

Learn How to Spot 5 Constellations

What are Constellations?

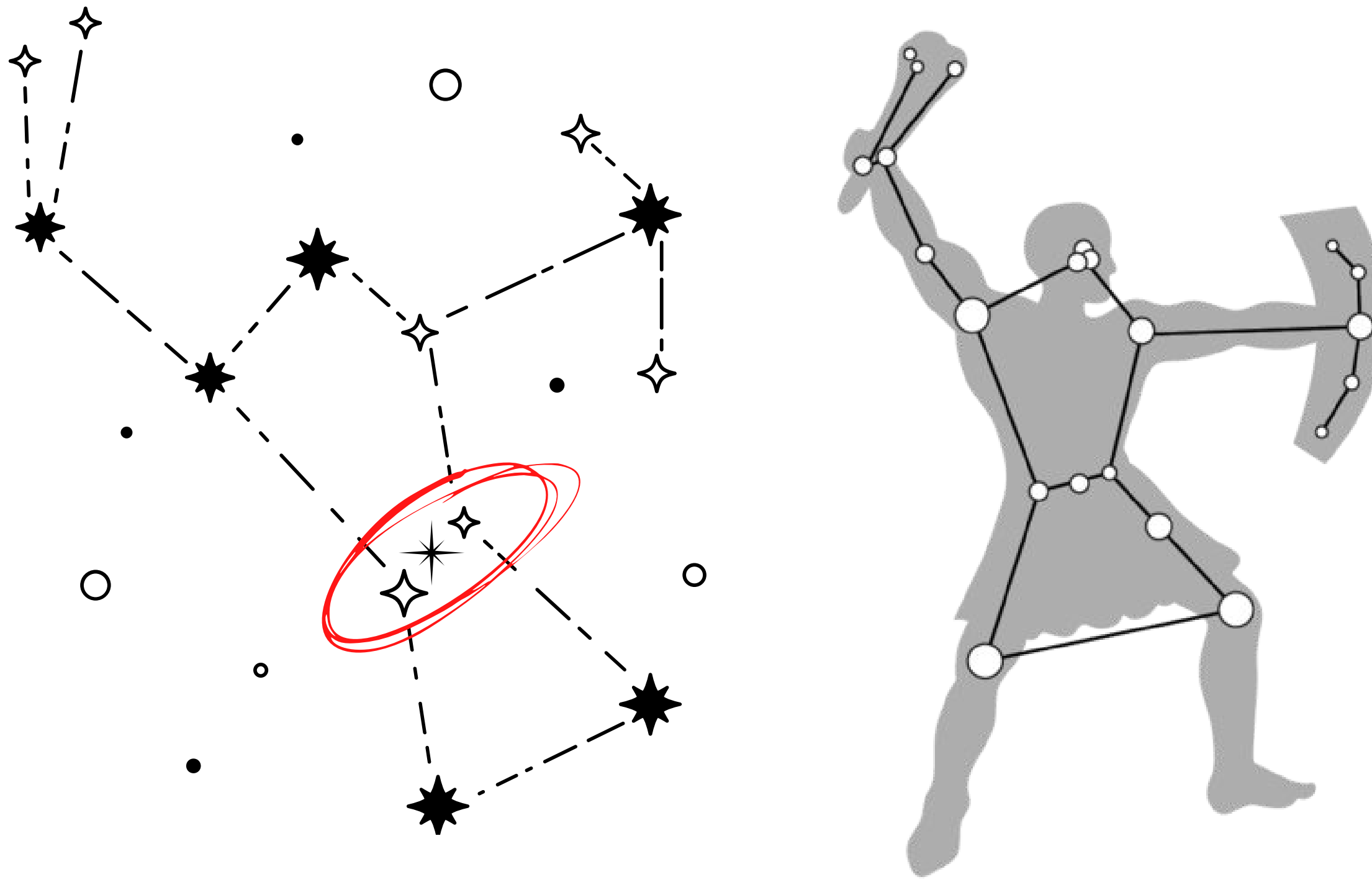
A constellation is a group of stars that looks like a particular shape in the sky and has been given a name. These stars are far away from Earth. They are not connected to each other at all. Some stars in a constellation might be close while others are very far away. If you were to draw lines in the sky between the stars like a dot-to-dot puzzle the picture would look like an object, animal, or person.

