

ENGAGING SCIENTISTS IN OUTREACH

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According to a survey reported by the National Science Foundation only 49 percent of high school graduates and 73 percent of those with advanced degrees can correctly answer the question, "How long does it take for the Earth to go around the Sun?" Science literacy in the United States and elsewhere has reached very low levels. In spite of spectacular advances in science and engineering over the past few decades, the wonder and excitement of scientific discovery is not reaching students in the classroom. Scientists can play a critical role in outreach efforts at their home institutions and other organizations, both public and private. NASA has a very clear mission to advance young people's scientific knowledge and, at the same time, "to inspire the next generation of explorers...." Acknowledging that doing science is different from teaching science, outreach efforts support scientists who help convey the marvels of science to students, educators and the public. The scientific method raises fundamental questions that can engage students by establishing a baseline of inquiry. Planning and implementing experiments can tap into prior knowledge of students challenged with answering scientific questions. These are a few of the ways that the essential knowledge of scientists can be passed on to the next generation of scientists. Some of the specific roles of scientists can play in the outreach effort include classroom visits, public lectures, high school science curriculum development, media interviews, and web site content, to name only a few.