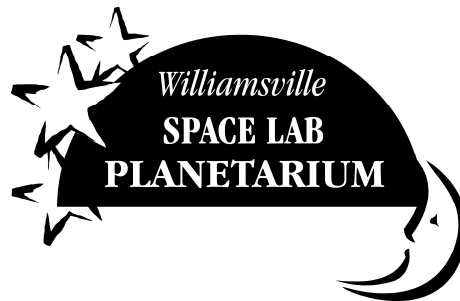
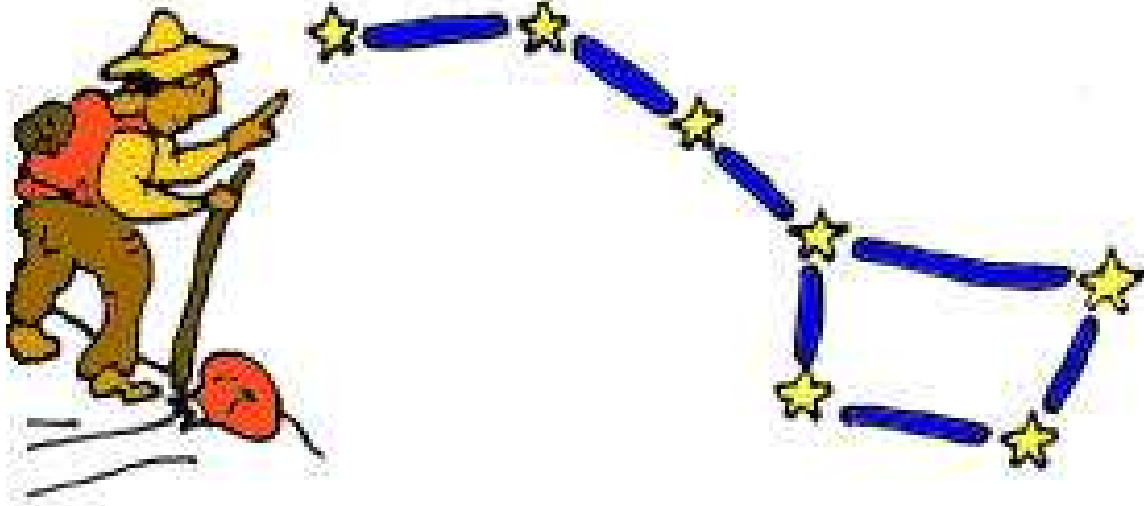


An Educator's Guide to
FOLLOW THE DRINKING GOURD
by
New Jersey State Museum Planetarium
And
Raritan Valley Community College Planetarium



An Educator's Guide to
FOLLOW THE DRINKING GOURD

The following Teacher's Guide is designed to help you better prepare your students for the upcoming presentation of *Follow the Drinking Gourd*. Please be aware that not all the material in this guide may be appropriate for every age level. This presentation is provided for a variety of grade levels, please use only the material that you feel is appropriate for your students.

Follow the Drinking Gourd was originally produced by: **The New Jersey State Museum Planetarium** and **Raritan Valley Community College Planetarium**. ©1995. Funding for the production of this presentation was generously provided by: **Martin Marietta Astro Space** and **Friends of the New Jersey State Museum**. The planetarium show follows and explores the *fictional* story *Follow the Drinking Gourd*, written by Jeanette Winter and published in 1988 by Dragonfly Books, a division of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. of New York.

Background history

During the era of slavery in the United States, many slaves fled to freedom in the North. In order to reduce the numbers of escaping slaves, owners kept slaves illiterate and totally ignorant of geography. Owners even went so far as to try to keep slaves from learning how to tell directions.

Nonetheless, slaves knew perfectly well freedom lay to the north, and they knew how to locate north. They used the North Star, or as it is more correctly named, Polaris. Polaris lies almost directly north in the sky. Slaves fled using the simple direction "walk toward the North Star." However, unable to plan a route, they risked walking into impassable or dangerous terrain.

Members of the Underground Railroad were fully aware of the predicament of fleeing slaves. About 1831, the Railroad began to send travelers into the South to secretly teach slaves specific routes they could navigate using Polaris. By the beginning of the Civil War in 1861, about 500 people a year were traveling in the South teaching routes to slaves, and well established escape routes had been established. Scholars estimate that 60,000 to 100,000 slaves successfully fled to freedom.