Constellations have been used to tell stories, honour religious heroes, understand agricultural seasons, and help with navigation.

Where can I find Constellations?

The constellations you can see at night depend on the time of year. Earth orbits around the Sun once each year. Our view into space through the night sky changes as we orbit. Your location on Earth also determines what stars and constellations you see, and how high they appear to rise in the sky.

Orion, "The Hunter"



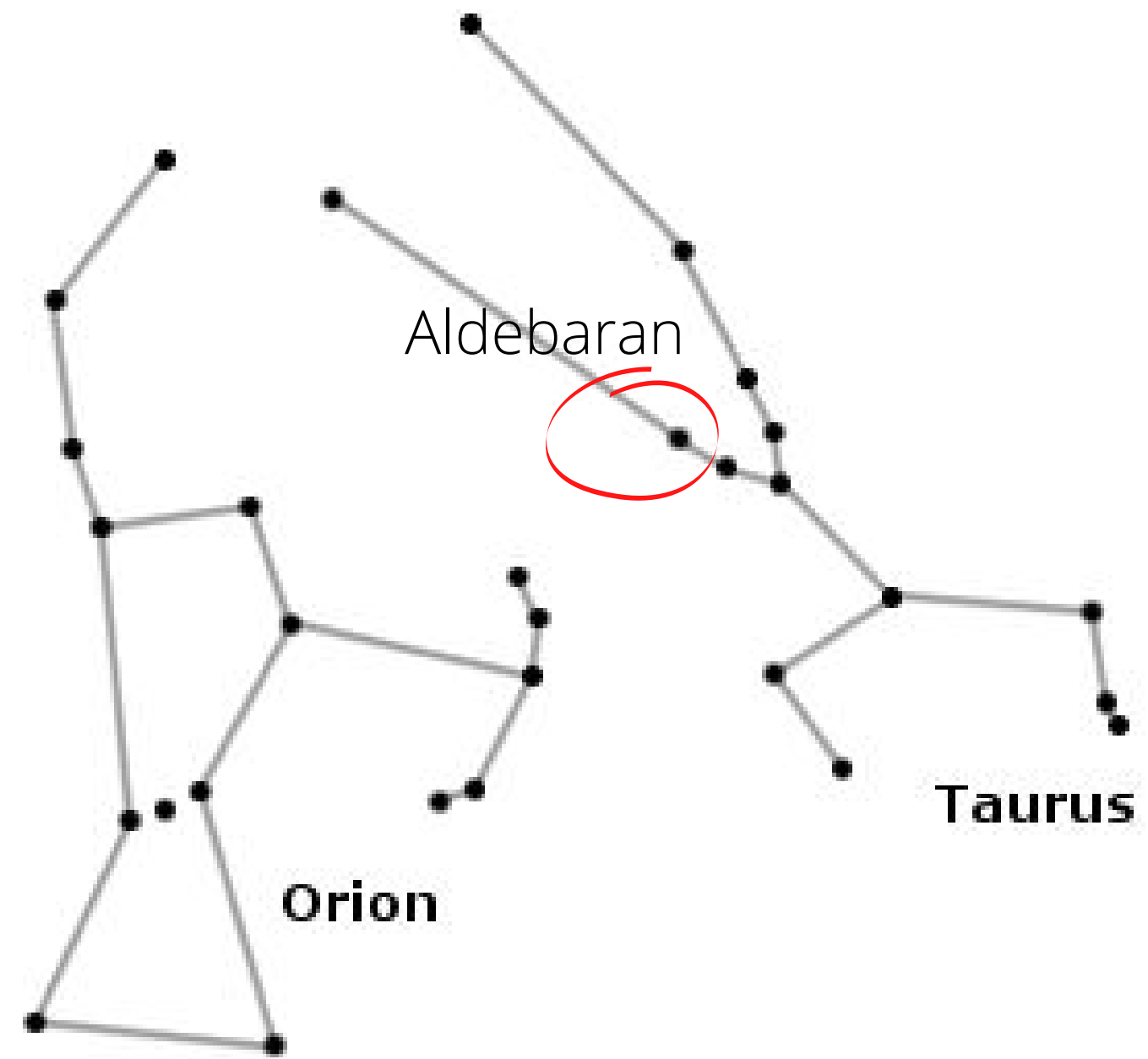
How to Find Orion

Orion is one of the most prominent and recognizable constellations that can be seen throughout the world. Look for the three bright stars that form the straight line of the hunter's belt. From there you should be able to make out the bright star that forms the hunter's armpit, and follow that east along the hunter's arm, which is holding a bow.

The Story of Orion

According to Greek mythology, Orion was in love with Merope, but Merope would have nothing to do with him. Orion's life ended when he was killed by Scorpius, the scorpion. The gods felt sorry for him, so they put him and his dogs in the sky as constellations. They also put all of the animals he hunted up there near him. Scorpius, however, was placed on the opposite side of the sky so Orion would never be hurt by it again.

Taurus, "The Bull"



