

Reading & Making Myths

Ages: 7–12 (Grades 1–6)

Duration: 30 minutes

Materials needed:

- Paper
- Pencil
- Story planning worksheet (This is optional. You can use the prompts from the lesson on a blank piece of paper if you prefer!)

Introduction:

Myths are a type of story, and all stories have a structure. **Story structure** is the order of events that happen in a story. When we read a constellation myth, by identifying the parts of the story, the characters, and the **resolution**, or problem, solved we can understand why the story was told and eventually written down. Because people in different areas of the world can look at the same stars and see the same constellations, it is possible for different myths about the same set of stars to exist.

Procedure:

1. Read *The Myths of Ursa Major, The Big Bear* on the next page.

The constellation Ursa Major contains the group of stars commonly called the Big Dipper. The handle of the Big Dipper is the Great Bear's tail and the Big Dipper's cup is the Bear's side.

2. Discuss the following questions.

- What happens in these myths? How are they similar? How are they different?
- Who are the main characters in the Roman version of the story?
- Who are the main characters in the Micmac and Iroquois version of the story?
- How does each myth begin? This is called the **exposition**.
- What are some of the main events or actions in the stories? These help create the story's **plot**.

- 3. Brainstorm and write.** Use the included story planning worksheet or a plain piece of paper to brainstorm ideas for your own myth. Think about the characters, setting, beginning (exposition), middle action, and end (resolution) of a story you want to tell. Think about supernatural events, magic, or superpowers your character(s) may possess. Write down your ideas and plans. Save your brainstorms for the next activity!

Example Myth: *The Supernatural Pen* by Bridget McCormick

This myth is about a supernatural pen.

The heroine of my myth is named Bridget. (character)

This story takes place in modern times in an everyday place. (setting)

One day, Bridget decided to take a walk. After a while, she noticed something up ahead. It was an object, shining silver in the sun. She got closer and saw that the object was a beautiful pen. She picked it up and brought it home. That night, Bridget awoke to a light in her room. The pen was glowing and bright. She felt pulled toward the pen and found herself picking it up. But - she couldn't put it down! All she could do was write. She couldn't stop. She wrote anything and everything. She wrote fiction and non-fiction. She wrote poems and letters to her friends. She wrote for three days straight, until she had terrible writer's cramp! She could not get the pen out of her hand, no matter how hard she tried to let go. (action)

On the fourth day, she decided to take a walk again. At least she would be away from any paper and could have a break from writing! She was moving along when it began to rain. She stretched open her hands, feeling sprinkling showers. To her surprise, as the rain fell, the pen started to fade away. Eventually, it disappeared. All it took was taking another walk, and Bridget's writer's cramp problem was finally solved! (resolution)

Excerpts from the [American Association of Variable Star Observers](#)

The Roman Myth

A Roman myth involves both bear constellations, Ursa Major and Ursa Minor. A beautiful maiden, Callisto, hunting in the forest, grew tired and lay down to rest. The god Jupiter noticed her and was smitten with her beauty. Jupiter's wife, Juno, became extremely jealous of Callisto. Some time later, Juno discovered that Callisto had given birth to a son and decided that Jupiter must have been the father. To punish her, Juno changed Callisto into a bear so she would no longer be beautiful. Callisto's son, called Arcas, was adopted and grew up to be a hunter, while Callisto continued to live in the forest.

One day Callisto saw Arcas and was so overjoyed at seeing her son that she rushed up to him, forgetting she was a bear. Arcas thought he was being attacked and shot an arrow at Callisto. Jupiter saw the arrow and stopped it from hitting Callisto. To save Callisto and her son from further damage from Juno, Jupiter changed Arcas into a bear also, grabbed them both by their tails, and swung them both into the heavens so they could live peacefully among the stars. The force of the throw caused the short stubby tails of the bears to become elongated.

The Hunt

The Micmac People of Nova Scotia and the Iroquois People along the St. Lawrence seaway share one story about the Big Bear. In this story, the rectangular portion of the Big Dipper represents a bear that is pursued by seven hunters; the three closest hunters are the stars that make the handle of the dipper. As autumn approaches, the four farthest hunters dip below the horizon and abandon the hunt, leaving the closest three hunters to chase the bear.

The hunters are all named after birds. The closest hunter to the bear is named Robin, the second closest is Chickadee, and the third is Moose Bird. Chickadee is carrying the pot in which the bear will be cooked. The second star in the handle is actually two stars [the famous double-star system] called Mizar and Alcor which represent Chickadee and the pot.

In autumn, as the bear attempts to stand up on two legs, Robin wounds the bear with an arrow. The wounded bear sprays blood on Robin, who shakes himself and in the process colors the leaves of the forest red. The bear is eaten, and the skeleton remains traveling through the sky on its back during winter. During the following spring a new bear leaves the den and the eternal hunt resumes once more.

Worksheet: Plan Your Story!

Is your story about a person, an animal, or an object?

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Who is your hero/heroine? (Who is your character?)

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When and where does the story take place? (What is the setting?)

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What is he/she/it doing there?

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What happens to your hero, animal, or object in the story? (What is the action?)

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How does your story end? (What is the resolution?)

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How or why does your hero, animal, or object end up in the night sky?

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