

Here's a myth that challenges our notion of the Man in the Moon. And another one that suggests how the Moon came to be.

Our sky companion

Worldwide the Moon is a regular sky companion as it traverses its apparent path across the skies each month. Its regular motion has long occurred like clockwork, and cultures around the world have tales about the Moon, its motions, and how it got into the sky. Two wonderful stories from diverse cultures offer us clues to understanding the Moon's presence and appearance in the sky.

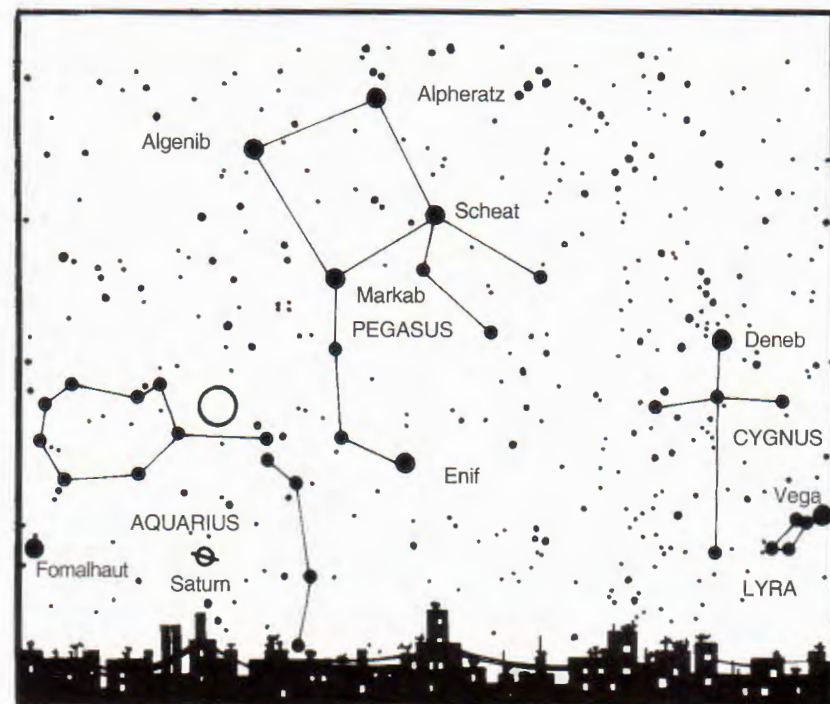
From down under

The Maori peoples from New Zealand tell of the "Woman in the Moon"—a myth that contrasts sharply with our own, perhaps patriarchal, myth of the Man in the Moon.

A long time ago, a woman named Rona lived in a village on an island. Her husband and sons, like most of the men in the village, fished to supplement their living. The men who fished on the islands made their greatest catches on nights when plentiful light, provided by a full moon, brightened the waters near the island.

As on every such night when her husband and sons had departed for their fishing trip, Rona was left to prepare a fire in the oven. Rona heated stones in the oven to make steam for cooking the night's catch. However, on this particular full moon, as the rocks heated in the oven, Rona realized that she had no water to sprinkle over the hot rocks. The moonlight was sufficient to guide her on her path, until clouds moved in and blocked the Moon's light. In the sudden darkness, Rona stumbled against a tree, and in her pain, cried out loudly at the Moon.

The Moon heard Rona's cry, moved down from the sky, caught her in its hands and began carrying her back up to the sky. With all of her strength, Rona held onto a tree



LOOKING WEST AT 8 P.M. ON JANUARY 31, 1994.

branch so tightly that it was uprooted and pulled, along with Rona, up into the sky.

When the husband and sons returned from their fishing expedition, they found a cold oven and no wife or mother. So they searched for Rona and finally looked upward and found her on the face of the Moon, where she remains to this day.

From the Sun people

For another perspective on the Moon, the following myth from West Africa suggests how the Moon came to be in the sky.

In times even before there was a Moon in the sky, there lived a spider named Anansi who had six sons. On one occasion, Anansi left his sons behind as he began a long journey. After their father left for the trip, time passed slowly, and finally the sons began to worry about his safety. The oldest son, Akaki, who had the best eyesight among them, climbed the highest mountain to look for their father. Akaki saw that their father had fallen into a river and was

being swallowed by a great fish.

