

Written in the Stars: How Humans Pick Out Constellations

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Around the world, people have long gazed up at the stars and found meaning in them. The Renaissance polymath Nicolaus Copernicus once wrote, “Of all things visible, the highest is the heaven of the fixed stars.” Five centuries later, [Kalpana Chawla](#), the first Indian woman in space, said, “When you look at the stars and the galaxy, you feel that you are not just from one particular piece of land, but from the solar system.”

What we see in these connect-the-dot patterns is due largely to cultural influences, but humans are pattern-seeking creatures by nature. New research published in [Psychological Science](#) this year aimed to explain why certain constellations — such as the Big Dipper, the Pleiades and Orion — are recognized across cultures and across time. According to their findings, the similarities may have a lot to do with our shared visual systems.

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