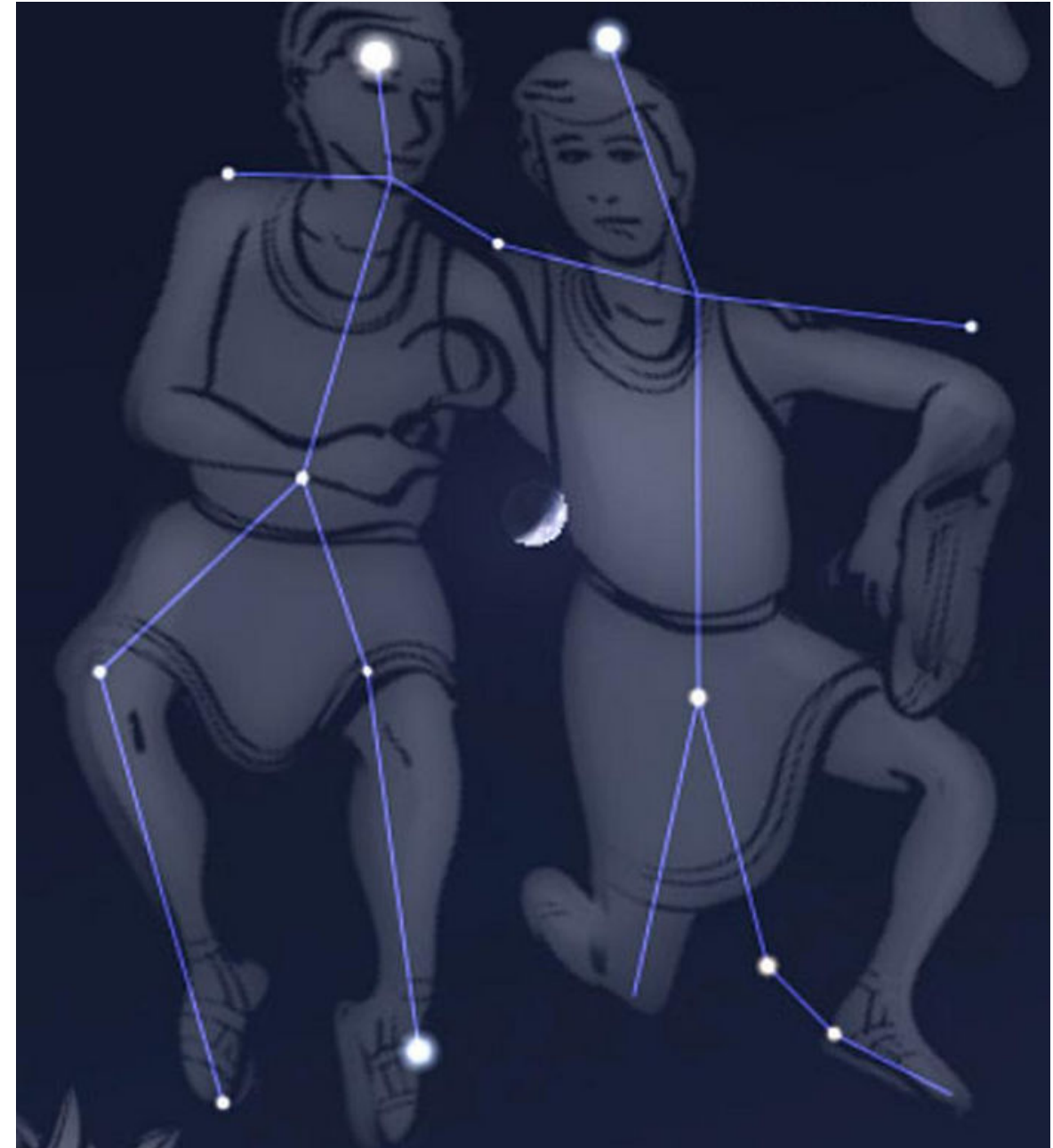
