

## **Whoa! Did I See What I Thought I Saw?**

Do you know what a double-take is? It's when you pass something by with a glance, and then your brain says, "Wait a minute," and you look again. It's like when you're walking down the hall at school and you pass an open classroom door. Did you see what you thought you saw? Was that teacher really standing on his head? You have to back up to be sure.

NASA's Space Technology 6 (ST6) project will flight test three experimental technologies. One of them is called the Autonomous Sciencecraft Experiment. Sciencecraft will observe things and decide if they're worth a double-take. If it notices a change in something it's been watching, Sciencecraft will send information back to Earth. It will only send the most interesting data back to our planet. This will save scientists a lot of time, because they won't have to slog through the boring stuff to get to the cool new data.

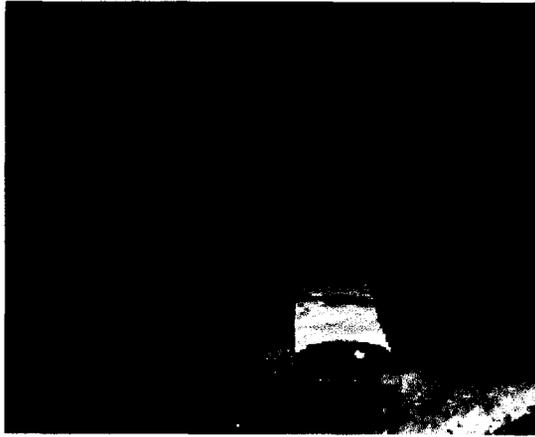
If you walked by a classroom and the teacher was talking about nouns and verbs, you'd probably keep going. But if he was on top of the desk, standing on his head and singing the "Croc Files" song, you'd probably stop to check it out.

ST6 is all about teaching computers to solve problems without human help. Most space missions need a ground crew to tell the faraway craft what to do. ST6 is testing new technologies that will let the spacecraft make their own choices. Scientists want new machines to choose what information to gather and what to send back to the ground.

The first part of the ST6 technology will be tested in space in March 2003.

Check out the ST6 Star Finder activity on The Space Place at <http://spaceplace.nasa.gov/st6starfinder/st6starfinder.htm>

*This article was written by Eric Elkins and provided by the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, California Institute of Technology, under a contract with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.*



*Autonomous spacecraft technology lets the spacecraft decide for itself what are the most interesting places and important scientific events to observe, then send only that information back to Earth.*