wings. Thus, when the Thunderbird constellation is shining brightly in the sky, spring or the rainy season has arrived.





### **Bear**

The Bear, a Navajo constellation that is tangent to the Thunderbird, is also tied into the legend of changing seasons. When the bear is bright in the sky and the feather of the Thunderbird is just touching the nose of the Bear, spring has arrived. The Bear has essentially come out of winter hibernation.



### **Great Bear (Shoshoni)**

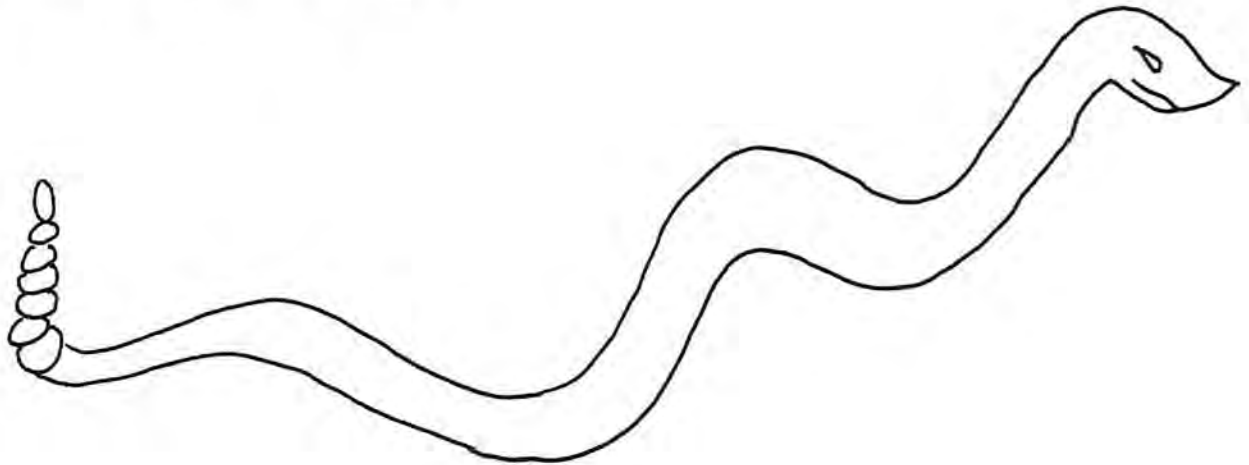
Located on the Milky Way Path. One Iroquois legend tells us that the Great Bear was pursued by three Indian braves. The chase began at the beginning of time when the first Indian shot and struck the Bear in the side with his bow and arrow. The wound wasn't serious, however, and the Bear kept on running. He has been running across the sky ever since. The Bear's path changes from season to season. In the autumn it begins low in the northwest. During this season, the arrow wound of the Bear opens slightly and a little blood trickles down upon the land. It covers the leaves of the trees and dyes them red and that is why we have autumn.



### **Rabbit Tracks (called Gahaat'e'ii by the Navajo)**

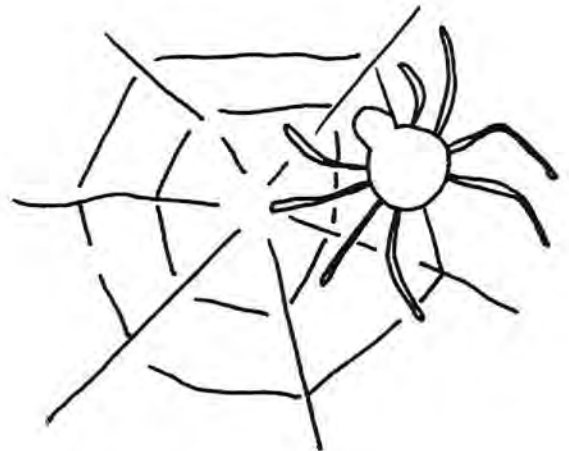
This is the constellation that governs all hunting. During the spring and early summer when the open end of the tracks point upward, no one may hunt game animals. In the late fall, when the open end tips toward earth, the hunting season begins. Laws governing hunting were very strict since the Navajo depended on game for their food. No hunting was allowed during an animal's mating season.

