

# Exploring Our Universe

## Chapter 1

People looking into the sky for thousands of years have associated the heavens, the stars, and the patterns of stars with gods and goddesses. The constellations that we usually associate with the night sky are patterns Greeks and Romans saw in the night sky. The constellations have Latin names, which was the language of the ancient Romans. For example, Ursa Major is Latin for Great Bear and Leo is Latin for lion.



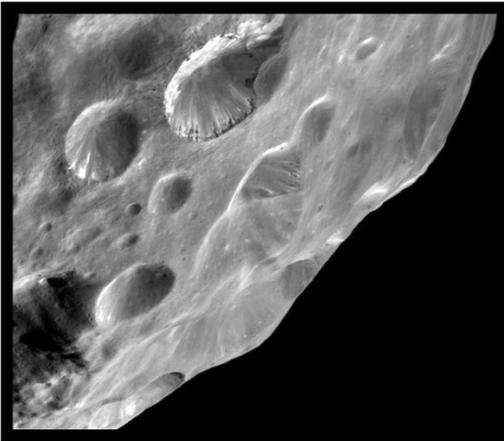
Gene Cernan  
the last Apollo  
Moon walker  
NASA

### Myths and legends about the skies

These are a few of the myths and legends told by people on different continents about the skies.

- The Mayas thought the Milky Way was a mystic road that people used to walk into the underworld. Mayans looking at the stars as they moved across the heavens believed that the point where the Milky Way appeared as a vertical band in the night sky represented the moment of creation.
- Odin was a mighty god of the Norsemen. He was called All Father. His special attendants were Valkyrie. The Valkyrie carried the bodies of the warriors killed in battle to Valhalla, the hall of the slain, in Heaven.

- The African people of Yoruba tell the story of Olorun. Olorun is their sky-god. He is also known as Olodumaie (Almighty) because he created the world and mankind. The people of Yoruba also believe that the Earth at one time was a watery place. Olorun took some dirt, a pigeon and a hen to make the land. He threw the earth onto a small point and placed the pigeon and hen on the point. The two animals created all the solid ground on Earth.
- The Egyptians told the story of Nut, the Egyptian sky goddess. She was a giant woman supporting the sky on her back. Her body was blue and covered with stars. She married Geb, the Earth god. Re, the powerful Sun god, was angry about the marriage and forced their father, the god of the air, to separate them.



Saturn's moon  
Phoebe, a natural  
satellite NASA

### Telescope

The invention of the telescope allowed people to observe celestial objects invisible to the unaided eye.

Galileo was the first person to study the sky through a telescope. He observed the dark areas of the Moon, sunspots on the Sun and discovered four of Jupiter's moons.

The telescope he created was based on drawings made by a Dutch spectacle maker.

# Star Gazing

## Activity 1

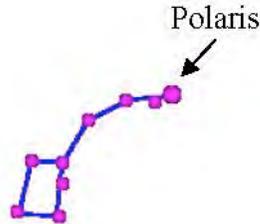
### Introduction

Millions of stars are visible on a clear dark night. You do not need a telescope or any other instrument to study the stars.

In this activity you will be going outside to see if you can locate Polaris, the North Star, which is found at the end of the handle in the Little Dipper. You will also be looking for bright stars in the sky that could form a pattern that might be an animal, person, or other object in the sky.



Star cluster ESA/NASA



### Materials

- Clear night to view stars
- Warm clothing
- Comfortable place to sit
- Flashlight with red plastic covering the lens (optional)
- Notebook paper and pen

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