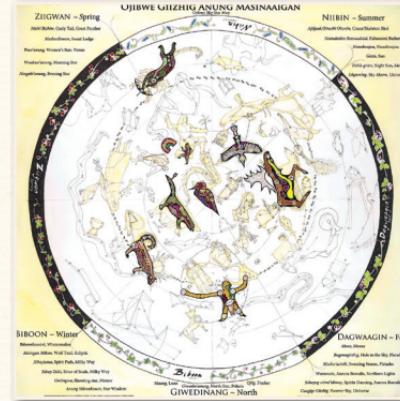




POTAWATOMI

ASTRONOMY AND STORYTELLING

The study of astronomy is a universal concept. Since times past, our ancestors have looked into the sky with the same passion and inquisitiveness as their Eastern counterparts. They too, strove to understand the motion of the cosmological bodies to predict celestial events in a relation to the time of the seasons, when to plant, when to harvest, and as a means of navigation. The celestial objects also played a major role in all Native American customs and beliefs, being incorporated into ceremonies and storytelling.



Ojibwe Star chart very similar to Potawatomi.

The best-known constellation in the northern hemisphere is the Big Dipper, Ursa Major or the Great Bear. Our ancestors saw this same grouping of stars as their European and Asian counterparts. Coincidentally many of our ancestral stories describe it as a bear as well. However, Neshnabe teachings also denote the big dipper as a Fisher, or a weasel, known as Ojig Negos.

The Fisher was a great hunter who lived in the winter world. During this time, many of the animals and people would perish because of the lack of food. The only way to save them was for the Fisher to go to the summer world and bring back the warm weather. But the people and animals of the summer world refused to give the Fisher their warm weather.

The Fisher called his winter companions to formulate a plan. Because the muskrat lived between the two seasons, it knew where summer was hidden; in a secret bag located at the center of a faraway island. They secured the bag and were on their way back to the winter world but the animals and villagers of the summer world followed them back to the winter world. The Fisher was seen carrying the bag and ran up a tree to flee from the summer animals. An arrow was cast, striking the Fisher, carrying him and the bag up to the sky.

The Creator knew that the Fisher wanted to save his friends from starvation, so he prevented the Fisher from falling from the sky by placing him among the stars. Thus, every winter, when the arrow strikes the Fisher, he rolls onto his back, low into the northern sky, near the horizon. During the summer when food is plentiful, he rolls onto his feet, sitting high in the northern sky.

STUDENT ACTIVITY

Have students break into groups of 3-4. They need to write a short skit with their own version of how the Big Dipper came to be.

Students will perform their skits for the class and everyone can vote on their favorite version.

Watch this video, produced by the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, about Potawatomi cosmology and the Fisher Star

<http://cpnlanguagevideo.potawatomi.org/videos/22458/video-bitdash.html>

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<https://www.potawatomi.org/pubinfo/HowNikan/volume29No032008.pdf>



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