### **Horned Rattler (Hydra to the Greeks)**



### **Spider God (Blackfoot)**

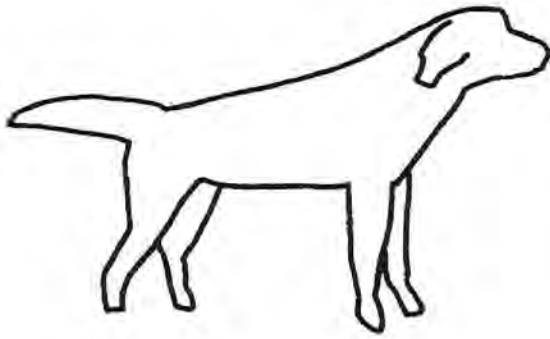
Spider God sits in his star web during the summer time, watching over the earth. To visit the land, he climbs down the Milky Way.



### **Porcupine (called Dahsani by the Navajo)**

The Porcupine was given charge of the growth of all trees on the mountains.





### **Dog Star (Cherokee)**

Legend tells us that all departed souls on their sky journey to the “land of souls” must pass two barking dogs. These dog stars are Sirius (located in the dog constellation) and Antares (located in the First Big One) on your Native American Mythology Cylinder. If the departed soul fed the first dog but had nothing for the second dog, it would be left trapped in the sky forever between the dogs.



### **Long Sash (to the Tewa)**

#### **First Slender One (called *Átshéh 'Ats'ózi* by the Navajo — Orion)**

Long Sash lead his people westward to a new land away from their enemies who were attacking villages, stealing animals and killing families. Once settled in this new land, however, the people began to quarrel and fight amongst themselves. Long Sash declared “you are hurting yourselves worse than your enemies hurt you. If you are to come to a place of your own, there can be no violence among you. You must decide whether you follow me or take another trail.” To the Navajo, First Slender One represented planning and consideration.



### **Place of Decision or the Twins (Tewa)**

North and east of Long Sash are 2 bright stars. This is where Long Sash's people sat to decide which path of life to follow and thus it is called the place of decision. People looked to the stars for guidance whenever they came to a turning point in their lives.

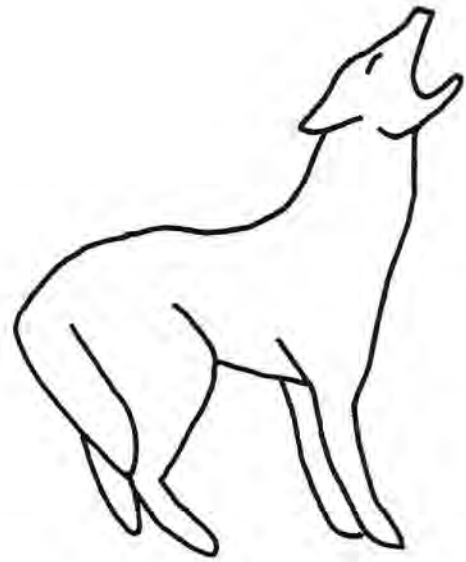


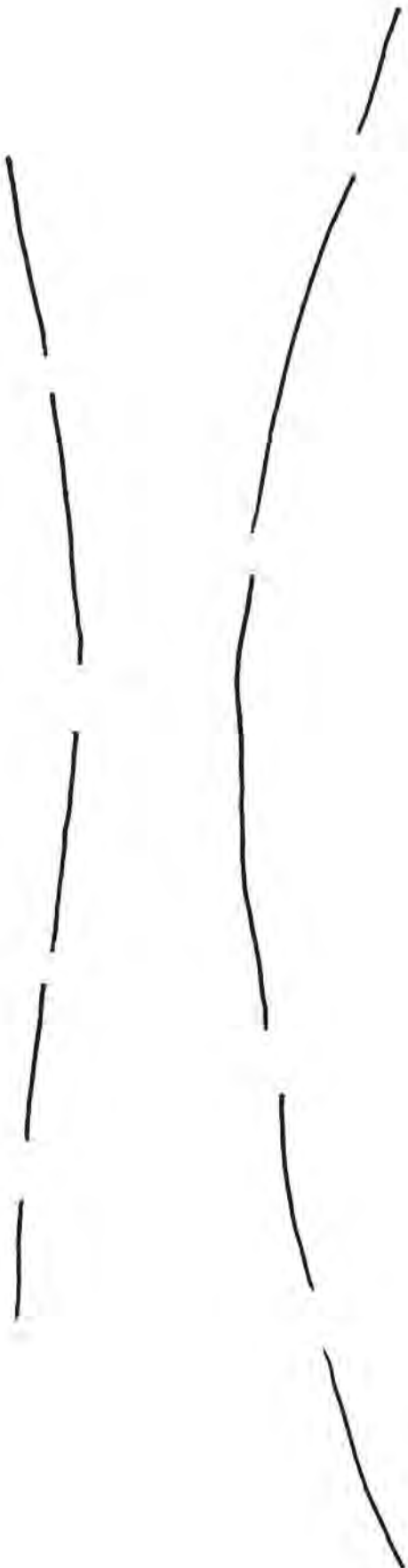
### **Coyote (called Ma'ii Bizo' by the Navajo)**