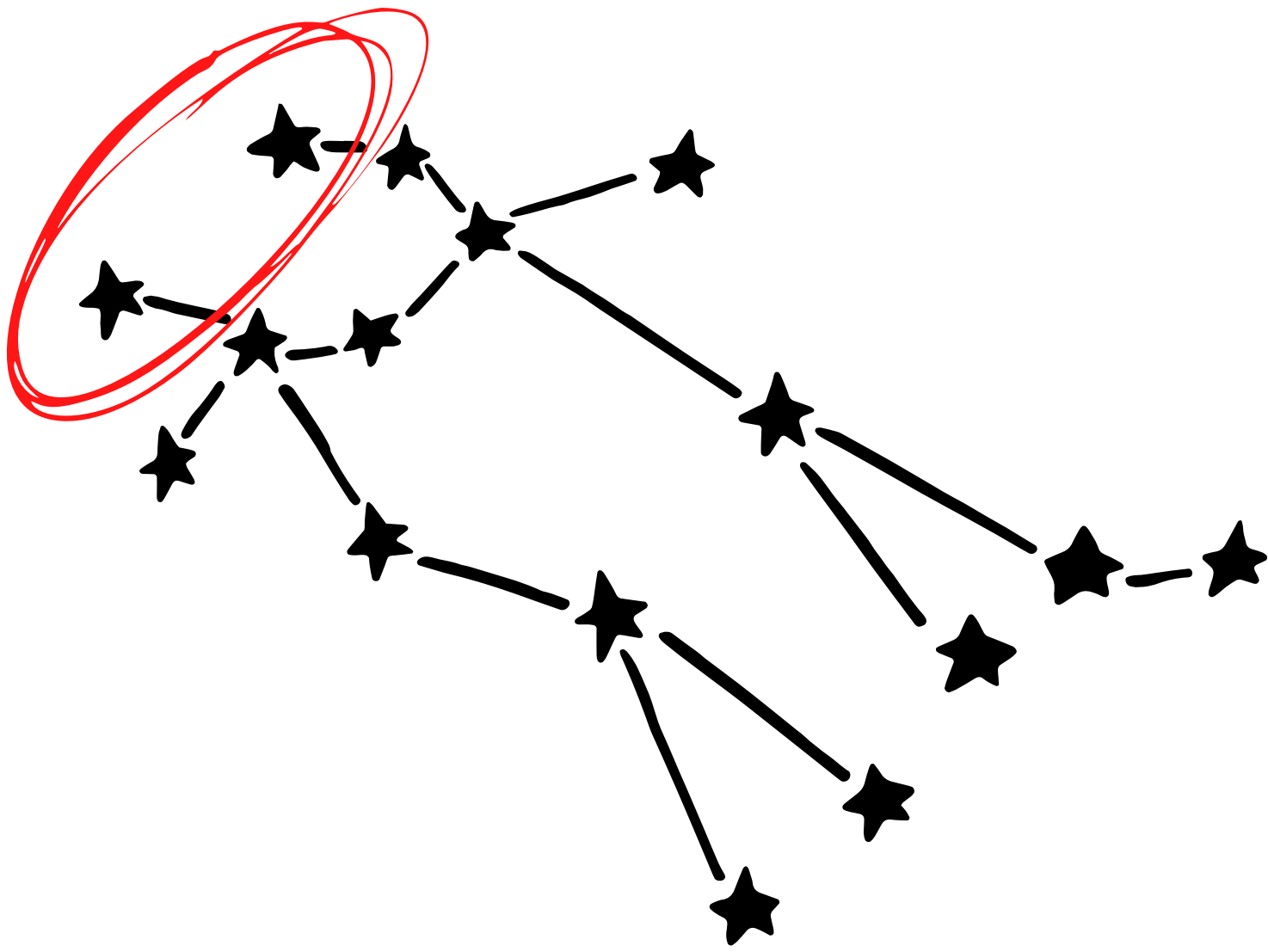
How to Find Taurus