Polaris became a symbol of freedom to slaves as well as a guide star. As soon as they were old enough to understand, slave children were taught to locate Polaris by using the stars of the Big Dipper.

Slaves passed the travel instructions from plantation to plantation by song. Slaves brought from the tribal cultures of Africa the custom of creating songs to transmit factual information. In America, slaves turned song into codes that secretly transmitted information they wished to keep from whites.

"Follow the Drinking Gourd" is a coded song that gives the route for an escape from Alabama and Mississippi. Of all the routes out of the Deep South, this is the only one for which the details survive. The route instructions were given to slaves by an old man named Peg Leg Joe. Working as an itinerant carpenter, he spent winters in the South, moving from plantation to plantation, teaching slaves this escape route. Unfortunately, we know nothing more about Peg Leg Joe.

The song and its translation are as follows:

When the sun comes back and the first quail calls,
Follow the Drinking Gourd.
For the old man is waiting for to carry you to freedom,
If you follow the Drinking Gourd.

“When the sun comes back” means winter and spring when the altitude of the sun at noon is higher each day. Quail are migratory birds wintering in the South. The Drinking Gourd is the Big Dipper. The old man is Peg Leg Joe. The verse tells slaves to leave in the winter and walk toward the Drinking Gourd. Eventually they will meet a guide who will escort them for the remainder of the trip.

Most escapees had to cross the Ohio River, which is too wide and too swift to swim. The Railroad struggled with the problem of how to get escapees across, and with experience, came to believe the best crossing time was winter. Then the river was frozen, and escapees could walk across on the ice. Since it took most escapees a year to travel from the South to the Ohio, the Railroad urged slaves to start their trip in winter in order to be at the Ohio the next winter.

The river bank makes a very good road,
The dead Trees show you the way,
Left foot, peg foot, traveling on
Follow the Drinking Gourd.

This verse taught slaves to follow the bank of the Tombigbee River north looking for dead trees that were marked with drawings of a left foot and a peg foot. The markings distinguished the Tombigbee from other north-south rivers that flow into it.

The river ends between two hills,
Follow the Drinking Gourd.
There’s another river on the other side,
Follow the Drinking Gourd.

These works told the slaves that when they reached the headwaters of the Tombigbee, they were to continue north over the hills until they met another river. Then they were to travel north along the new river, which is the Tennessee River. A number of the southern escape routes converged on the Tennessee.

Where the great big river meets the little river,
Follow the Drinking Gourd.
For the old man is awaiting to carry you to freedom if you
Follow the Drinking Gourd.

This verse told the slaves the Tennessee joined another river. They were to cross that river (which is the Ohio River), and on the north bank, meet a guide from the Underground Railroad.

CHORUS
 Fol - low _____ the drink - ing gourd! Fol - low _____ the
 drink - ing gourd. For the old man is a - wait - ing for to
 VERSE
 car - ry you to free - dom If you fol - low the drink - ing gourd. When the
 sun comes back, and the first quail calls, _____ fol - low _____ the
 drink - ing gourd. For the old man is a - wait - ing for to
 car - ry you to free - dom If you fol - low the drink - ing gourd.