The identity of the Coyote star is unknown. Most authorities think it is probably Sirius or Antares. The coyote created confusion in the skies.

### **Coyote (Hopi)**

Hopi legends tell us that the Creator called on all his creatures to gather tiny sparkling stones to place in the sky for light. He told each creature to take as many of the sparkling rocks as they could carry and draw a picture of themselves in the sky. Most of the animals, however, were too small to carry enough stones to complete their picture, so the Creator gave Coyote a large bag of stones so that he could help the smaller creatures. But Coyote grew impatient. He took the stones and flung them into the sky, which is why some of the star figures are unfinished and why the stars don't all form clear patterns. It was only when there were no rocks left that Coyote realized that he had forgotten his own picture. Coyote howled, and even today a coyote will howl at the sky because his picture is not there.





### **Milky Way Trail (called Yikáisdáhi by the Navajo or One That Awaits Dawn)**

The Milky Way is said to be white cornmeal scattered across the sky by First Man. Cornmeal is sacred, as is this constellation. It defines east, one of the cardinal points to which prayers are offered daily.

### **Milky Way Trail (known as the Pathway of Souls to the Algonquin)**

The Algonquin legend tells us that the Milky Way is the path that our souls take when we die. Sometimes referred to as the Pathway of Souls, it is an imperishable mark upon the sky which arches across the heavens. We do not know where the path leads nor do we know what sights they may behold. Each bright star, however, is a campfire blazing in the sky where they have paused in their journey to look down on us, their people, as we huddle for warmth around our home fire.

Other names for the Milky Way:

- Fox Tribe: “a river of stars”
- Yokut: “dust from a race between antelope and deer”
- Cherokee: “corn meal dripping from a dog’s mouth”
- Ciowa: “backbone of the sky”
- Hidohsa & Parwin: “scattered ashes”
- Eskimo: “track made by Raven’s snow shoes”
- Skidee Pawnee: “glue holding the sky together”

