



Teens Discovering Science in the News: An Opportunity for Scientists to Communicate

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We have developed a program directed by teens and for teens to discuss current science and technology topics in the news. Modeled after the international Café Scientifique program for adults, we combine a social atmosphere with discussion of controversial topics to challenge teens to think about how science affects their lives. Our approach is for short story telling presentations during which the speaker identifies a single important idea and scientific principle to communicate. A good speaker will leave the audience with a dilemma or controversy to discuss, and with further opportunities to learn. A good speaker does not take him/herself too seriously and will work to fully engage the audience on the things that they can relate to. We integrate trivia quizzes at the beginning or the presenter questions the audience about assumptions they have about the topic. These techniques allow the presenter to gauge the knowledge level of the audience, while keeping them engaged and processing new information. We incorporate hands on learning from building model fuel cell cars, to analyzing the science in popular movies, to using Google Earth and remote sensing imagery to spy. Controversial topics such as geoengineering the climate, the role of nuclear energy and nuclear weapons, the future of hydrogen fuel cells/cars, carbon sequestration, and the nexus of water, climate and energy are often presented within a scientific, economic and social or political framework because science is only part of the solution.

What we have learned is that teens begin to see science everywhere in their lives. We commonly hear the youth say – I did not know that is what geoscientists did! They learn to appreciate and can put the science they learn in school within a more relevant context. They like the challenge of finding solutions, but turn off to presentations on topics that seem to have no good solutions and speakers who talk down to them. And they begin to better understand what science is and that scientists are interesting people.