This is the musical composition for the song

ASTRONOMY BACKGROUND

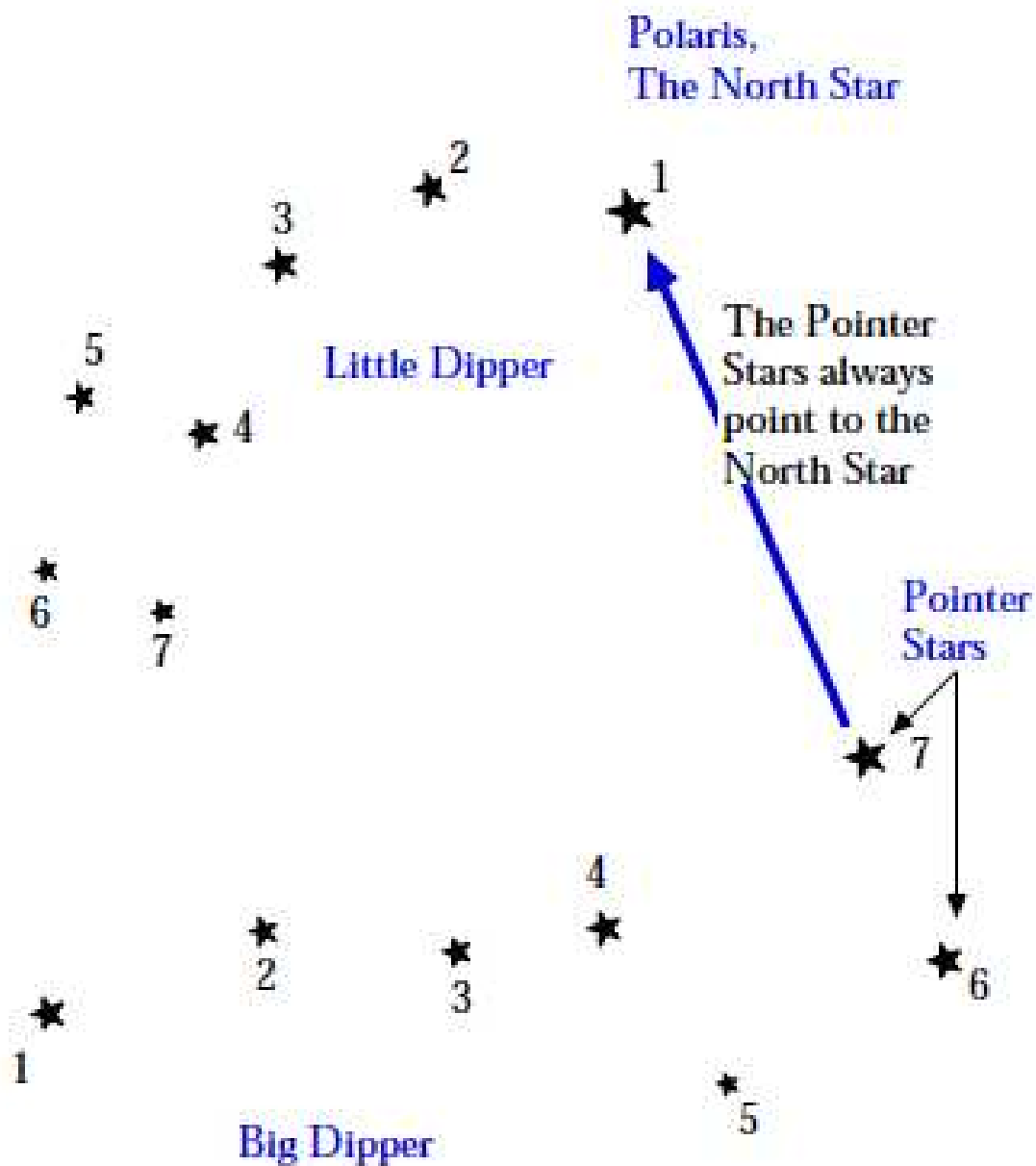
“When the sun comes back” teaches us that slaves knew how to use the sun as a calendar. During winter and spring, the sun’s altitude is higher and higher each day at noon. In fall and summer, it is lower. This is because Earth has seasons. Seasons occur because Earth is traveling around the sun, and because Earth is tilted toward the sun, the Northern Hemisphere receives more hours of sunlight per 24 hour period than the Southern Hemisphere. During this period, December 21 to June 21, the sun is higher and higher in the sky each day at noon. Its’ maximum height occurs on June 21, the summer solstice. After this date, the sun seems slightly lower each day, and the Southern Hemisphere is beginning to receive more light. By September 21, the fall equinox, sunlight falls equally north and south of the equator. By December 21, the winter solstice, the South Pole is tilted toward the sun, and the Southern Hemisphere has its’ longest day, and the Northern Hemisphere its’ shortest. Then the pattern reverses, and by March 21, the spring equinox, sunlight falls equally north and south of the equator.

On December 21, those of us living in the Northern Hemisphere see the sun rise in the southeast and set in the southwest. On succeeding days, sunrise and sunset are further and further north. On March 21, sunrise and sunset are straight east and west. On June 21, they are in the northeast and northwest. Then the pattern reverses, and by September 21, sunrise and sunset again are due east and west.

Polaris, the North Star, is almost exactly aligned with Earth’s North Pole. There are two common misconceptions about the North Star. The first is that it is a bright star. In fact, it is actually quite dim. That’s why we learn to use the much brighter stars of the big dipper to find it. The second misconception is that it is directly overhead, which is a point that astronomers call the zenith. As the Earth rotates, the stars move across the sky. Stars may pass by the zenith, but they never stay there. However, Polaris does stay in the north while the other stars seem to turn around it. If you can locate the North Star, then you always know that walking towards it is travelling north.

