

What's My Sign? created and developed by Laura Venner

Objective: This activity is aimed at teaching students: about the precession of the Earth about its axis, how to recognize constellations including Ophiuchus, the difference between astrology and astronomy opening a discussion about pseudoscience, the significance of star gazing to cultures around the world, and the movements of cosmic objects through space.

Materials: Black foam core board with the name, constellation, and "traditional" zodiac date category on the front. On the back of the foam core board place a picture of the zodiac symbol and the correct date that the sun travels through the constellation in the current age.

Procedure:

- 1) Begin creating the 13 zodiac constellations by cutting black foam core boards into 4 pieces.
- 2) On each piece of black foam core write, in pencil, the name of the constellation on the top of the board and draw the corresponding zodiac symbol next to the constellation name.
- 3) Underneath the name and symbol draw the constellation.
- 4) Write the "traditional" zodiac date category on the bottom of the board.
- 5) On the back of the foam core board draw the zodiac symbol again with the corresponding date that the sun appears to "travel" through the constellation in the current age.
- 6) Once this is done you can either use a paint pen to outline the information or use glitter to highlight the information on the boards. Please see photos below.
- 7) Have the students form a circle.
- 8) Ask all the students that are Aries to stand behind the sign that represents Aries and all the students that are Aquarius to stand behind the sign that represents Aquarius and so on until all of the students are standing behind what they believe to be the sign that represents their birth sign.
- 9) Have the students check the front of the signs to be sure that their date of birth falls on or between the dates listed.
- 10) Repeat this process for the other constellations of the zodiac.
- 11) Once all of the students are standing behind their zodiac constellation sign, have each group turn their boards around and check their date of birth with the dates that now appear under the zodiac sign.
- 12) Have the students stand behind their new zodiac sign. Hopefully, a few students will be standing without a sign because their date of birth is not represented by the 12 signs of the zodiac. These students should have dates of birth that fall under the zodiac sign Ophiuchus.
- 13) Bring forward the board with Ophiuchus represented on it and have the Ophiuchians stand behind the board.
- 14) Discuss the earth's precession and the zodiac. Point out why we do not see the constellation that we are born under during the evening on our birthday.

15) Have the students make a constellation sign that represents the date of their birth according to the position of the earth now.

This is a fun activity that is informative while serving as a good ice breaker activity. I usually follow this activity with a star wheel activity and in cases where applicable a Star Lab presentation. The star wheel activities can be found by visiting the following websites: <http://spaceplace.nasa.gov/starfinder/> , <http://www.lawrencehallofscience.org/starclock/skywheel.html>..

Background information:

<http://spaceplace.nasa.gov/starfinder/>

<http://spaceplace.nasa.gov/starfinder2/>

<http://spaceplace.nasa.gov/starfinder3/>

