



2020-2021
INDIGENOUS
THEME:
SKYWORLD
TEACHINGS

*January & Wesakechak:
The Giant, Orion*

JANUARY STAR SIGHTINGS

"Every culture in the Northern Hemisphere can look outside and see the same stars," Wilfred Buck

Happy New Year &
Welcome Back!

Our CDSBEO Indigenous Theme of **Skyworld** continues with the exploration of a new constellation – one that is talked about in the winter, one that has the appearance of a giant, and one that is known for a bright belt.

You may know this constellation as **ORION** -- but in our efforts to decolonize language, we will refer to this constellation in the language of the Cree people.

This constellation is called:
WESAKECHAK.



WHAT IS WESAKECHAK?

"We are Star People..." Wilfred Buck

Wesakechak is known as a trickster and a hero! In Ininewuk stories, **Wesakechak** is a prominent figure, and stories are said to begin, move forward and end with him. Stories about **Wesakechak** are to be only told only in the winter when he stands tall in the sky.

Wilfred Buck shares the story of the **Wesakechak** from a Cree perspective in this short video:

Cree Legend of the Star People



THE STORY OF THE WESAKECHAK

Wilfred Buck states, "...as children, the stories of Orion, the Hunter... were presented to impressionable young minds as knowledge given from great cultures; no other alternative viewpoints were presented. Such experiences left me with the impression that my people were not smart enough to have such perspectives as those that can be associated with the heavens... I know now that this is not the case."

For a complete story on [Wesakechak](#) and his creation of the moon, visit: [The Origin of the Moon](#)

* **Please note:** this story comes from Galileo.org, a government sanctioned educational network created to facilitate an understanding of Canadian social and cultural elements. The group itself is non-Indigenous and the story does not specify the nation from which this story originates.



HOW CAN I FIND WESAKECHAK?

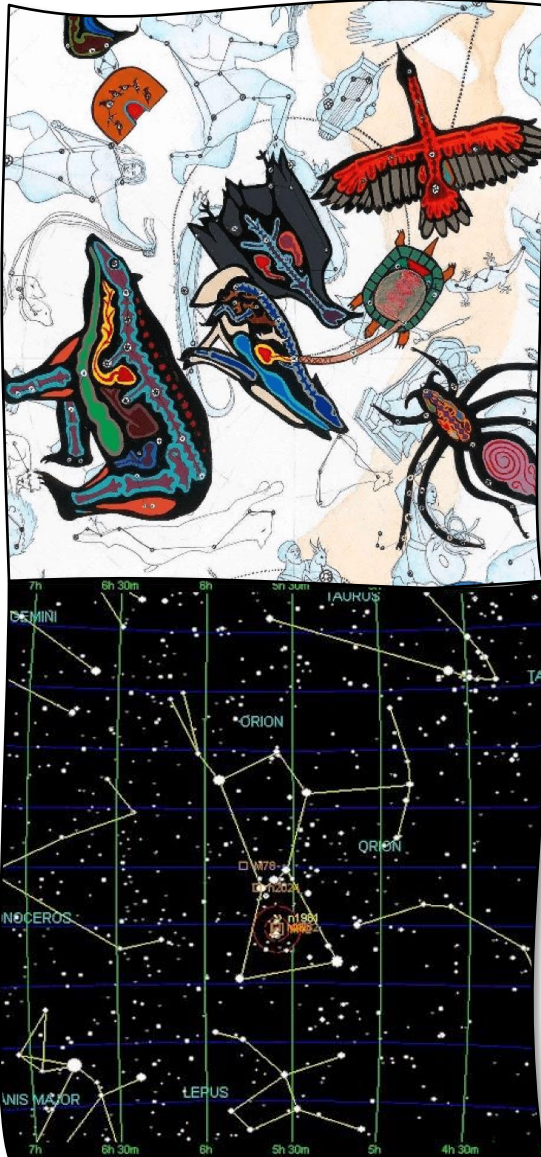
- This special constellation is easiest to find in the winter. Look for three bright stars in a line—this belt sits right over the equator. (Using a compass on a smartphone could make this even easier! It will identify southeast – where the first sighting would be – and then slowly moves to the southwest of the night sky☺)
- The two stars north of this are *Wesakechak's* shoulders and include a giant red star. The two brighter stars to the south are his legs. A brighter blue star can be seen as *Wesakechak's* left foot.

Fun Fact!

Ancients used *Wesakechak* to predict the seasons: If it appeared at midnight, the grapes were ready to harvest. If it appeared in the morning, summer was beginning. If it appeared in the evening, winter had arrived.



HOW CAN I CHRONICLE WESAKECHAK SIGHTINGS?



- Check out this Star Map – it contains First Nations names, and [Wesakechak](#) is titled here under “The Giant.” [Star Map - First Nations Names](#)
- January Star Chart – colonized language, but clear placement: [January Stars](#)
- Here’s a Stargazing Chart: [Stargazing Chart for younger students](#). Some of you might have already used this to chart your constellations.

Finally,

- Check out this site for an overview of [Wesakechak](#) and other stories associated with him! [Learning About Wesakechak](#)

* Please Note: Again, this last story comes from [Galileo.org](#) which is not an Indigenous site. We wanted to include this story as the information and teacher planning elements are worthwhile to note.

