

# Passages

## Reading Level 12



**Title:** Contact

**Author:** Carl Sagan

### Sample From The Book

For all the tenure of humans on Earth, the night sky had been a companion and an inspiration. The stars were comforting. They seemed to demonstrate that the heavens were created for the benefit and instruction of humans. This pathetic conceit became the conventional wisdom worldwide. No culture was free of it. Some people found in the skies an aperture to the religious sensibility. Many were awestruck and humbled by the glory and scale of the cosmos. Others were stimulated to the most extravagant flights of fancy.

At the very moment that humans discovered the scale of the universe and found that their most unconstrained fancies were in fact dwarfed by the true dimensions of even the Milky Way Galaxy, they took steps that ensured that their descendants would be unable to see the stars at all. For a million years humans had grown up with a person daily knowledge of the vault of heaven. In the last few thousand years they began building and emigrating to the cities. In the last few decades, a major fraction of the human population had abandoned a rustic way of life. As technology developed and the cities were polluted, the nights became starless. New generations grew to maturity wholly ignorant of the sky that had transfixed their ancestors and that had stimulated the modern age of science and technology. Without even noticing, just as astronomy entered a golden age most people cut themselves off from the sky, a cosmic isolationism that ended only with the dawn of space exploration



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