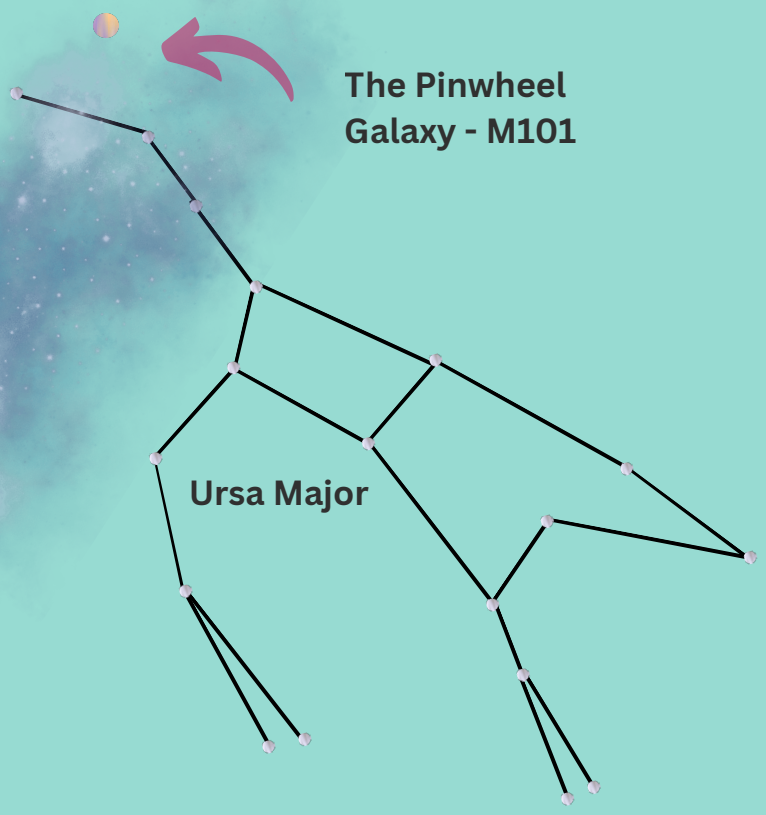
THE PINWHEEL GALAXY - M101

Masses of stars eventually form into what we know as Galaxies - enormous groups of stars, dust, gas clouds and other material, rotating around a common centre of gravity. There are many different types of galaxy - M101 is a spiral galaxy. It is face on to us and has several main arms that tightly wind into the middle. In fact the Milky Way would look very similar to this if seen from the outside.

As you look at it you'll see that the arms themselves are a blue colour with the centre orange yellow. It is known that the further out from the centre, the newer the stars whilst the middle contains much older ones. This corresponds to the colours in that newer stars are white/blue whilst much older stars are yellow/red.



The galaxy is 252,000 light years across and has an estimated 1 Trillion stars. It is also extremely far away - 21 million light years in the direction of Ursa Major, the Great Bear. It was discovered in 1781 by Pierre Méchain. It is also full of many new star forming regions (pink red nebulae) where active birth is happening. It also has been the location of several Supernovae in recent years.

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