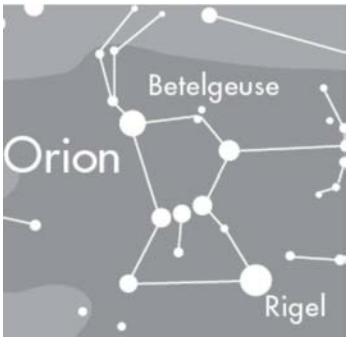
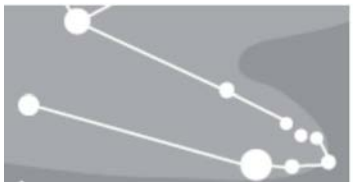
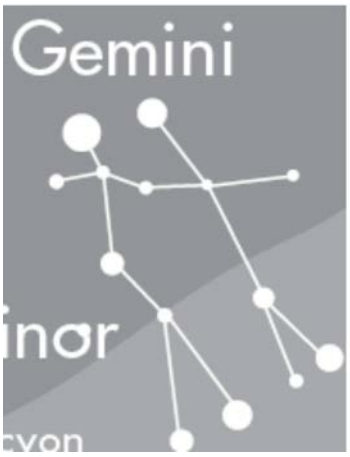
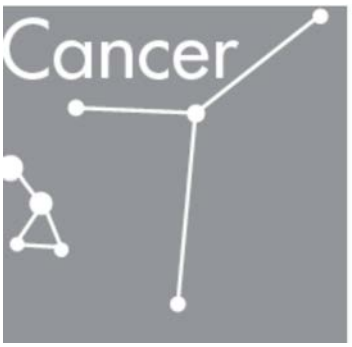
CONSTELLATIONS

Constellations	Description	Picture
Ursa Major (the Great Bear) and Ursa Minor (the Little Bear)	The Great Bear was actually a beautiful nymph named Callisto. Callisto was turned into a bear by Zeus to protect her from his jealous wife Hera. One day, Callisto ran into her son, Arcas, who was hunting in the woods. Arcas raised his spear towards the bear, his mother. Zeus, watching from above, acted quickly to save his beloved, Callisto. He turned Arcas into a bear and hoisted them both into the sky by their tails. In doing so, Zeus stretched the bears' tails and they now appear that way in the sky. The legends of some Canadian First Nations, including the Micmac and Iroquois, also identify this constellation as a bear. Ursa Major includes the Big Dipper which is also known as "The Plough" in Europe. The Big Dipper's handle is the bear's tail, while its scoop is the bear's side. The second star from the end of the Big Dipper's handle is really two stars. In ancient times these stars were used to test eyesight. An individual had good eyesight if they could see two distinct stars. At the end of the Little Dipper, Ursa Minor, is the pole star, Polaris. Polaris, also known as the North Star, is about 50 times larger than the sun but it appears very faint as it is 600 light years away. Polaris is due north and was important in early northern hemisphere navigation.	 *Constellations, by National Research Council of Canada. Retrieved December 3, 2007, from http://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/docs/education/planisphere_e.pdf* Figure U-1 Ursa Major  *Constellations, by National Research Council of Canada. Retrieved December 3, 2007, from http://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/docs/education/planisphere_e.pdf* Figure U-2 Ursa Minor
Cassiopeia (the Queen of Ethiopia)	When Cassiopeia died, she was placed next to her husband, Cepheus, in the sky. Her vanity and cruelty had never been forgotten by her enemy, Poseidon, who tilted her throne as she was placed in the sky. For half the night Cassiopeia is sitting upright, but for the rest of the night she must cling to her throne as she hangs upside-down in the sky.	 *Constellations, by National Research Council of Canada. Retrieved December 3, 2007, from http://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/docs/education/planisphere_e.pdf* Figure U-3 Cassiopeia

