

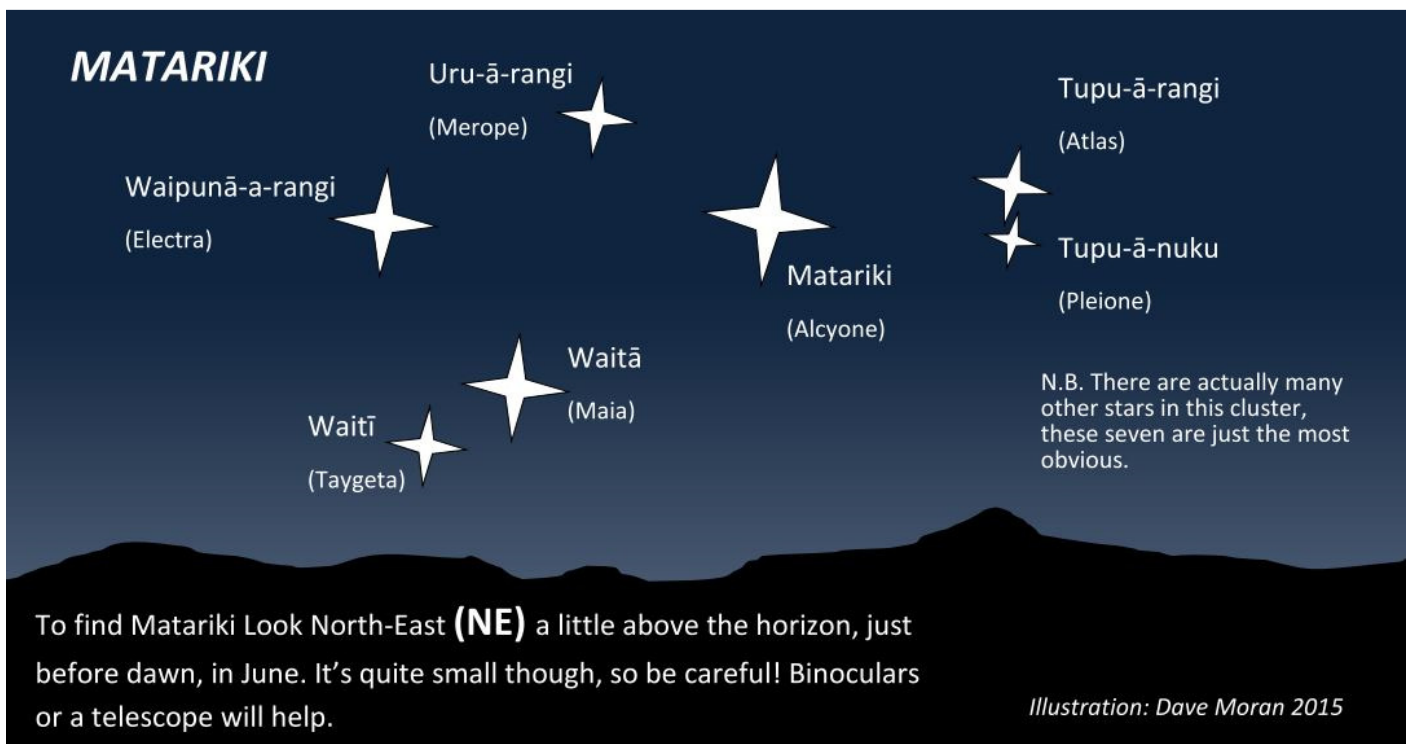
Matariki – Māori New-Year. Level 3 Comprehension activity. Name _____

In Māori tradition, the stars were used as a way to navigate the seas around New Zealand and to figure out the turn of the seasons. Sometime around late May or early June as the star cluster known as 'Matariki' is first seen. This was the start of the New Year for some Māori. Some Iwi such as Whanganui or Ngai Tāhu actually use the star Rigel, or 'Puanga' as a sign of the new-year, but they are both visible at around the same time of year. Matariki was a time to remember and honour those who had died during the last year. It wasn't all sad though, because the harvests of vegetables, fish and birds had all been safely stored away for winter, it was time to celebrate!

Māori Iwi around New Zealand would celebrate Matariki each in their own style. Sometimes it was simply a meal prepared in a hangi (an underground roast) but it also could involve singing, dancing, flying kites, and story-telling. A lovely way to celebrate Matariki these days is to plant kumara or fruit trees for the coming seasons. Or, you could make and fly your own Matariki kite (Manu tukutuku).



Some years ago Matariki was becoming forgotten as western culture and time keeping took over. More recently since about the year 2000, people have brought back Matariki to remember the ancient ways and to encourage everyone to celebrate a special New Zealand anniversary. Schools have a major part to play in bringing back Matariki – by learning about our past and understanding why things happened we can make our culture richer and more interesting!



The Matariki cluster is only visible from New Zealand at certain times during the winter months. In the Northern hemisphere the cluster is known as the **Pleiades** or 'seven sisters', although it appears the other way up from their perspective. The Pleiades were named after a series of ancient Greek myths about Atlas, his wife Pleione and their daughters (some of whom are named in the illustration above). The Pleiades are just one small part of the 'Taurus' constellation. Really, there are hundreds of stars in the group, although most are only visible using a telescope. The Matariki/Pleiades stars are around 425 light years away. The light we see now from them has been travelling since the late 16th century - roughly fifty years before Abel Tasman first sighted Aotearoa (in 1642) – which he soon re-named 'New Zealand' (cheeky old Abel).

Dave Moran 2015

Matariki – Māori New-Year. - Comprehension: (you are allowed to re-read the story)

1. What is the traditional reason for celebrating Matariki?

2. What is the Greek name for the Matariki star cluster?

3. What direction would I have to look to find Matariki?

4. Why do you think the stars were called ‘the seven sisters’ by some people?

5. Matariki is so big, it stretches right across the night sky: True / False

6. How long does it take for light to get from the Matariki stars to Earth?

7. Inference: What could the word ‘**iwi**’ mean? (look it up if you get stuck)

8. List some of the ways Māori people would have celebrated Matariki:

9. What kind of equipment might help you to see the Matariki stars?

10. Higher level thinking: On another piece of paper, or in your literacy book, design a Matariki kite (Manu tukutuku) – what shape would fly?

– How could you decorate it? (If you have an especially awesome teacher, you might even be able to try making one!)



Read more on the Te Ara website:

<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/matariki-maori-new-year>

Know more: Matariki literally means the ‘eyes of god’ (mata [ariki](#)) or ‘little eyes’ (mata riki). According to myth, when Ranginui, the sky father, and Papatūānuku, the earth mother, were separated by their children, the god of the winds, Tāwhirimātea, became so angry that he tore out his eyes and threw them into the heavens.

Paul Meredith. 'Matariki – Māori New Year', *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 29-Apr-15

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