Big Dipper, Little Dipper & Polaris--the North Star

Connect the stars and see how they are oriented to each other!

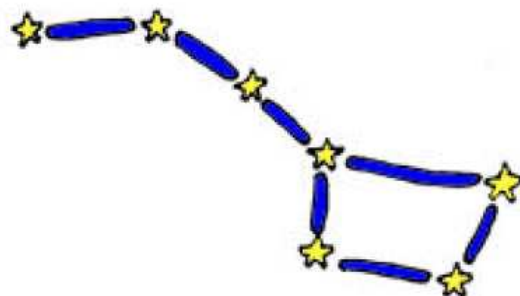


Find the following words hidden in the puzzle:

(some words you will find more than once!)

REWARD FLEE FAMILY SCARED NIGHT SUN CLUES SAFEHOUSE
RUN ESCAPE CABIN RIVER HIDE MASTER WAGON TRAIL SLAVERY
TRAVEL FIELD COTTON BRUTALITY DRINKING GOURD PLANTATION
BIG DIPPER CONSTELLATION RAILROAD NORTH UNDERGROUND GO
STAR CANADA SOUTH SONG PEG LEGGED JOE BRAVE WALK SOLD
NO MONEY SKY FREE

T	B	R	C	F	S	N	F	N	G	H	I	D	E	T	W
R	S	A	O	I	L	C	M	R	I	V	E	R	F	X	A
A	A	I	N	E	S	C	A	P	E	Z	J	I	A	P	L
I	F	L	S	L	A	V	E	R	Y	E	P	N	M	E	K
L	E	R	T	D	S	O	N	G	E	?	L	K	I	G	R
T	H	O	E	N	I	G	H	T	Z	D	A	I	L	L	U
R	O	A	L	W	A	G	O	N	S	U	N	N	Y	E	N
A	U	D	L	M	A	S	T	E	R	S	T	G	C	G	H
V	S	N	A	N	O	R	T	H	F	K	A	G	A	G	I
E	E	D	T	S	O	L	D	C	L	Y	T	O	B	E	D
L	S	B	I	G	D	I	P	P	E	R	I	U	I	D	E
?	T	C	O	T	T	O	N	Z	E	H	O	R	N	J	F
T	A	U	N	D	E	R	G	R	O	U	N	D	G	O	R
B	R	U	T	A	L	I	T	Y	C	L	U	E	S	E	E
C	A	N	A	D	A	X	T	S	O	U	T	H	J	T	E
X	W	A	L	K	A	N	D	W	A	L	K	A	N	D	!
Z	L	I	I	N	O	\$	K	B	R	A	V	E	V	P	A





Coloring Page

Write a caption to this picture in the lines below the picture.

Vocabulary

Abolitionist: A person who wanted to end slavery.

Constellation: A group of stars that forms a dot-to-dot picture in the sky.

Drinking Gourd: The “Big Dipper.”

Free States: The states of the north that did *not* allow slavery. Included: Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Vermont, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, California

Gourd: The fruit of a vine, similar to a squash or pumpkin, though usually smaller. Gourds were often hollowed out and dried and then used as a drinking utensil.

Plantation: A large farm in the southern United States for growing usually cotton or tobacco. Most of the work done on plantations was done by slaves who were owned by the *Master of the Plantation*.

Polaris: The actual name of “the North Star.”

Quail: A small game bird that lives in the northern United States and southern Canada during the summer months, but migrates to the southern U.S. during the winter months.

Safe House: The house of a member of the Underground Railroad. It was a place where escaping slaves were safe to rest during their long trip north to freedom.

Slavery: Forcing people to do work for another without pay. In slavery, people become property that could be bought and sold.

Slave States: The states of the south that allowed slavery. Included: Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, Kentucky, Maryland, Delaware, and Missouri.

The “Master”: The owner of a slave or many slaves.

Tombigbee River: A river that runs south through the states of Mississippi and Alabama. It was a major route of the Underground Railroad for slaves from Alabama and Mississippi.

Underground Railroad: A network of houses and individuals that helped slaves escape to the north. They provided shelter, hiding places, food, and clothing to runaway slaves. They also directed them to safe pathways and helped to carry them along this path. It was said that the “safe houses” were lined along the pathways from the south to the north like “cars in a secret *underground railroad*.”

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Juvenile books are indicated with the symbol*.