Raisins come from grapes. Grapes have been grown in California for the past two hundred years. During the 1800s, men came looking for gold. Some of them ended up growing grapes instead.

Today most of the grapes we eat come from California. About 550 farmers grow grapes there. The warm, dry California weather helps grow sweet fruit.

Americans eat an average of about eight pounds of grapes a year. Most of them come from California. Many other countries enjoy grapes grown in the United States. People in Canada, Mexico, China, Taiwan, and Central American countries eat grapes grown in our country.

People in ancient China drank juice made from grapes mixed with snakes and frogs to feel better when they were sick. We can leave out the snakes and frogs! Grapes are good for us by themselves.
“Timber!” I heard Dad yell. I ran to my bedroom window and saw one of the trees in our backyard come crashing to the earth. It just missed hitting the garage.

Mom and I rushed outside. “What in the world are you doing now?” Mom asked.

Dad set down his axe and said, “I’m making a story pole!” Mom rolled her eyes.

Last summer we visited a place in Olympia, Washington, that had a story pole. Chief Shelton had carved animal figures into a cedar tree. The pole tells a story about Chief Shelton’s Snohomish culture. He worked on it for five years. When he died in 1938, other people in the tribe finished the carvings. “Can I help?” I asked.

“Sure, Billy!” Dad said.

“So, what kind of animal should we put at the top of our pole?” I asked.

“How about a mule?” Mom suggested.
Patterns in the Sky

Constellations

Long ago, people looked up at the night sky and noticed patterns in the stars. They gave these patterns names, such as *Libra* and *Pisces*. Today we call these patterns *constellations*.

The Big Dipper

The Big Dipper is a star pattern that has inspired many stories. The seven stars of the Big Dipper are part of a constellation called *Ursa Major*. It is one of the most recognizable patterns in the sky. People have told stories about this group of stars for hundreds of years.

Other Names

Many of the names of the constellations come from old stories. *Hercules* is named after a brave hero from a Greek story. *Leo* is named for a lion with skin so strong that no weapon could harm it.

Where to Find Them

One reason that constellations were given names was for people to remember them. This helped people long ago understand how the movement of the Earth was connected to seasons.
Dad always wanted to see beluga whales in the wild. I wasn’t very excited about going to Canada for our vacation. “Sam, I think you might enjoy learning about the songbirds of the sea,” Dad said.

“Songbirds? I thought whales lived in the water,” I said.

“Many people call beluga whales songbirds because they are always making beautiful sounds,” Dad said. “That’s how they communicate and find food.”

So, we traveled by boat on the Churchill River in late July. This river has the most beluga whales in the world.

After an hour on the boat, we spotted a pod of twenty belugas. It was incredible! They were huge. Everyone was really excited. This was more fun than I thought it would be. In fact, I would say it was the most fun I ever had on vacation! I guess learning can be fun.
Winter Blooms

Have you ever wanted to grow plants in the winter? During winter months, the Earth tilts away from sun, so there is less sunlight and less heat. Plants need sunlight in order to grow.

But wait! You can still grow plants inside, even during the coldest days of the year. Place your plants in front of a window that faces south or west because they will get more direct light. You can tell if a plant is not getting enough light by how it grows. If a plant leans toward a window, it wants more sunlight!

Plants are like people. They also need water. If the leaves on your plants begin to shrivel up or fall off, it is because you aren’t giving them enough water. But be careful, you can also over water plants.

If you learn the secrets to growing indoor plants, you too can have winter blooms.