

SEMESTER SUN WATCH

Ancient peoples were much more familiar with the patterns of the sun and stars than are we. They were much more aware of how directly dependent they were on the sunlight and rains that they studied and noted the patterns very carefully as Stonehenge and Chaco Cañon exhibit. The purpose of this project is to foster such an awareness of the sun's motion in you and to help you touch, albeit lightly, the minds of our ancestors. You will observe its apparent motion from north to south as we pass through the autumnal equinox and continue to the winter solstice. This should help you get more of a sense of being on a planet that is in motion instead of sitting still below the "dome of the sky." It is also to encourage you to make astronomical observations a natural part of your life. Until very recently, it was a matter of survival to know and observe the motions of celestial objects. Remember to see the sky and not just a class assignment... enjoy the sunsets!

*You must observe every sunset from the **EXACT** same position!*

PREPARATIONS: Choose a place from which you will observe the sunrise or sunset for the rest of the semester. You will need to see a large stretch of the eastern horizon (if you enjoy sunrise) or western horizon (if you're more inclined to appreciate the sunset)¹. It is preferable to have a rather distant horizon instead of a nearby building, thus a place outside or a high window will be best. Make sure you can see the horizon to at least 30° south of due east/west. **During the day, take a photo of your horizon and print it!** Mark the position of due east or due west (use a compass!). You will then mark the positions of sunrise or sunset on this diagram throughout the semester. **If You take individual photos, copy each setting position to a single diagram ... get enough context in your photos to do this!!**

OBSERVATIONS: At least once every other week observe the sunrise or sunset from your chosen location.



Note that the hours of daylight decrease from now until December 21 at 10:03 PM EST, the December solstice. For each observation of the sunset or sunrise, **draw the position of the Sun accurately on the printout of your photograph and note above it:**

- 1) Date
- 2) Time of day (Eastern Standard Time or Eastern Daylight Time. Most of the US will "Fall Back" one hour at 2AM on Sunday, November 1 ... **NOTE THE TIME CHANGE**)
- 3) Sky conditions
- 4) Position of the Sun as it crosses the horizon.
See the example on the back of this page.

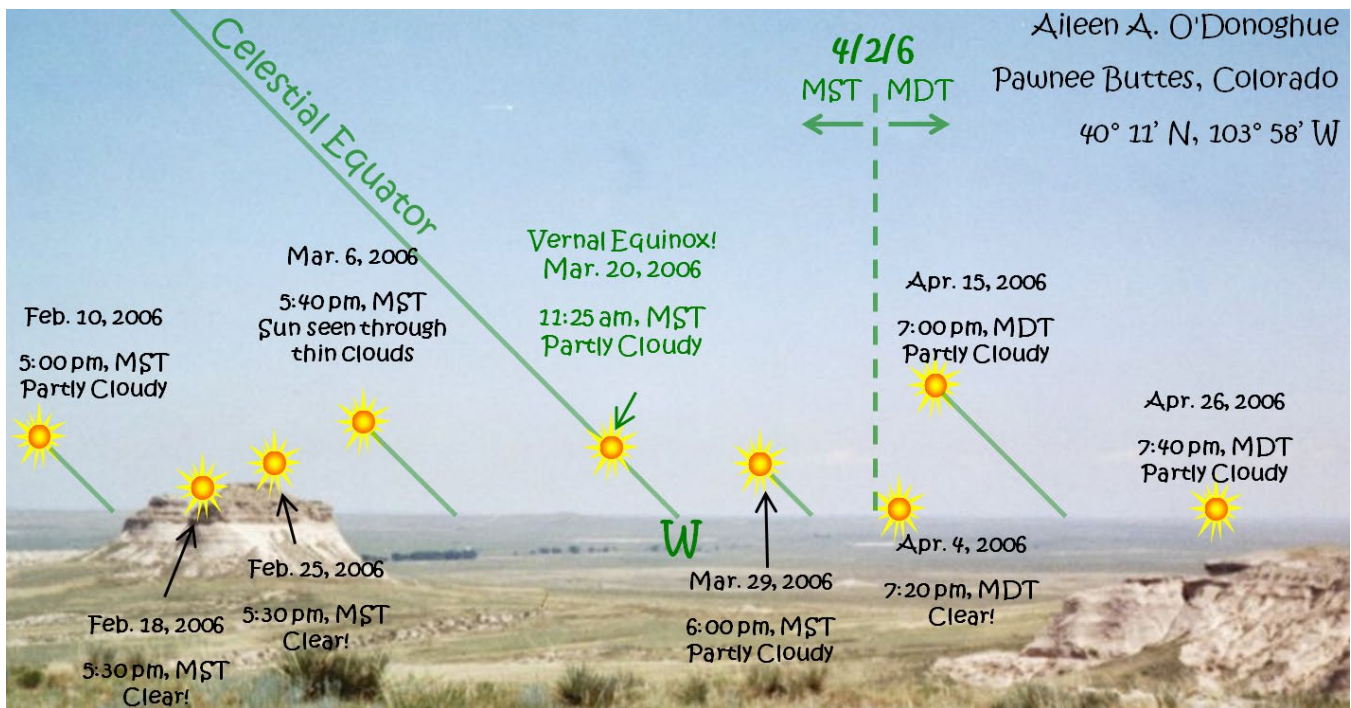
YOU MUST HAVE A MINIMUM OF FIVE OBSERVATIONS BETWEEN SEPTEMBER 11 AND DECEMBER 3.

Start This Week!

SUMMARY & ANALYSIS: At the end of the semester, write a paragraph describing 1) where, 2) how (finding west, finding same observing spot) and with whom you observed the sunsets, 3) what you saw, and 4) how they fit the theory of the Earth's motion you have learned in class. How easy would it be for you to figure out the motions of the Earth from your data? (It too humanity millennia ...)

**2 OBSERVATIONS DUE ON WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 14, 2026 AND
3 MORE OBSERVATIONS (PLUS WRITE UP) DUE BY FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2026**

¹ The best place for this is in on the path along the practice fields parallel to Park Street, between trees on opposite side.



Sun Watch Example: The position of sunset shown on different dates on the same diagram as the sun moved north through the spring of 2006. Note that the date of the change from standard to daylight saving time is shown along with the position of the observer (place and latitude and longitude). Also, **for each observation, the date, time and sky conditions are shown along with a line showing where the Sun will intercept the horizon.**

