



***The Wild Dark: Finding the Night Sky in the Age of Light***  
by Craig Childs

Discussion Questions

1. Childs uses poetic language as he describes the night sky, the stars, and their effect on him personally. He describes the color of the night sky as sapphires on silk. He says that we can look at the sky and see God. He says that the sky seems to sing him calm. How would you describe the night sky and your reaction to it?
2. Childs says that 80 percent of people on Earth can't see the Milky Way (p. 94). Are you among the majority who cannot see it where you live? Were you able to see it in the past when there were fewer lights? Do you have a sense of loss because you can't see it?
3. Were you surprised to learn that finding constellations is easiest at about a Bortle 5 sky (p. 150)? Does this make sense to you?
4. A central idea in the book is expressed early on when a Las Vegas security guard from Ethiopia asks, "I wonder what it does to us not to see the night sky" (p. 17)? Do you think being able to see the night sky is important to us as humans? Why or why not?
5. Childs several times states that he believes studying the sky was essential to humans' development. He says that if we had not been able to see the multitudes of stars, we might still be doing math on our fingers and thinking the world is flat (p. 40). He notes that our luck in having a fixed North Star allowed our ancestors to develop navigation (p. 76). He seems to suggest that without a night sky full of stars, we might not have developed astronomy or space travel (p. 151). Do you think the study of stars is fundamental to development and progress as a human species, or would you give other technologies or sciences a central role?



6. Arthur C. Clark wrote, “Two possibilities exist: either we are alone in the universe or we are not. Both are equally terrifying” (p. 138). Do you think we are alone or not? Do you find both possibilities terrifying?
7. Childs discusses many deleterious effects of too much artificial light. For humans, he cites links with physical maladies such as cancer, macular degeneration, and sleep cycles (p. 20-21). He points out that artificial light can be deadly for birds and insects (p. 59) and that studies that seem to show that we may feel safer with artificial light at night, but that the light might actually increase our peril (p. 38, 173). How do you feel about lighting the night or returning to a darker world?
8. Childs cites lighting engineers who think we might have reached peak lighting. They believe that better lighting design and increased appreciation for dark nights are helping us to reduce the light we shine on the world. What do you think? Have you experienced that trend?



### Activity Ideas

1. Check out a backyard astronomy book from your local library or purchase a night sky chart. Find the North Star. Observe the phases of the moon. Find the planet Venus. Find the Big Dipper. And then find other features.
2. There are roughly 150 Dark Sky Places in the US. Is there one near you? Visit one, lie on the ground, look at the sky.
3. There are around thirty meteor showers visible on Earth each year. Go away from city lights and look.
4. Many planetariums and hobby sky watchers sponsor star parties. Find one and attend.
5. If you already know about and love astronomy, join the citizen science crew at NASA.  
<https://science.nasa.gov/citizen-science/>