

The Sliding Sun

BOB RIDDLE

On Sunday, March 20 at 4:27 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, spring officially starts for those living in the northern hemisphere. The Sun rises almost due east on this date, having moved from rising east-southeast throughout the winter months. From this date onward to the start of summer in the northern hemisphere, the sunrise position will gradually shift to the northeast.

In the northern hemisphere, the Sun's northward motion along the eastern horizon, centered on due east, is easily observed from the classroom using a shadow stick placed in an east-facing window over a period of several weeks around the time of the equinox. Place a sheet of paper under the shadow stick so that the stick casts a shadow on the paper. Each day at the same time, perhaps around sunrise, mark the position of the tip of the shadow on the paper, and write the date next to it. Through this indirect method of observation, the Sun's apparent

motion along the eastern horizon can be followed. (Before the equinox, the Sun rises slightly south of east; whereas after equinox, it rises slightly north of east. At the time of solstice, this trend reverses.)

The story "Why Sun Cautiously Rises," an adaptation of a Pahute Indian legend, tells a tale about the Sun's changing position:

Long ago, mornings were not the same. Sun was always eager to rise and fill the day with light. There came a time, however, when the days became so hot that rivers dried and water became scarce. The deserts turned from green to brown and food became hard to find. The animals began to worry about how they would get food and water if it continued to stay so hot.

One day while the animals were talking, Rabbit suggested that it was the Sun's fault. "It is Sun that is making the streams dry and the ground turn brown. Someone must make the Sun come down out of the sky," he continued. This frightened the other animals, but the

thought of having no food or water frightened them even more.

Rabbit volunteered to bring Sun down out of the sky. Rabbit gathered a bow and some arrows and set out for the place where the sky and Earth come together. The plan was to shoot an arrow at Sun when it appeared in the morning.

The next morning when Sun appeared, Rabbit shot an arrow at Sun. The arrow just barely missed hitting Sun because Sun had moved a little bit from where it usually rises into the sky. Rabbit was surprised, but took note of the exact place where Sun rose into the sky. The next morning Rabbit took careful aim but again missed because Sun had moved a little bit. This went on and on, and each morning Rabbit would shoot an arrow at Sun, but would miss because Sun moved its rising position

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a little bit each morning.

After a while, Rabbit said "I know what Sun is doing, and tomorrow morning I'll be ready."

The following morning, Rabbit aimed an arrow just a little to one side of where Sun would come up. But that morning Sun did not move, it came up in exactly the same place, so once again Rabbit's arrow went flying off into the sky, missing Sun.

The next day, Rabbit was in no mood for tricks. He took aim at the Sun and let fly his last arrow. This time the arrow struck Sun, hitting it in the side, near its heart. Sun let out a cry, and at once fire began to bleed from the wound, pouring and spilling down to splash on the Earth. Fire looked this way and that way. Seeing Rabbit, Fire chased him across the desert. Rabbit started running as fast as he could with Fire right behind him.

Rabbit spotted a tree and shouted, "Tree, Tree, can you hide me?" "Oh no, I cannot hide you," Tree replied, "for if I do, Fire will burn me too." Rabbit continued running until he saw a bush. He shouted, "Bush, Bush, can you help me, would you hide me?" Bush replied, "No I cannot, for if I do,

Fire will surely burn me."

Rabbit ran and ran until he came to a little cactus. The fire was getting closer and Rabbit was getting tired. "Cactus, Cactus," he shouted, "can you help me, can you hide me?" "Yes," replied Cactus, "I will help you, I will hide you. Dig a hole down near my roots, and hide there. When Fire comes here he will pass right over us." Rabbit quickly dug a hole, and just in time, jumped into the hole.

At that exact moment Fire caught up with Rabbit, but as Cactus had said, Fire passed right over them and continued running on into the desert. And, after a while Fire burned out.

When the smoke cleared, Rabbit and Cactus opened their eyes and looked about. The top of Cactus had been burned and had turned from green to a pale yellow and brown. Because Rabbit did not have enough time to dig a deep hole his head stuck just a little. The hairs on Rabbit's head were scorched, leaving black streaks.

And so it is to this day, in the summertime, that little Cactus remains green, all but the top of his head. It dries out and turns yellow. And Rabbit, well, if you

look closely at Rabbit you will see he still has dark streaks on his head from where Fire singed him.

Sun too has changed. Now when it is time for Sun to rise in the sky, he pauses, barely showing himself. Then he peeks over the horizon, and if all is well, he slowly continues up into the sky. And that is why the Sun rises cautiously. ■

Reference

Moroney, L. (Reader and folklore collector). (1991). *Tales of the Sun and Moon—Skylore Series*. Audio cassette. (Lynn Moroney, 9230 North Penn Place #177, Oklahoma City, OK 73120.)

Evening planets

March and April

Venus: Hangs over western horizon, sets one hour after sunset.

Jupiter: Situated over eastern horizon, rises three hours after sunset.

Moon phases

March

Last Quarter - March 4

New Moon - March 12

First Quarter - March 20

Full Moon - March 27

April

Last Quarter - April 3

New Moon - April 11

First Quarter - April 19

Full Moon - April 25

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