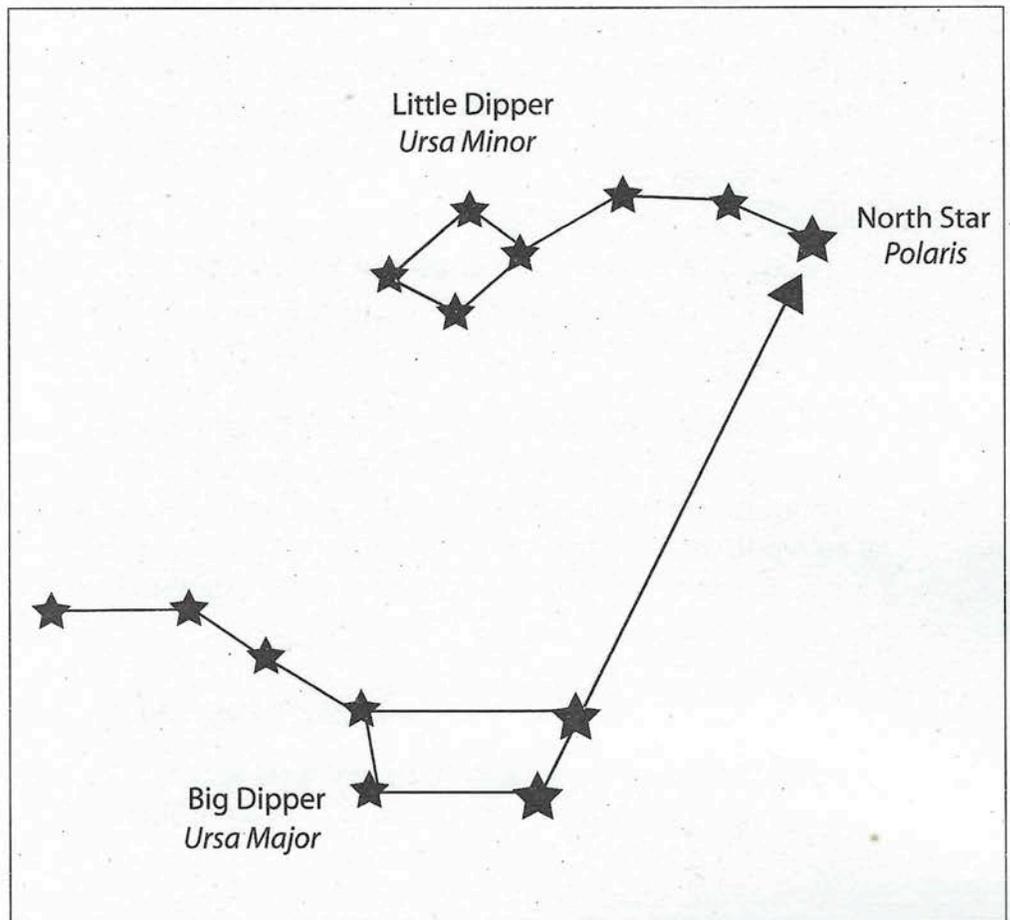


# How the Stars Show Where We Are

For thousands of years, explorers have used the stars to guide their travels. One star is especially helpful when a person has no map—the North Star. Along with the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper formations, the North Star is the most common star used for travel or navigation.

The North Star shows the direction of “true north.” When facing the North Star, our bodies are turned directly toward the North Pole. This is why the North Star was given the Latin name *Polaris*. Before the U.S. Civil War, those escaping slavery used the North Star to guide their journey to freedom.

The Little Dipper is known as *Ursa Minor*, which means “Little Bear” in Latin. The Little Dipper has seven stars that form the shape of a ladle. The handle of the Little Dipper begins at the North Star—the brightest of the seven stars. Notice how the “scoop” of the ladle points away from the North Star.



The Big Dipper is officially called *Ursa Major*, which means “Big Bear” in Latin. The Big Dipper also has seven stars, is ladle-shaped, and is much bigger than the Little Dipper. Notice how the “handle” on the Big Dipper bends differently from the Little Dipper’s handle.

Finding the Big Dipper in a clear night sky is easy due to its large size and distinct shape. Depending upon the time of the year, this formation of stars may be tipped in different directions.



## Did You Know?

The state flag of Alaska pictures the Big Dipper.



(continued)