

November 2012 *School Days & American Ways* Lesson Plan Supplement

Pourquoi Tale #1: How the Milky Way Came to Be

Long ago when the world was young, there were not many stars in the sky.

In those days the people depended on corn for their food. Dried corn could be made into corn meal by placing it inside a large hollowed stump and pounding it with a long wooden pestle. The cornmeal was stored in large baskets. During the winter, the ground meal could be made into bread and mush.



One morning an older man and his wife went to their storage basket for some cornmeal. They discovered that someone or something had gotten into the cornmeal during the night. This upset them very much for no one in a Cherokee village stole from someone else.

Then they noticed that the cornmeal was scattered over the ground. In the middle of the spilt meal were giant dog prints. These dog prints were so large that the elderly couple knew this was no ordinary dog.

They immediately alerted the people of the village. It was decided that this must be a spirit dog from another world. The people did not want the spirit dog coming to their village. They decided to get rid of the dog by frightening it so badly it would never return. They gathered their drums and turtle shell rattles and later that night they hid around the area where the cornmeal was kept.

Late into the night they heard a whirring sound like many bird wings. They looked up to see the form of a giant dog swooping down from the sky. It landed near the basket and then began to eat great mouthfuls of cornmeal.

Suddenly the people jumped up shouting and beating and shaking their noise makers. The noise was so loud it sounded like thunder. The giant dog turned and began to run down the path. The people chased after him making the loudest noises they could. It ran to the top of a hill and leaped into the sky, the cornmeal spilling out the sides of its mouth.

The giant dog ran across the black night sky until it disappeared from sight. But the cornmeal that had spilled from its mouth made a path way across the sky. Each grain of cornmeal became a star.

The Cherokees call that pattern of stars, *gi li' ut sun stan un' yi* (gil-LEE-oot-soon stan-UNH-yee), "the place where the dog ran."

And that is how the Milky Way came to be.