

Star stories

Topic

stories from indigenous peoples, constellations

Aims

- To raise awareness of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples on 9 August
- To talk about how people have always found animals in the patterns in the night sky
- To discuss two stories learned by indigenous children on different continents about dark constellations
- To develop learners' speaking, observation and collaboration skills
- To provide learners with an opportunity to explore the knowledge of indigenous cultures
- To practise the present and past simple when completing a text
- To practise the present simple when describing the patterns learners can see in the night sky

Age/level

Young learners aged 9-12 years
High CEFR level A2 and above

Time

60 minutes approximately

Materials

1. worksheet (one per learner or group)
2. an image of the Milky Way
3. images of local star constellations (optional)
4. images of the emu and the snake dark constellations (optional)

Introduction

This lesson can be used to celebrate the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples on 9 August or at any time of the year. August 9 is the day we celebrate the people of the world who live in traditional ways and who speak their own languages. Two indigenous peoples are the Australian Aborigines and the Quechua people of the Andes region of South America. The Quechua people are related to the Incas, an important civilisation of the past.

The stories in the text show two cultures where the starless spaces in the sky, called dark constellations, were used to identify objects. The stories relate to the emu and the snake. Learners first learn the key vocabulary and then complete the text with the missing words. Afterwards, learners look for other patterns in the night sky and invent explanations or stories to accompany them.

Procedure

Before the lesson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Download and make a copy of the worksheet (one per learner or group). • Find an image of the Milky Way to display on a screen in class (or print out if you don't have access to a screen). • Optional: If you are going to show learners the star constellations visible where you live, open the website https://in-the-sky.org/skymap2.php or print out pictures in advance if you don't have internet access. • Optional: If you are going to ask learners to try to identify the emu and the snake, find and print out pictures in advance.
1. Warmer (10–15 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce the topic by telling the learners that the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is celebrated on 9 August. Ask learners if they know anything about cultures where people still live in traditional ways and what kinds of things they do. Answers include growing their own food, fishing and hunting, building their own houses and making their own clothes, and knowing about the land they live on, the seasons they have and what can be found there. • Talk to learners about how people have always told each other stories while sitting around the fire at night. Ask them to imagine what it was like to live in the dark, with the big sky full of stars above them. What did people think or see when they looked at the stars? • Show learners a picture of the Milky Way and ask them to describe it. What can they see? Do they see any patterns in the stars? Tell learners that a pattern of stars is called a 'constellation'. You might like to show learners pictures of the night sky where you live and see if they can identify any constellations. This website shows the sky from your location (in the display options, select only 'stars', then select 'stick figures' and 'names' to reveal the constellations): https://in-the-sky.org/skymap2.php • Now point to the dark parts in the picture of the Milky Way. Explain that while we use the stars to find patterns, some indigenous people use the dark parts. We call these dark constellations.
2. Vocabulary and reading (20–30 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give each learner (or group) the worksheet and ask them to cover the descriptions of the words on the right-hand side of the page. Go through the vocabulary together, describing what each word or phrase means. Once you have elicited definitions of the key words, ask them to match them to the descriptions in the right-hand column. • Once learners understand the vocabulary, get them to read the text in pairs or groups, putting the missing words in the gapped text. • You might like to find images featuring the emu and the snake and ask learners if they can see them.
3. Follow-up (5–10 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask learners to look at your image of the Milky Way once again. In pairs, they look for animals or objects in the image. Each pair comes to the front of the class and says, for example, 'We can see a (fish / balloon).' The other learners try to guess where it is. They could ask, 'Is it made of stars? Is it made from the dark spaces?'

4. Creative work (10–20 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learners draw their animal or object. With their partner, they then invent an explanation for their constellation. For example, if they drew a fish, they could say it means that when their fish ‘swims’ across the sky, this is a good time to go fishing. Afterwards, learners mingle and show each other their pictures, guessing what they mean.• Alternatively, you could write all the animals and objects the learners identified on the board, and ask pairs to imagine a story which features three or four of them, for example, ‘<i>One day, a fish was swimming in the river, when suddenly it saw a balloon. It decided to follow the balloon ...</i>’ Learners could draw pictures to illustrate their story, then sit in groups (as if round a fire) and tell their stories using the pictures to help them.
Extra activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For homework, learners could look up at the night sky to find the moon, planets and stars. If you live in Australia or South America, ask learners to look for the emu and the snake in the night sky.• Find more stories from indigenous peoples to tell the learners.• Learn about the Greek stories based on the constellations in the sky.

Contributed by

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