

Matariki

A Maori Traditional Tale

MATARIKI

Manawa maiea te putanga o Matariki

Manawa maiea te ariki o te Rangi

Manawa maiea te Matai o te tau

Hail the rise of Matariki

Hail lord of the sky

Hail the New Year



Astronomy, the study of the cosmos, is an endeavour that unites all peoples throughout the world. Since early times mankind has looked into the heavens seeking knowledge, understanding and inspiration. The many celestial objects above the earth were viewed as Gods, as ancestors and as supernatural beings, their stories embroidered into the tapestry of the night sky.

The pre-dawn rising of Matariki, commonly known as Pleiades or the Seven Sisters, in the midwinter month of June in the Southern Hemisphere has been long honoured as a time togetherness, unity and goodwill and it also heralds the Maori New Year. This group of stars is significant all over the world and has particular meaning in Maori tradition as the Maori year began with the rising of Matariki. The clarity of the stars would predict the bounty of the year and it was now the time when the *kumera* (sweet potato) could be planted. The days would begin to grow longer and the weather would become warmer.

In the kindergarten this midwinter festival is often celebrated with the telling of one or another of the Maori myths. This is a favourite of mine:

There was once a mother fish, who said to her little fishes:

“Now listen carefully, dear children, be sure you keep close to the rocks. Do not venture out into the open sea. Today is the day that Tataraimaka goes fishing.”

Tataraimaka was a giant who fished with an enormous black net. His black net made magic and had been woven from flax that grew near Spirits Bay. On this day however, the sea was smooth, the sun at its brightest. Rainbow colours danced about the little fishes as they played their games. They were having so much fun they quite forgot their mother’s words and swam out into the open sea.

All at once disaster struck and the big black net of Tataraimaka hit the water and all seven fish were caught. They cried, making the sea salty with their tears. Take, the God of the Forest, heard their cries and felt sorry for them. He took away Tataraimaka’s net and hauled it high into the heavens. There the seven little fish were turned into stars. You can see them right now in the heavens above the horizon. Six of the stars have names – Toheti, Toheta, Tupu a Rangi, Tupuanuku, Ururangi and Waipuna a Rangi.

But one star remains nameless. It has been left for all the children of the world.

Just before going to bed you may put your name on this star and in this way you are among friends when you sleep.

This festival ends with a midwinter bonfire and the cooking of *kumera* on the fire!

This story was shared by Kathy McFarlane, kindergarten teacher and representative member from New Zealand in the Council of IASWECE