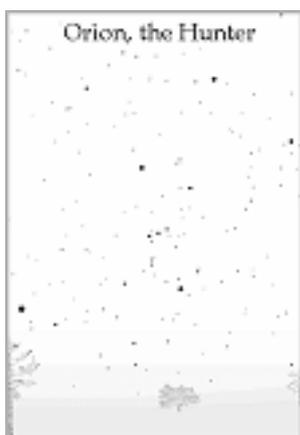


The Wizard from Space

Make Your Own Fantasy Orion

Objective: To encourage students to exercise their fantasy in coming up with their own version of a constellation using Orion, the Hunter, one of the most well known constellations. The following pictures (pages 4—9) are examples of how it has been represented.

Procedure: After explaining to the students how constellations can appear in more ways than one (using the examples below) encourage them to use the included sheet with Orion's stars (page 10) to come up with their own new interpretation of this famous grouping. Some may wish to write a short story, create a poem, or even write a song using the constellation as a source of inspiration.



As long as we humans have been looking at the night sky we have tried to establish some sense of order. One of the earliest forms of that is star pictures, or constellations. The ancients who imagined these patterns and then passed their stories down from generation to generation made up about half of the 88 we recognize today. But, there is more than one-way to see a constellation.

This first picture shows the stars of Orion, the Hunter, as he appears in the night sky. His belt of three stars in a row is one of the most easily recognized patterns in the winter sky.



Imaginative ancients saw Orion as a mighty hunter carrying a club and wearing a sword at his side as seen in this second picture. An old lion skin draped over one arm became his shield.

According to one legend Orion set himself the goal of hunting every kind of animal that could be found. This made Artemis, the goddess of hunting, angry and she ordered a small scorpion to sting Orion on the heel. Orion died from the poison and Artemis placed both the hunter and the brave scorpion among the stars. As Orion sets in the west the scorpion always rises in the east, keeping an eye on him just in case he gets the urge to hunt again.



Modern sky gazers can more easily learn to identify a stick figure version of Orion as our third picture shows.

The three stars that form a row in the center is Orion's belt; the pair of stars closest to the horizon are his feet, the pair above the belt his shoulders. The four-sided group is his hunting club while the vertical line at the right is his shield, an old lion skin held at arm's length. The small triangle of stars over Orion's shoulders represents his head. Unless you live under dark skies away from city lights the club and shield stars may not be visible.



Astronomers think of the sky differently than through legends and pictures. In 1930 the International Astronomical Union divided the 88 constellations up into geometric areas that resemble county maps rather than the more imaginative classical figures. This was so that all of the stars visible in the night sky would be within a constellation.

This picture shows this somewhat boring – though practical -- way to see Orion.

All 88 constellations fit together like a giant celestial jigsaw puzzle.



Groups visiting the planetarium are often encouraged to make up their own constellations from both the already named patterns as well as out of randomly picked stars. Turning Orion into a butterfly as seen in picture five is one example that has been used for several decades.

The belt makes the long slender body of the butterfly. Its wings are made from the stars marking Orion's shoulders and feet. Since the butterfly follows the rotation of the heavens it is always flying westward across the night sky.



Last, but not least, we tend to think of constellations from our own historical tradition; Greco-Roman. Actually all the cultures scattered around the world and throughout history have seen the patterns in the sky in different ways. The ancient Egyptians, for example, saw Orion as their god of the dead, Osiris.

Some of these other constellations don't even use many stars; in ancient China a constellation may have had only two stars. Some cultures made constellations out of the dark places in the sky where there are no stars. Others even used the band of the Milky Way.