A LITTLE MORE INFO...FYI

"...in all its glorious colours and brilliance, [Wesakechak] attracts more notice than just about any other constellation" - Frank Dempsey

In his article from 2009, Dempsey takes a look at Indigenous language for some of Wesakechak's main stars. The three bright stars that make up the "belt" is translated from Cree as "The Three Chiefs" while in Inuktitut they are called "Ullaktut" which identifies "three runners or hunters." Betelgeuse and Bellatrix were coupled together as "Akuttujuuk" and identified as important with the return of daylight.

For additional information and stories on these pointer stars, please refer to Dempsey's article here: [Further Wesakechak Information](#)

Fun Fact!

Betelgeuse is a giant red star in "it's last violent stages of evolution," says astrophysicist Andrea Dupree. It has varied in brightness for some time, but despite the hype of an explosion, [this article](#) from The New York Times states, "it merely sneezed!" It will certainly explode...sometime in the next 100,000 years 😊



Aboriginal Sky Lore of the Constellation Orion in North America

By Frank Dempsey, Jorette Genta (@FrankDempsey@mpinc.ca)

Introduction
The brilliant stars of midwinter shine brightly, and the constellation known to contemporary astronomy as Orion is one of the best-known and familiar groups of stars. The brightness and appearance of the easily recognized line of three stars forming the traditional belt of Orion contribute to the familiarity with and easy recognition of this star group by North American aboriginal cultures; this prominent constellation was used for seasonal and nightly time-keeping and calendar functions, such as the Starry method of plotting when the constellation was setting at dusk (early May). Legends are one method of utilizing cosmic phenomena to teach concepts that are difficult to understand, to teach structured behaviour and tribal ethics, morals, and beliefs, and to promote ways of living that would be in sustainable harmony and order with the Universe. An examination of the mythology of the constellation in various aboriginal cultures across North America shows numerous variations and several major interpretations. In this note, several interpretations have been selected, including an assortment of hunting characters and animals, the Navajo bear figure, a porcupine hand, and the conflict between the women Chloko and the cold winds.

Various Hunters and Animals
An assortment of legends associated with the stars most often described the three Orion belt stars as a prominent star group. One example is the mythology of the Cree nation of the central subarctic region of Canada, in which the three bright stars were known as a group whose name (Oonikwan and translated as "The Three Chiefs" Miller 1997), in the Arctic, the Inuit nation had several myths associated with the stars of Orion. The two bright stars commonly called Bellatrix and Betelgeuse were known as the star group (Iklikkik) and were associated with the very important occasion of the returning daylight (MacDonald 1998). This pair of stars is visible in the southern sky at the time of year when the evening twilight begins to lengthen. The three belt stars were seen as Ullaktut, three runners or hunters, while the factor star below was the hunter's children, carrying dishes for their fathers. The heavy star (Orion's belt) was seen as a fur being carried by one of the children. A legend about the star figure explained that the star was Ikliqigla, meaning "the one behind." He was seen as a hunter who dropped behind his three brothers (Ullaktut) in order to recover a dropped mitten. Another Inuit legend told of three hunters pursuing a bear with a sledge off the edge of an ice floe, and into the sky. The sledge is represented by the Orion sword stars (below the belt stars), the three hunters are the three bright belt stars, and the bear is represented by the bright star Bellatrix. In another Inuit legend, the three belt stars represented a great structure for drying and stretching reindeer.

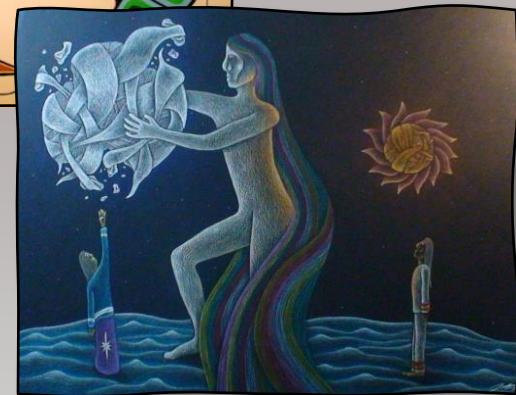


Figure 1. Orion in all its glorious colours and brilliance, attracts more notice than just about any other constellation. The map star conspicuously (Star2) suggests, who used a Nikon F2, 56 mm, f/2.8 lens, Scope 400 bin, and 22 minutes of his life in February 2002 to get it.

CROSS-CURRICULAR RESOURCES

Connect back to the [Wesakechak](#) tale and have students illustrate the story.

- Older students can make a thematic or theoretical connection
- Younger students might enjoy creating a series of pictures in a children's book format
- Check out images and information from these two talented artists:
 - [Wesakechak and the Moon](#)
 - [Wesakechak and the Origin of the Moon](#)



- Check out the following blog post: [Math Meets Astronomy](#) for a great way to teach grades 3-4 angles using constellations!
- This K-6 resource was created from our CDSBEO Math Department: [Map the Stars!](#) various levelled tasks use the apparent distance to the constellation to provide a fun activity that connects to the Spatial Sense strand. Enjoy!

EXTRA INFO & RESOURCE OPTIONS

Free Stargazing Apps
for Kids to Learn Constellation



There are a few apps that can be handy for all sorts of stargazing. Students can use these on their own, or this can be used in a classroom setting. This [article](#) outlines two great options depending on level of interest and ability.



Students can create images and understand astronomical data with coding. Following a scaffolded set of activities and working with data from NASA orbiting telescopes on sources from exploded stars to black holes, through [Recolouring the Universe](#), students can experience real world application of science, technology & art (Grades 6+).



Check out OnCore in your CDSBEO Apps. Here is a link to a video that reinforces why it is so important to remain [Connected to the Sky](#)

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