In the northern hemisphere, the bull passes through the sky from November to March. Taurus is located above Orion and can first be identified by finding the large red star, which is near the fork of the bull's horns.

The Story of Taurus

According to Greek mythology, when Zeus fell in love with the Phoenician Princess Europa, he transformed himself into a white bull with golden horns named Taurus and carried Europa away to Crete.

Gemini, "The Twins"



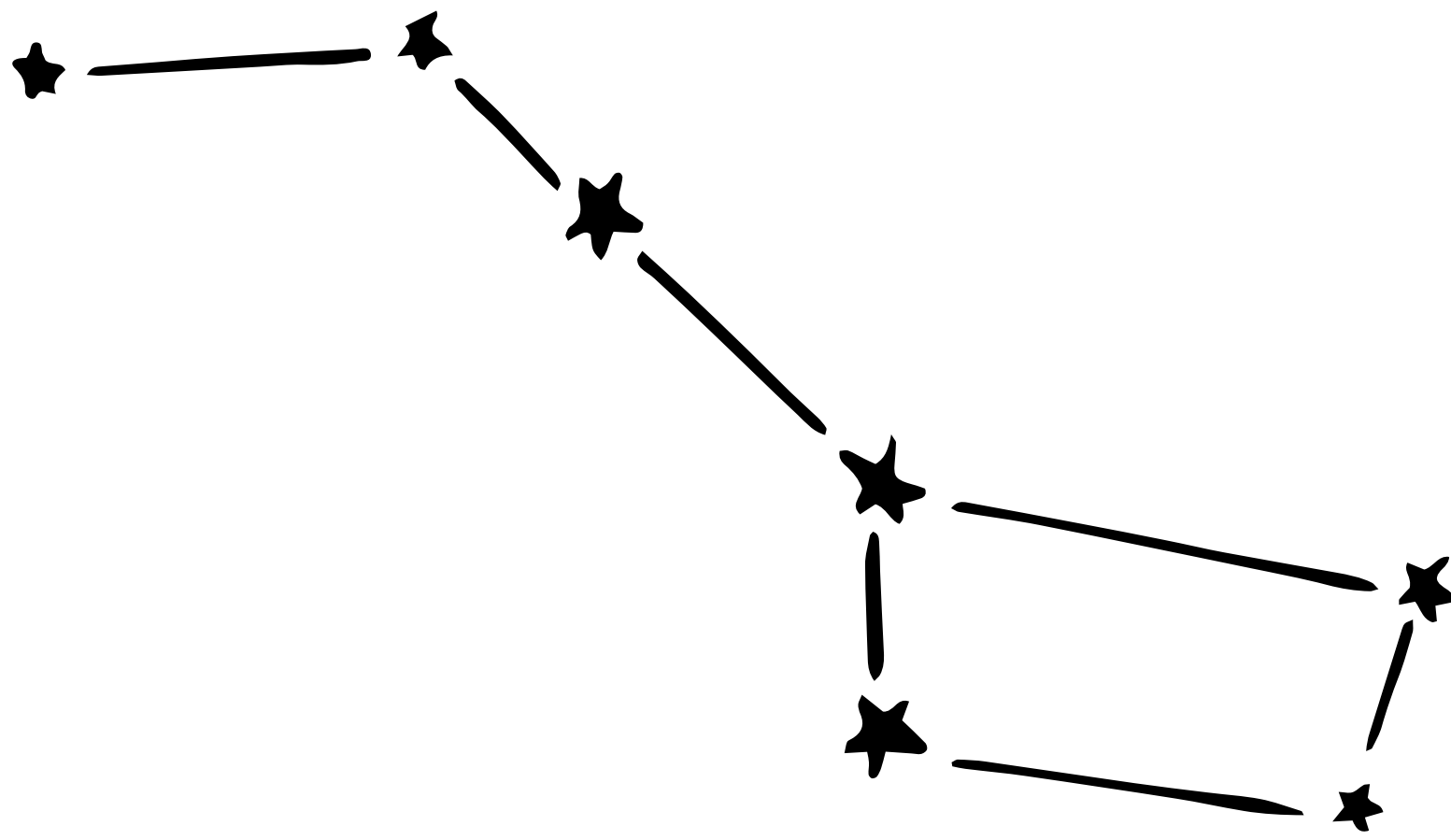
How to Find Gemini

Gemini is located northeast of Orion and between Taurus and Cancer constellations. The two brightest stars in the constellation (named Castor and Pollux in Greek Mythology) represent the heads of the twins, and are an ideal identification feature.

The Story of Gemini

Gemini is Latin for "twins", although the twins identified depend on the culture. According to Greek mythology, brothers Castor and Pollux were known to share many adventures together. They were bound very closely and loved each other very much. When Castor was killed, his brother, Pollux, also began to die. Zeus took pity on Pollux and allowed him to share his life with Castor. Castor and Pollux will never be separated in the night sky.

The Big Dipper/Ursa Major, "The Great Bear"



