

IAF SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
Calling Planet Earth - Space Outreach to the General Public (6)

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THE SCIENCE OF INSPIRING: HOW TO FOSTER A LOVE FOR SPACE

Abstract

In the third century BCE, Eratosthenes calculated the circumference of the Earth using only the difference in length of shadows cast at noon in Alexandria and Syene, and the distance between those two ancient cities. As important as this information was to the development of physical sciences, impressive is the fact that it's still talked about - more than 2000 years later. On September 28, 1980, Carl Sagan presented his first episode of the television series *Cosmos: A Personal Voyage*, in which he described Eratosthenes' achievement. His keenness to impart his love of space science to his viewers was palpable. And he did. One of the people whose attention he caught was Neil deGrasse Tyson, now a renowned science communicator himself. A discovery made two millennia ago, as remarkable as it was, would have been lost to modern minds had it not been preserved and effectively communicated. Space bemuses and fascinates many. Before anyone is an astronomer, an astronaut, or any expert on space-related science, they are space enthusiasts. How does one become a space enthusiast? What role does popular culture play in kindling an interest of what lies beyond planet Earth? Is there a correlation between exposure to space-related content in popular culture and choices made at the educational level for post-secondary students? The precursor to knowledge is reflection. If popular culture can stimulate individuals to reflect on space, chances are they will learn more about it. This research will examine the influence of space in popular culture on university students' perception of space science. What are the attributes of content that students report has significant impact on their perception of space? Ultimately, this study aims to benefit our ability to effectively foster an interest for outer space through communication.