# Background Information on the Navajo

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by **Gloria D. Rall**

- The Navajo Nation came into existence sometime in the 16th century when various groups of Indians migrated from the West Coast to settle in the Four Corners area where they coalesced to form one tribe with a distinct cultural identity.
- That distinctiveness exists even today. The Navajo have resisted white culture and preserved much of their own. The Navajo believes the sky is a father who provides rain and the earth is a mother who shelters and raises living things. Everything on the earth is sacred. They make no distinction between secular and sacred. Nature strives to live in harmony, and it is the obligation of people to preserve and cherish that harmony. Thus, certain balances must be kept.
- To understand the Navajo, one must understand their story of how the tribe came to be. At one time, they emerged from an underground world known as Black World. Only Holy People lived in Black World, including First Man and First Woman, who lived, respectively, in the east and the west. (First Man and First Woman are to be viewed as Holy People, not ordinary humans.) They were united when First Man burned a crystal (symbolizing the awakening of the mind) and First Woman a piece of turquoise.
- Chaos came to the Black World, so First Man and First Woman migrated, first to the Blue World, then to the Yellow World. Finally, they moved to the Glittering World where they still live today. In this world, they found Changing Woman as an abandoned baby. They adopted her. She created people from all the things of the Universe.
- First Man, First Woman and Changing Woman are the most important of the Navajo deities. Changing Woman developed and taught the Navajo all the values and beliefs they cherish today.
- When First Man and First Woman emerged, they found the world barren — no plants, no mountains, no animals, no sky, so they built a home to have a place to plan the world. This was the First Hogan. Today the hogan is the center of Navajo life. Not only is it a home, it represents the center of life and is the place where all ceremonies and important functions are carried out.
- Black God entered the First Hogan carrying a small group of stars on his feet. These stars were called Dilyehe (the Pleiades or Seven Sisters in western culture). He stomped and they jumped to his knee. He stomped again and the stars moved to his thigh. A third stomp took the stars to his shoulder, and a fourth to his face. Together, First Man, First Woman and Black God planned the placement of the stars in the sky. They were to benefit the Earth People. The stars were meant to: 1) help people find their way; 2) help them regain faith and balance; 3) help diagnose illness, locate lost people, or lost items and; 4) forecast the future. They would also place stars to provide seasonal and nightly markers for agricultural, hunting and ceremonial activities.
- Revolving Male (Big Dipper) and Revolving Female (Cassiopeia) are the official leaders of all other constellations. The North Star is their fire. The Navajo consider these as one inseparable constellation, not two constellations as in the Greek tradition.
- The Pleiades are Dilyehi and Orion is First Slender One. Dilyehi represents early childhood, and Orion is adolescence.
- The third pair of constellations are Male with Legs Apart (Corvus to the Greeks) and The First Great in Size (Scorpio). They represent adulthood, old age, and wisdom.
- The final pair are Rabbit Tracks (the last four stars in Scorpio's tail) and the Milky Way. Rabbit represents hunting, and the Milky Way is the patron of plants.

- The constellations were almost created and perfect when Coyote appeared on the scene. As always, Coyote created confusion. Impatient with the precision and slowness of carefully placing the stars in the sky, he grabbed all the remaining stars (which the Holy People had placed on a blanket) and threw them into the sky. Thus the constellations were never quite finished and do not look like their names. One star fell back to Earth. Coyote grabbed it, placed it back into the sky, and claimed it as his star.
- The identity of the Coyote star is uncertain. Some authorities identify it as Sirius in Canus Minor, others as Antares in the Scorpion. According to the creation legend, it is a bright star low in the southern sky and visible only during the summer.

## References

References to the sky and stars are common by the Navajo. They rely particularly on the Pleiades as a calendar marker and the Big Dipper was a calendar.

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# More Native American Star Legends

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by Doris Forrer

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## Note

These notes were prepared by Doris Forrer of the Walter Schuele Planetarium, Lake Erie Junior Nature and Science Center, Bay Village, Ohio.

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## A Few General Thoughts

To the first Americans, the sky was a calendar, a clock, a road map and a teacher of moral values. Children learned early to be celestial navigators out of necessity. It is obvious the Native Americans had charted the sun's path and even understood something of the solar system's relationships from the stories they tell. The primary intent of this literature was to express religious belief, and although they are intended for adults, they make an entertaining and educational program for today's children. From the following story outlines, you can develop a program for any time of the year. Become a story teller yourself and embellish as you will, just as many a village elder did for the children of his time.

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## As Night Falls (Paiute)

"Tu omp i av" the sky is wonderful. It is like "Tu weap" the earth. The seasons of the year are there. There is day and there is night. There is brush, grass, trees and mountains with their tops pointing towards us. It is an inverted world. The animals are there — "Cooch" the buffalo, "Tuee" the deer, "Cabi" the horse, "Qua nauts" the eagle. They are restless and traveling, looking for warmth and food. If we watch through the night, we will see how they move. Some are gone to warmer places in winter. They follow the good weather and the good grass.

## Northern Sky (Paiute)

One animal doesn't move. Nogah was a favored mountain sheep awarded great curled earrings for his bravery. His vanity caused him to climb a very high mountain. So intent was he on climbing that he failed to notice each ledge crumbling behind him and so his pride stranded him on top of the mountain — to this day the only unmoving star. But the other sheep didn't learn, for we see them going round and round, trying to find a way up the mountain.