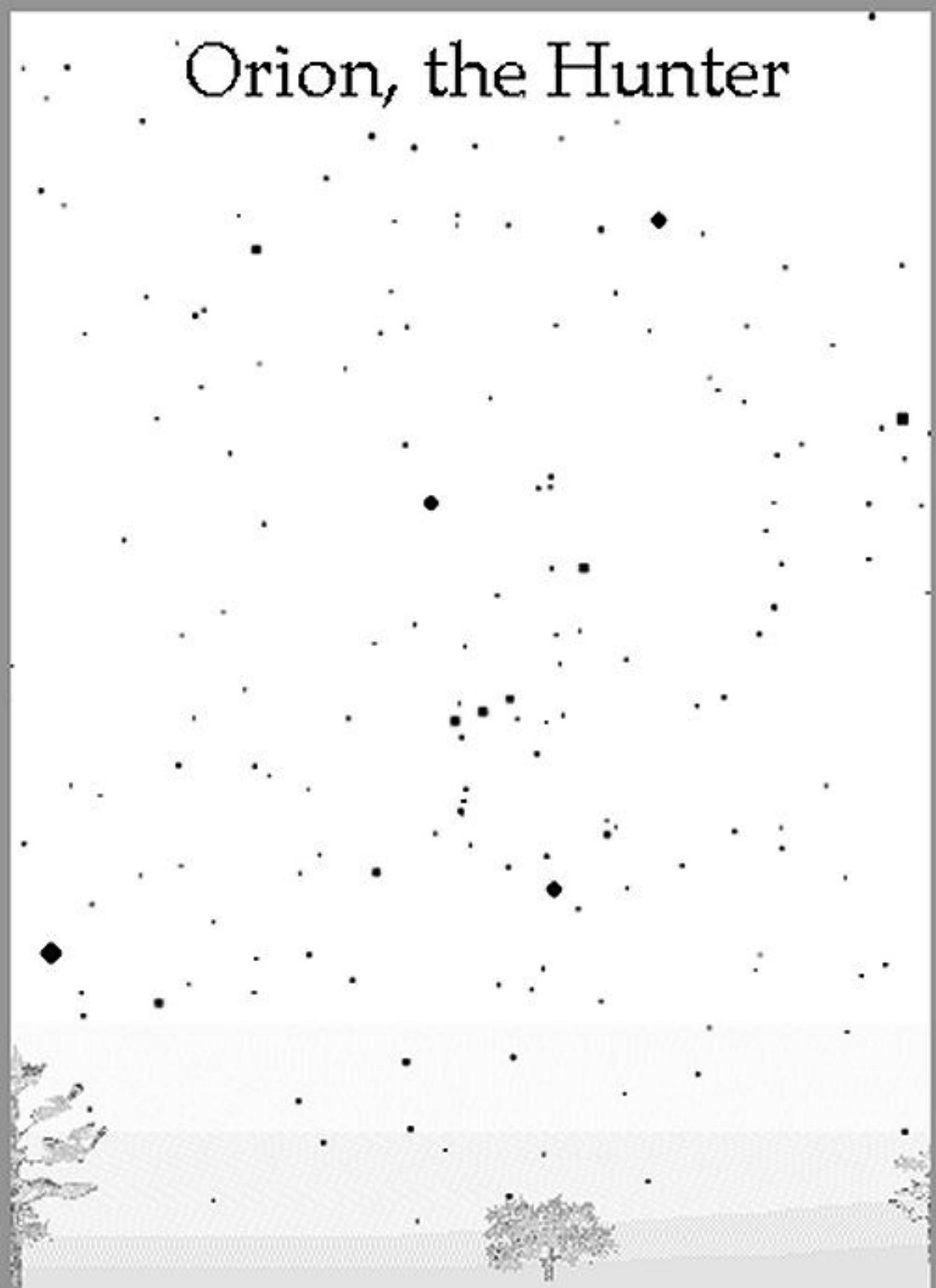
*The Wizard
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Orion in Fantasy

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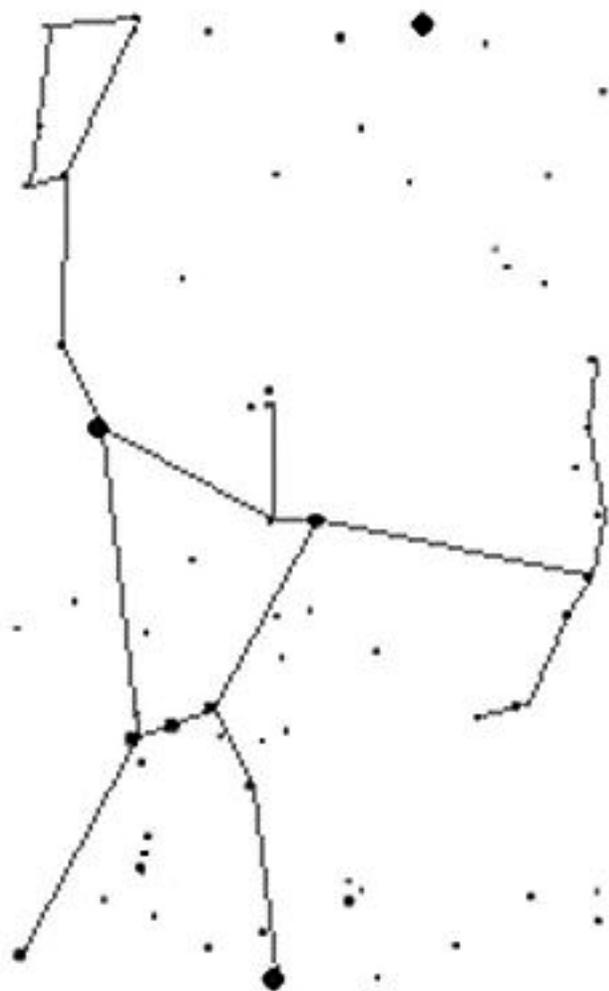
Orion, the Hunter