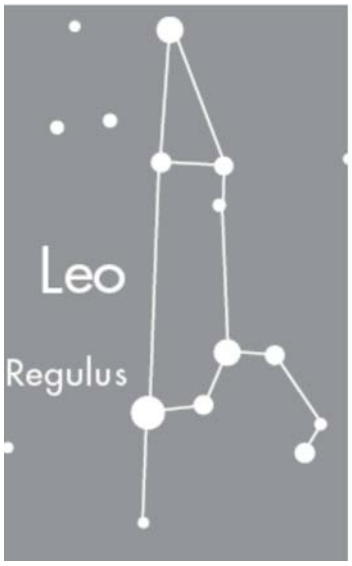
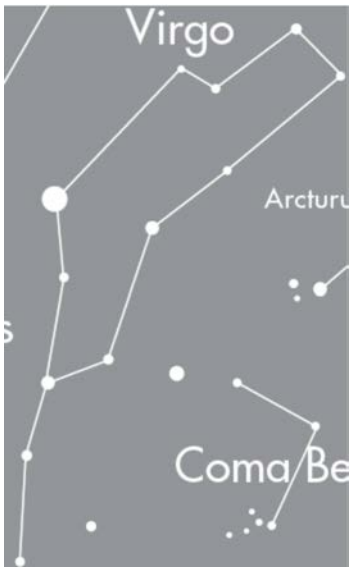
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Constellations	Description	Picture
Orion (the hunter)	Orion was a famous hunter who claimed he could kill any animal. Nothing could protect him from the scorpion that stung his heel and killed him. Orion and Scorpius are placed at opposite ends of the sky so they will not fight again. Look for a star with a fuzzy appearance just below Orion's belt as this is the Orion Nebula where baby stars are born. Betelgeuse, or the "armpit" of Orion, is a red supergiant star that is 300–400 times the diameter of the sun and is among the best candidates to become a supernova in northern skies. Betelgeuse is a variable star; its brightness varies, but on average it is the 12th brightest star in the sky.	 *Constellations, by National Research Council of Canada. Retrieved December 3, 2007, from http://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/docs/education/planisphere_e.pdf* Figure U-4 Orion
Aries (the ram)	Aries was a magical ram who could speak, think and fly. The god Hermes gave Aries two children, Helle and Phrixus, who wanted to escape their evil stepmother. Helle fell off Aries during the escape, but Phrixus made it to safety and sacrificed Aries to show his thanks. He gave Aries' fleece to King Aeetes, who sent Draco the dragon to guard it. Eventually, Aries' Golden Fleece was stolen by Jason and the Argonauts. Aries' brightest star is Hamal, which means "the lamb." It is one of the few stars that has had its apparent size measured. Most stars are so far away they appear as just a point of light, but astronomers have measured the size of Hamal to be 0.00680 arcseconds. That is the same size as a penny would seem to be if you held it 60 km away.	 *Constellations, by National Research Council of Canada. Retrieved December 3, 2007, from http://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/docs/education/planisphere_e.pdf* Figure U-5 Aries
Taurus (the bull)	Taurus represents a bull. When Zeus fell in love with Europa, he transformed himself into a white bull. One day, as Europa was playing near the seashore, she noticed the new white bull. She went over for a closer look, and the bull knelt down to allow her to climb up. Once she was on, the bull leapt into to the sea and swam to the island of Crete. Then Zeus changed back into human form and told Europa of his love for her. Taurus is easy to spot from the constellation Orion. Follow the three stars of Orion's belt towards the west until a bright red-orange star is encountered. This is Aldebaran, the Eye of the Bull. Nearby are five more stars that make a V with Aldebaran and trace out the face of the bull.	 *Constellations, by National Research Council of Canada. Retrieved December 3, 2007, from http://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/docs/education/planisphere_e.pdf* Figure U-6 Taurus

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Constellations	Description	Picture
Gemini (the twins)	The Twins, Castor and Pollux, were born to Leda, who was seduced by Zeus in the form of a beautiful swan. Every December, meteors appear to spray out of this constellation. This event is called the "Geminid meteor shower." Castor and Pollux, the heads of the Twins, are the two brightest stars in the constellation Gemini. Castor, "the Beaver" and Pollux, "much wine" are the 20th and 16th brightest stars in the night sky respectively.	 *Constellations, by National Research Council of Canada. Retrieved December 3, 2007, from http://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/docs/education/planisphere_e.pdf* Figure U-7 Gemini
Cancer (the crab)	Cancer represents a crab that played a small role in the story of Hercules whose stepmother, the goddess Hera, was his mortal enemy. Hera sent the crab to try to distract Hercules who was battling the dreaded Hydra. The crab grabbed on to Hercules' toe with its claws, but Hercules just shook him off and crushed him underfoot. To thank the crab for its brave attempt, Hera placed it in the sky.	 *Constellations, by National Research Council of Canada. Retrieved December 3, 2007, from http://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/docs/education/planisphere_e.pdf* Figure U-8 Cancer

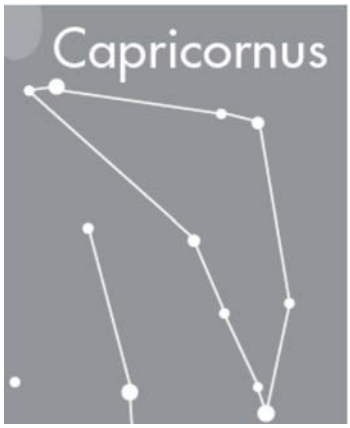
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Constellations	Description	Picture
Leo (the lion)	Leo was a lion that was sent from the moon down to Earth by Hera, the stepmother and mortal enemy of Hercules. Leo lived in a cave and would attack the people who lived nearby. Hercules was sent to fight Leo but his spears and arrows just bounced off the lion's invincible skin. Hercules finally decided to wrestle Leo and eventually managed to strangle the lion to death. Hercules then made a cloak from the lion's skin so that he could be invincible too. Regulus, the brightest star in the constellation Leo, means "the little king" in Latin. It is the 25th brightest star in our night sky and is relatively close to the Earth at a distance of 77 light years. Regulus is much brighter than our own star; it shines 350 times more brightly than the sun. The easiest way to find Leo in the sky is to look for a backwards question mark. This shape, often called The Sickle, marks the head and front paws of the lion.	 *Constellations, by National Research Council of Canada. Retrieved December 3, 2007, from http://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/docs/education/planisphere_e.pdf* Figure U-9 Leo
Virgo (the goddess of agriculture)	To the ancient Greeks, Virgo represented Demeter, the goddess of agriculture. Demeter's daughter, Persephone, was kidnapped by Hades, the god of the underworld, and taken to be his wife. Demeter searched high and low for her daughter neglecting the crops. Eventually, Zeus persuaded Hades to release Persephone. While she was in the underworld, Persephone had eaten some pomegranate seeds and could never fully leave. Each year Persephone returns to the underworld for a time and winter occurs as the crops die and her mother mourns. When Persephone returns, her mother rejoices and the earth becomes fruitful again. The brightest star in Virgo is called Spica. It is easy to find by following the arc of the Big Dipper's handle to Arcturus and then continuing in a straight line: "Arc to Arcturus, then speed on to Spica".	 *Constellations, by National Research Council of Canada. Retrieved December 3, 2007, from http://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/docs/education/planisphere_e.pdf* Figure U-10 Virgo