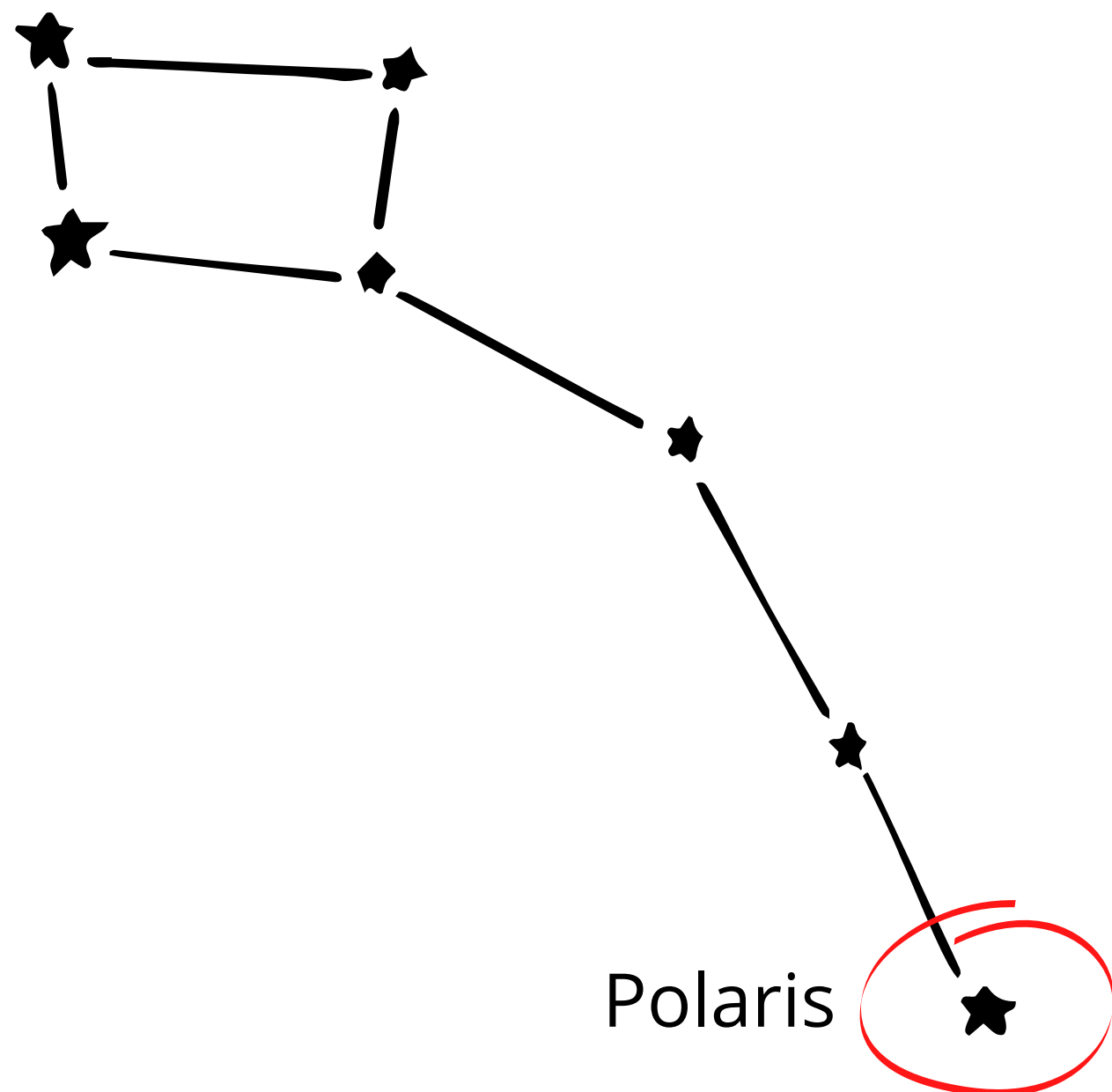
How to Find Ursa Major

The Big Dipper is one of the most familiar patterns in the sky, and is the largest northern constellation. It is most easily found by identifying the "cup" and "long handle" that make up the body and tail of a bear. This constellation is easily seen in the summer months in the northernmost part of the sky.

The Story of Ursa Major and Ursa Minor

The constellation is referenced in Homer and the Bible. Ancient Greeks associated the constellation with the myth of Callisto, the beautiful nymph who had sworn a vow of chastity. Zeus saw the nymph one day and fell in love. The two had a son named Arcas. Zeus's wife, Hera, was jealous and turned Callisto into a bear. When Arcas drew his spear on the bear, Zeus turned them both into constellations. Arcas is also known as Ursa Minor.

The Little Dipper/Ursa Minor, "The Little Bear"



How to Find Ursa Minor

Ursa Minor is notable for marking the location of Polaris, the North Star, which is located at the end of the Little Dipper's handle. The Big Dipper is the key to spotting the Little Dipper. Begin by looking at the two stars that form the right side of the 'cup' and follow a straight sight line due north and you will see Polaris, the North Star. The handle is actually the 'Little Bear's' tail, and the cup forms part of the bear's side.