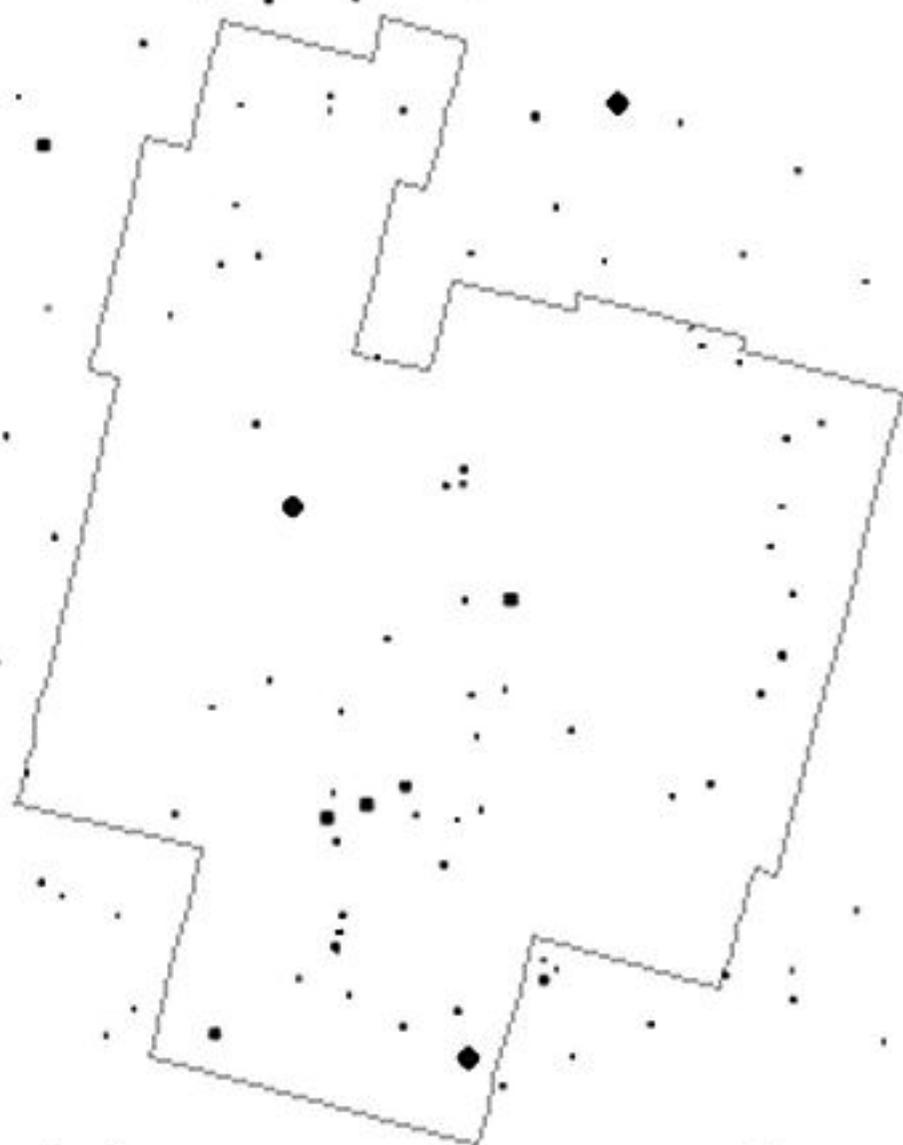
Classical Orion



Orion as a stick figure



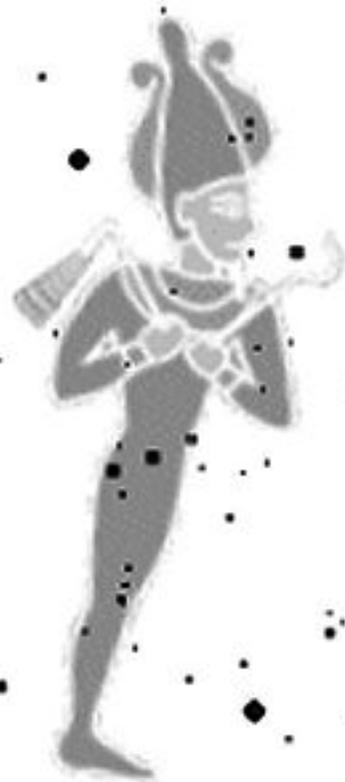
Orion's I.A.U. boundaries



Orion as a Butterfly



Orion as Osiris



The Wizard
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Orion in Fantasy

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