

Vocabulary



constellation a group of stars that seems to form a pattern in the sky

Ancient people found pictures in the sky and made up stories about them. Today, we use the constellations as a map of the night sky. Unlike planets, the stars in constellations do not change position in the sky compared with each other. So constellations help scientists describe where stars and planets can be seen. The constellations most easy to recognize are the *Big Dipper*, *Little Dipper*, *Orion*, and *Cassiopeia*.

light year a unit of distance equal to the distance light travels in one year

Light travels at a speed of 300,000 kilometers (186,000 miles) per second. Imagine how far light travels in a year at that speed! Our closest star, Proxima Centauri, is 4.5 light years away.

star an object in space that gives off its own heat and light

The stars we see look very small because they are far away. Some stars are many times bigger than our star, the Sun. The stars that make up a constellation are usually many light years apart.