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Astronomy Lesson 1: One Sky, Many Stories

THE ONE STAR AND BIG DIPPER (SIZUOKA, JAPAN)

Big Dipper always boasted about being rich and important, but One Star (Polaris), the child of a poor family, bragged about being the center of the northern sky. This made Big Dipper very angry because he wanted to be more important than One Star.

Big Dipper tried to conquer One Star so he could again boast about being more important. However, he was unable to reach One Star because the pair of stars in the constellation Ursa Minor (Kochab and Pherkad) always stayed between One Star and Big Dipper as they turned in the sky. This prevented Big Dipper from ever getting close to One Star. For this reason, Kochab and Pherkad are known as the “Guardians of the Pole,” because they will always protect One Star (Polaris).

KEYWORDS: *Polar star, Big Dipper, Ursa Major, Little Dipper, Ursa Minor*

THE SEVEN BULLS (CROW NATION)

NOTE: Story courtesy “Montana Skies: Crow Astronomy” by Lynn Moroney, OPI (2011)

The Crow people do not tell stories in the summer and so it is, only in the deepest, coldest time of winter is the following story told.

It is best to show students a 15 minute video in place of this telling: <https://youtu.be/nzMljr1XP38>

Once, there lived a young woman who was with child. When the baby was born, the young woman didn't want him. She took her son far out into the prairie, placed him on the prairie grass and left him there. Just left him there! A newborn.

They say that not long after that some buffalo bulls came along. There were seven of them. They saw the child lying there. They went close to the baby and surrounded him. They sniffed him and nudged him. The leader of these seven buffaloes was called “Crazy Bull”. Crazy Bull gently scooped up the boy and held him for a moment. He tossed him in the air, but the baby was not hurt, for when he landed on the ground, he began to crawl about. Another bull came forth and like the first, used his horns to toss the boy into the air. This time, when the boy landed, he could stand up and he could talk. There was yet a third buffalo who did the same thing and when the boy landed, he had turned into a young man. And they say they named him “Buffalo Boy”.

The bulls came to love the boy, really love the boy. Those seven buffaloes took the boy with them, they cared for him, they watched over him and taught him many things. They warned him, saying, “There is a bull that is very mean. His name is “Connected Bones” and he has several pretty wives. They will offer you water, and when they do,

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you must refuse to take even one drop.”

One day, Connected Bones’ youngest wife came to Buffalo Boy and as he had been told, she offered him water. Buffalo Boy refused to drink any water. He turned away and said no. She took her finger to the water and then placed a small drop on Buffalo Boy’s lips and said, “Well, you drank my water anyway. Now, I will tell my husband.”

She ran to her husband, told him what happened and Connected Bones was filled with anger. Maybe because it was his prettiest wife. At once, he went to the lodge of Buffalo Boy, called to him, “Buffalo Boy, get up! Come outside!” And they say the seven bulls came to the aid of Buffalo Boy, telling him, “Stay inside the lodge! We’ll take care of him.” But they could not protect the boy, and one by one, Connected Bones broke their bones and left them dead. All seven of them. Dead. Their bodies lying here and there on the prairie.

Again, Connected Bones called to Buffalo Boy, “Come out!” Buffalo Boy appeared at the door of his lodge. He had an eagle feather tucked to the back of his head and he had his arrows. They say that Connected Bones started pawing and snorting, and then charged the boy. But when the huge buffalo passed under him, Buffalo Boy twisted his body, aimed his arrow, and shot the bull in the rump. That was one of the weakest parts of the buffalo.

They say that the bull started wallowing and snorting, and charged the boy a second time. But Buffalo Boy did the same as before. He jumped into the air just as the bull charged him. He spun around and shot his arrow into the bull’s collarbone. That is another weak spot. When the arrow struck, the bull fell. Dead.

They say that the boy took all seven buffaloes into the sweat lodge and there, all seven bulls were healed. When

they came outside the lodge, they knew that Buffalo Boy had great powers, and that he was strong. They knew it was time for him to go back to his people. And they said, “But we want to continue to watch over him. We need to become something that will watch over the boy and all the Crow people.” The seven buffaloes agreed that they needed to become something that would last forever. They talked among themselves.

One of them said, “Why don’t we become trees?” One of them said, “No. The Crow chop the trees and make fire. They use the trees for firewood.”

One of them said, “Why don’t we become a river?” And one of them said, “No, the river can die. Especially in hot weather. The river can dry up.”

One of them said, “Why don’t we become a mountain? Mountains last forever.” And one of them said, “No. The rain wears away a mountain. In time, even the mountains disappear.”

There was one who had been looking at the sky and he said, “For as long as I can remember, there have been stars. Why don’t we become stars and watch over the Crow?”

The seven bulls went to the sky and became the seven stars in the Big Dipper. And they say Buffalo Boy went back to his mother. His mother didn’t want him and he left. And they say he went to be with his buffalo family and he became the constant star. The star some call the North Star.

When you look at the Big Dipper and the North Star, remember this story of a family, held together by their story and their love for one another. And that is the end of the story of the Seven Bulls and the Buffalo Boy.

KEYWORDS: *North Star, Big Dipper, Buffalo, Sweat lodge*