

Make a Bedroom Planetarium!

If you're lucky enough to live near a museum or a university with a planetarium, you'll definitely want to take your child for a visit to explore outer space with him. But you don't need to pay the price of admission for this delightful constellation craft...you'll just need an old round oatmeal container, a flashlight, and a few other common materials. Help your first grader learn to recognize constellations with this fun and easy activity. Then, on the next clear night, take a walk and see if he can find them in the sky!

What You Need:

- Round cardboard oatmeal container with plastic lid, clean and dry.
- Plain flashlight
- Black paper
- Tape
- White crayon
- Constellation book
- Push Pin
- Pencil
- Construction paper, gold stars, and clear contact paper



What You Do:

1. Start by decorating your Starfinder: Have your child glue or tape sheets of construction paper around the outside of the container, and decorate it with as many of gold stars as he would like (you might even encourage him to mark out a few constellations right on the container).
2. When he's finished, help him to cover the whole design with clear contact paper (later, you'll be pulling tape on and off, and the contact paper will protect the design).
3. Now help your child cut a hole in the plastic lid with scissors or an X-acto knife, so that the flashlight can fit through.
4. Tape the lid around the edge so that the flashlight is secure.
5. Cut the round cardboard bottom out of the oatmeal can. Now use it to mark several circles on your black paper. Your circles should be larger than the original circle being used as a template. Trace a circle that is about $\frac{1}{2}$ " wider (all the way around) than the original circle cut from the oatmeal container.
6. Look up some key constellations in a science book (constellations like the Big Dipper, Little Dipper, Draco, Andromeda, and Orion or you can surf the internet to find pictures of constellations). You can make copies or print these templates out and then have your child trace them onto white paper. Cut around them to fit the inner circle of your Starfinder, and glue them onto one of the black circles you and your child cut out. Then take a thumbtack and lightly poke a hole where every star in that constellation appears. Help your child do this several times on several different circles.
7. Now put your whole starfinder together. Tape one black constellation circles to the end of your starfinder, and then pop the plastic lid onto the top, with the flashlight inside, facing toward the constellation end of the Starfinder. Each time your child wants to look at a new constellation, you can replace the constellation circle on the Starfinder with a different one.
8. Turn all the lights off in your child's room, turn on the flashlight in the starfinder, and see what you can see! Be prepared for oohs and aaahs. With this activity, you and your child can bring the giant night sky into your very own home and do some star gazing from the comfort of your beds!