Another of Anansi's sons, Twa Akwan, quickly cut a path through the thick jungle, leading his brothers to the river's edge. While trying to decide their next step, yet another son, Hwe Nsuo, bent over and began drinking from the river. Soon there was no water left in the river bed, only the great fish was left, gasping for breath. Another son, Adwafo, quickly jumped down to the great fish and slit it open, thereby releasing their father. Before Anansi could say a word of thanks, a great hawk swooped down from the sky and grabbed Anansi in its talons and carried him away to the sky.

Reacting quickly, yet another son, Toto Abuo, threw a rock at the hawk, causing it to drop Anansi. Just before Anansi crashed into the hard ground, the youngest son, Da Yi Ya, threw himself on the ground to cushion his father's fall.

Anansi had always been proud of his six sons, but their recent actions in twice saving his life pleased him immensely, and so he began thinking

of an appropriate reward for their deeds. One day, while walking through the jungle, Anansi came upon a beautiful shiny light. He could tell it was no ordinary light, such as that of a campfire, so he thought it would be a wonderful present to give one of his sons, but was unable to decide which son should receive it. To get help, Anansi called out to the sky god, Nyame.

Nyame held the beautiful light while the sons gathered around their father. When the sons saw this light, they began shouting and pushing against each other, fighting over who would receive such a wonderful present. Soon the shouting turned into a fight. Nyame, in disgust, silenced the arguing brothers. He told them that before this "beautiful" light was found, they had lived together peacefully. And so saying, Nyame threw the light up into the sky so high that it remains there to this day.

Winter transitions

You might think of January and February as transition months for seasonal constellations. During these months, constellations representative of three of the four seasons are visible throughout the continental United States. at sunset. Fall is represented by Pegasus, which is now flying downward toward the western horizon, and Andromeda the Princess, which trails directly behind Pegasus. Glancing toward the southern horizon, you can see winter constellations such as the familiar rectangular pattern of Orion. Toward the eastern horizon, look for the stars of Leo the Lion, which for hundreds of years have marked the onset of spring.

Visible evening planets are also in a state of transition as the last of the evening planets slowly slides down away from our view during January and early February. Saturn may be found setting closer and closer to the time of sunset and appearing lower over the southwestern horizon within the boundaries of the Aquarius.

Evening planets

Saturn: Sets earlier and earlier over the southwestern horizon near sunset; and by early February is gone from our view.

Moon phases

January

Last Quarter - January 4
New Moon - January 11
First Quarter - January 19
Full Moon - January 27

February

Last Quarter - February 3
New Moon - February 10
First Quarter - February 18
Full Moon - February 25

Bibliography

Hadley, E., and Hadley, T. (1983). *Legends of the Sun and Moon*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Corrections

In last month's column, a diagram depicts the path of the lunar eclipse. The description labeling the Moon's position "Moon leaves penumbra" should read "Moon leaves umbra."

The time table for the eclipse is listed as being in Eastern Standard Time, when in fact it is given in Central Standard Time.

Bob Riddle is the planetarium director for the Kansas City School District at Southwest Magnet Math & Science High School.

Simple Scientific Suggestions for Super Science Project Results

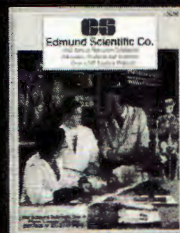


Looking for science project ideas and supplies... the ES catalog features over 4,000 hard-to-find science products. Our 128 page catalog features a complete 'hands-on' educational teaching aid line including individual components such as optics, solar cells, switches, fiber optics and more! We have been helping both students and teachers to successfully create science projects and fairs since 1942. Our catalog has been called the best **science idea book** available. We are anxious to serve you with reasonable prices and fast delivery.

Send us your school bids. You will be pleased with our prices and services.



Edmund Scientific Co.
Dept. 14A1, E725 Edscorp Bldg., Barrington, NJ 08007



TEL: 1-609-573-6886
FAX: 1-609-573-6295

CIRCLE NO. 8 ON READERS SERVICE CARD