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Constellations	Description	Picture
Libra (the scales)	To the ancient Babylonians, Libra represented scales or balance. This might be because the sun was in front of the stars of Libra during their autumnal equinox, when days and nights were of equal length. To the Greeks, the stars of Libra were not their own constellation but rather the claws of the scorpion Scorpio. The Romans resurrected the idea of Libra representing scales and sometimes drew Virgo holding the scales, just like the goddess of justice. The two brightest stars in Libra have interesting Arabic names: Zubenelgenubi, “the southern claw,” and Zubenelchemale, “the northern claw.”	 *Constellations, by National Research Council of Canada. Retrieved December 3, 2007, from http://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/docs/education/planisphere_e.pdf* Figure U-11 Libra
Scorpius (the scorpion)	Scorpius represents the scorpion that killed the hunter Orion. Orion was so proud of his hunting skills that he boasted he could track down and kill any animal on earth. His claim was so outrageous that the earth trembled in rage and cracked open. Out of the crack crawled a scorpion which stung and killed Orion. Out of pity, the gods placed Orion and Scorpius on opposite sides of the sky so there could be no more trouble between them. The brightest star in Scorpius is called Antares. This star is quite red and many people mistake it for Mars.	 *Constellations, by National Research Council of Canada. Retrieved December 3, 2007, from http://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/docs/education/planisphere_e.pdf* Figure U-12 Scorpius
Sagittarius (the archer)	Sagittarius was the ultimate archer, keen-eyed and with deadly aim. He is usually drawn as the Babylonians saw him, a centaur: half-man and half-horse. To the Greeks, though, he was a satyr: half-man and half-goat. He was the son of the pipe-playing god Pan and invented archery.	 *Constellations, by National Research Council of Canada. Retrieved December 3, 2007, from http://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/docs/education/planisphere_e.pdf* Figure U-13 Sagittarius

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Constellations	Description	Picture
Capricornus (the goat-fish)	Capricornus is one of the oldest known constellations. The ancient Babylonians called it the goat-fish and said it ruled the part of the sky from which the mighty Tigris and Euphrates rivers flowed. The Greeks also saw Capricornus as a creature that was half-goat and half-fish. They associated it with the god Pan, who had a human torso and face, but goat legs and goat horns. One story about Pan is that he jumped in the river Nile to escape the sea monster, Typhon. The part of him below the water turned into a fish, while the rest of his body remained a goat. Capricornus is a hard constellation to find because it does not have any bright stars and it never gets very high in the sky.	 *Constellations, by National Research Council of Canada. Retrieved December 3, 2007, from http://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/docs/education/planisphere_e.pdf* Figure U-14 Capricornus
Aquarius (young man pouring water from a pitcher)	To the Babylonians, Aquarius was the ruler of all the watery constellations – Pisces, Capricornus, Piscis Austrinus and Cetus. To the Egyptians, Aquarius caused the yearly flooding of the river Nile. The Greeks personified Aquarius, drawing him as a young man pouring water from a pitcher.	 *Constellations, by National Research Council of Canada. Retrieved December 3, 2007, from http://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/docs/education/planisphere_e.pdf* Figure U-15 Aquarius

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Constellations	Description	Picture
Pisces (two fish)	Pisces represents two fish in the sky. One day, the goddess Aphrodite and her son Eros were fleeing the terrible sea monster Typhon. They hid in the rushes along the bank of the river Euphrates but could not escape. The monster was just about to attack when two fish swam up and carried Aphrodite and Eros to safety. As a reward for their help, the fish were placed in the sky as the constellation Pisces. Pisces is a hard constellation to find. The easiest way is to locate the square of Pegasus and look underneath it towards the south. A ring of stars, called the Circlet of Pisces may be seen. This represents the body of one of the fish.	 *Constellations, by National Research Council of Canada. Retrieved December 3, 2007, from http://www.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/docs/education/planisphere_e.pdf* Figure U-16 Pisces

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