Get Astronomical with an Indoor Star Show!

Who doesn't like to lay out and stargaze? While you're stretched out on the grass, take the opportunity to introduce your young scientist to the science of the stars. Searching for constellations in the night sky helps kids learn to pay attention to details, and stimulates the imagination. With an indoor star show, your child doesn't have to wait for a cloudless night; she can watch the stars anytime she likes.

What You Need:

- Black construction paper
- Items to poke holes with, like pins, nails, or pencil
- Tape
- Flashlight
- Book of constellations, or website on constellations
- Copy of popular constellations
- Calendar or chart that tells the best times to view the specific stars (optional)

What You Do:

1. Read the constellation book with your child. Look at the pictures together and explain that people used to make shapes and pictures out of clusters of stars. Be sure to discuss the "big ones" like the Big Dipper, the Little Dipper, Orion, and Andromeda.
2. Go outside on a clear night with your child for a star gazing session. It might be a good idea to check the weather the night before to ensure clear skies. If you can, lay out a blanket on the grass so you don't crane your necks looking up! Encourage your child to "connect the dots" and point out the patterns and images she sees. Then, see who can find the constellations you read about in the book and point them out to each other!
3. Afterward, have your child pick her favorite constellation, and then make a copy of the pattern of the stars. Pictures can easily be found online, or in books.
4. Place the copy of the constellation formation on the black construction paper. Show your child how to use a pin to poke holes where the stars are illustrated. Be sure she pokes the holes completely through both papers. Tell her to be careful to avoid poking herself!
5. Turn out the lights and hand your child the flashlight! Invite her to shine it onto the construction paper, so it casts a shadow across the wall or ceiling. You'll get an indoor star show, even on a cloudy night!

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