## Northern Sky (Iroquois)

Big Dipper calendar: The bowl is a spirit bear, the three handle stars are three braves chasing him up a mountain. Nearest to the bear is an archer, the second carries a cooking pot on his back (Mizar-Alcor), the third lags behind gathering firewood. In spring, early in the evening in the eastern sky the braves chase the bear up the mountain. For summer days on top of the cool mountain, the chase continues overhead early in the evening. As summer ends, they stare down the mountain. The archer takes aim and wounds the bear. His blood stains many of the tree leaves red. They all start looking for caves in which to winter. By March, the bear's wound is healed and the braves have overcome their guilty feelings for wounding the bear — and the chase is on again.

## The Southern Sky (Iroquois)

The moon is the wife of the sun, who is angry with her and turns away from her. She pines away to nothing. Little Turtle encourages her to eat again so that she will look fat and jolly when the sun again looks upon her. But in his anger, he turns his face from her and she once again pines away. Each month the cycle is repeated.

## The Southern Sky (Algonquin)

An old Algonquin woman known for hurting people with her gossip was always pestering the Great Manitou to find out the date of the earth's death. The village elders together with the Great Manitou decided to kill two birds with one stone by telling the old woman that she would be told the date of earth's death as soon as she finished weaving a bag to

carry some of the day's light in the night. She was put in the sky with weaving materials, a pot of corn soup, and a kitten for company. Each month just as she was nearly finished, the soup began to burn. She had to put down her weaving to stir it. The kitten (under orders from the Great Manitou) unwound her weaving, thus spilling the captured sun's light. So now her work is never done, and she continues to hurt people with her gossip.

### **The Planets (Chippewa)**

The Indians were not particularly interested in the planets because they had no use for time or travel-reckoning. They did recognize the ecliptic as a specific path through the sky and called it a wolf-trail — the planets were then wolves who prowled restlessly. The recurring pattern of Venus and Mercury together near the horizon in the morning or evening led to a story that Venus (the brighter) was the sister of the sky, and Mercury was dimmer because he was brother to the earth. Their paths only occasionally crossed and when they did, they would “shoot arrows” in a contest (referring to times when meteor showers occurred at the same time).

### **The Milky Way**

Some tribes referred to our galaxy as the bridge to heaven that the soul must travel after death. Seminoles said it was souls of those who died on the great death march. Children were told not to be afraid of the dark because the Milky Way was Father Sky's arms around them. In the region of the summer triangle, because of the Great Rift, you can actually discern index fingers and thumbs almost touching, and a wrist bracelet as the transverse portion just above Deneb.

### **Summer Triangle**

The Deneb-Vega line represented the curled fingers and fist, and Altair the tip of the pointing index finger of the Great Manitou. When this hand pointed directly south early in the evening, it was time to start traveling south, for cold weather was on its way. Aquila is the eagle “Qua nauts.” Cygnus is a magnificent thunderbird.

### **Cetus (Algonquin)**

The Great Sucker Fish ate many people of a village. Blood Clot (Orion Nebula) was a courageous young brave born of an elderly couple who allowed himself to be swallowed and then danced faster and faster inside the fish, with a knife balanced on his forehead. When he was going very fast, he quickly nodded his head and the knife plunged deep into the heart of the fish, killing it and releasing the people, which is why there are so many stars in that part of the sky.

### **The Pleiades (Iroquois)**

Seven little boys who took their bowls of evening succotash to a hill to eat together, asked to be allowed to cook their own on the hill, but their parents said they were too young. Angrily, they stomped away without even taking their food. They proceeded to build a pretend fire, cook and eat a pretend meal, and then danced around the fire as their parents do. The longer they danced, the hungrier they got. The hungrier they got, the angrier they became and the faster they danced. The faster they danced, the hungrier they got, and so on until they found themselves dancing so fast they were going up into the sky. They were so angry they didn't care — except one. He looked back and grieved for his home and family, and so he is dimmer. The others glow bright in their anger.

### **The Pleiades (Paiute)**

A mother and six children defied custom and looked back on the funeral pyre of their husband and father. He became so angry, he jumped up and chased them until they escaped to the sky. His anger imprisoned him there and he was neither living nor dead. He was sorry, for they had acted in love. Manitou took pity on him and turned him into an ever-living coyote. On winter's night when the Pleiades is high, you can hear him crying, mourning his lost family.

