

“Gemini: The Twins”

Background Information

Astronomy is the study of stars, planets, and other objects in space. People have been studying the sky for thousands of years! Ancient civilizations tracked the stars in the sky to make calendars and predictions about the future.

In Egypt, the stars were used to determine the annual flooding of the Nile River. When the brightest star rose before the sun, the Egyptians knew the flood was coming. This day was marked as “1” on their calendar. Their calendar was very similar to our modern one. They had 365 days in a year: 12 months, with 30 days in each month, plus five extra days of feasting in the year. Egyptian temples and pyramids were positioned in relation to the stars. They would use a tool called “merhket,” a long slab of wood with a hole at one end. The astronomers would angle the tool until they could see their target star through the hole. They would indicate this spot on the ground. This was the beginning of the foundation for a new temple.

The Mayan culture also studied the stars. Constellations were part of the Mayans’ everyday life. Like the Egyptians, the Mayans built their temples around the sun and other stars. This helped them track seasons. By knowing what season would be coming soon, they could plant and harvest their crops. The ancient Mayans even tracked planets through the sky. They made predictions of where the planets would be at other times. Most of the predictions were accurate, but some of them were off. The Mayan calendar predicted the end of the world in 2012.

Our sun is also a star. The reason it’s so bright, unlike the other stars, is because the sun is our closest star. If other stars were closer to Earth, they would look about the same. Some would be even bigger and hotter!

Astrology is a belief that the stars and planets affect human lives. Gemini is the sign astrologers give to a person who is born while the sun is in Gemini—May 22nd to June 21st. Astrology is a pseudoscience. It is based on some knowledge of astronomy combined with beliefs, not facts.

Note: *Astrology* comes from the Greek root *astron*, which means “star,” and the suffix *-ology*, which means “study of.” The actual science of the celestial bodies is astronomy, which also includes the Greek word for “star” but with a suffix that means “arranging.”