The Teide Observatory in Tenerife, Spain, is more than 7,000 feet up on a mountain in the Canary Islands. Chile, Hawaii, and the Canary Islands are the world’s three best spots for stargazing.
The stars are a big part of many cultures’ ancient mythologies, or stories they told to help explain the natural and religious world. Certain American Indian tribes said stars were the children of the sun and moon. Ancient Turkish people thought stars were holes poked in the tent of the sky. The Chinese and Greeks said stars represented certain people and gods. Many of the constellations today are named after Greek or Roman gods. When you look up, one summertime constellation you may be able to find is called Hercules.

ACTIVITY 1: Written in the Stars

Check it out!
The Greeks named the lion constellation Leo after the Nemean lion Heracles killed.

Just looks like a bunch of stars to me.

I see it now!
Hercules is the Roman name for the Greek hero, Heracles. Read this excerpt about Heracles’ life. Then answer the questions.

Heracles once seemed to have the whole world going his way. He was the son of the most powerful god, Zeus, had a beautiful princess wife, and loving children. Then one night, he destroyed everything he loved, killed his wife and children, and found himself completely alone in this world.

The goddess Hera did not like Heracles. She tricked him into drinking poison that made him crazy. When he drank the poison, he thought his family had turned into wild animals, and he was afraid they would eat him. To protect himself, he fought them to the death. When he woke the next morning and realized what he had done, Heracles was afraid and heartbroken. He did not know that Hera had poisoned him, but he wanted somehow to make amends for his terrible deeds. He asked
his father, Zeus, for forgiveness.

“Heracles, you can never repair the horrible things you have done,” Zeus told his son. “I am very angry with you. But if you can prove you are strong, brave, and determined, I will forgive you.”

“I will do whatever I can to make this right, father,” Heracles said. “Tell me what I can do!”

Zeus told Heracles to ask King Eurystheus for ten tasks. If Heracles could complete them all, Zeus said he would forgive him. Heracles quickly ran to the city Tiryns, where Eurystheus waited for him. Eurystheus and the goddess Hera were good friends. Hera, who did not like Heracles, helped her friend plan ten of the most difficult tasks they could think of.

“Your first task,” King Eurystheus said, as he looked down on Heracles from high on his throne, “is to kill the Nemean lion.”

Heracles’ heart sank. The Nemean lion was a vicious creature who terrorized the area around Nemea. It had golden fur and claws sharper than...
swords. Its fur and skin were tougher than any humans’ weapons, so no human could hurt it by shooting it with an arrow or stabbing it with a sword.

“I’ll do my best,” Heracles said with a sigh.

Heracles gathered all his weapons and walked to Nemea to find that lion. Soon after he arrived, he found the beast. Frightened, he shot an arrow at it, but the arrow just bounced off the lion’s fur. The lion turned to look at Heracles. It exposed its sharp teeth in a frightening snarl, warning Heracles to stay away, and padded back to its cave.

Heracles watched the lion walk away, and realized the cave had two entrances. While the lion went into one, Heracles snuck into the other, holding a thick club in his hands. He snuck up on the lion and quickly banged the beast on the head with his club. The lion staggered around its cave, stunned by the club’s blows. Heracles leapt on its back, grabbed its neck, and strangled it. The Nemean lion fell down, dead. Triumphant Heracles had slain the Nemean lion. But his journey had only just begun.
List six events in this story, in order.

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2. ________________________________________________________________
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3. ________________________________________________________________
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4. ________________________________________________________________
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5. ________________________________________________________________
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6. ________________________________________________________________
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Think you’ve got a bunch of chores to do? Here are a few other things on Hercules’ “To Do List”:

- ✔ Kill the nine-headed Hydra, a mythical water monster.
- ✔ Capture Cerberus, the multi-headed mythical dog monster.
- ✔ Clean out the stables of Augeus in one day (3,000 cattle lived there and it hadn’t been cleaned in 30 years)!
What is the main theme of this first paragraph?

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In the second paragraph, how does the theme change from the first paragraph’s main theme? What is the new theme?

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How does Heracles feel in the beginning of the story?

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How does he feel at the end of the story?  
What events changed his feelings?

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How does Zeus feel about Heracles in this story? How do you think Zeus feels about his son at the end of the story?

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How do you think Hera will feel when she finds out Heracles killed the lion? Why?

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Today, lions only live in Africa and a small part of India, but long ago they roamed Ancient Greece!
Rewrite the events in this story from the point of view of the Nemean Lion.

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How does writing the events from the lion’s point of view change your feelings about Heracles’ actions?

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