### **Orion (Iroquois)**

Have you ever wondered why the sun gets higher in summer and lower in winter? The sun's light is carried in a large bundle on the back of a very old man. But the winter cold hurts his bones and so he gives his son the chore of carrying the sun's light. His son, like many young people, does his chores the shortest and fastest way, but not necessarily the best way. He carries the sun's light across a much lower path which makes us cold because the light is not there long enough to warm us during the day. So when you see the old man with his dark bundle, you know it is winter, for his son has the sun's light. But with the coming of spring, the old man again takes the sun on the high mountain path and we are warm.

## **Gemini (Blackfoot)**

Twin brothers were born to a woman who was killed right after their birth. They survived by being hidden. Castor is Ashes-Chief (hidden in the ashes of the cooking fire). He grew up to be the strongest brave and took the name, Rock. Pollux is Stuck-Behind (hidden behind the teepee). He grew up to love animals and lived with a beaver family and took the name Beaver. Notice the strong correlation to the Greek story.

## **General Objects**

Hydra is the Great Snake. Taurus is Cooch, the buffalo. Cepheus is a Great Chief. Cassiopeia to the Eskimos is stones supporting a giant whale oil cooking lamp. Orion's belt to Eskimos is three steps in a snow bank leading to heaven. Leo is a mountain lion. Auroras are the celebration fires of the ancestors and concurrent fires, dancing and feasting, celebrated on earth. Hercules is a running brave that shows us which direction the stars move across the sky.

## **Full Dark Story**

First there was only darkness over everything, filling all space, covering the whole world. The ancient Sun Father, dwelling in the Great Outer Spaces, gazed around with his all-seeing eyes and saw that all was covered with water. So he rubbed his hands together and from the skin that flaked off, he formed two great balls. Raising one arm high, he flung one of the balls into the water. It melted slowly and spread far and wide and grew bigger and bigger. As it grew, part of it sank into the water and it became Mother Earth. Then he threw the second ball into the water. That too spread all over, growing even larger than the first. It drew up all the water that was left by the first ball and became Father Sky. So there is water on Mother Earth and water in Father Sky — which is why the sky is blue. Time went on and Mother Earth gave birth to man and creatures. One day Mother Earth and Father Sky held a great council. "How will our children live?" said Mother Earth. "We must have food for our children. How, after they are born, shall they live and be guided?" "They will be guided by my hands when I am not near. Behold!" said Father Sky. He spread out his great hands, palm downward. There were golden-yellow corn kernels in every line and wrinkle of his palms and fingers. "The shining kernels will tell them what to do and how to live. They will be their guiding stars!" That, say the Zuni, was in the beginning.

## **Winter Program (Zuni)**

Precede the Tu am piav story at the beginning of a winter program with this . . . "In the winter, Mother Earth rests and all people should be very quiet. The snow spirit comes and covers her with a soft white blanket. It is time for telling stories."

## **Winter Milky Way (Shoshoni)**

Wakim the Grizzly Bear was banished to the land of souls for losing a fight. He traveled a long way trying to reach it and passed above the timberline walking through the snow. Ahead he saw the place where the sky and land meet and he ran so fast, he took flight. As he flew he shook the snow crystals from his shaggy coat and they left a trail to always show the way to the land of souls.

## **Dawn (Dakota)**

The night sun was brother to the day sun. He knew man needed the heat and light of the day sun very much to live and grow things. So that man should always look to the place of the rising sun, he placed the smoke of burning waters there to make it beautiful. [Emphasize the scientific truth behind this story.]

## **Closing**

The Otoe tribe had a sleep man named Patooyeh. His job was to watch over children at night so that their dreams would be happy. When he saw the first light of dawn, he knew it was time to leave. But before he did, he left each child with this benediction: "May the Great Spirit bring sunrise to your hearts."

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Learning Technologies, Inc. would like to express special thanks to the astronomers of the Astronomy Education Program at the Lawrence Hall of Science, University of California at Berkeley for their suggestions on the STARLAB Native American Mythology Cylinder.

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