A NEW SCIENCE CLUB

Extracurricular activities can sometimes be the most memorable experiences we offer our students. In addition to a good education, I want my students to have good memories of high school. Because doing science outside of the classroom can be rewarding for both the students and the teachers, I started looking for just the right approach to launch a new science club at Blue Valley North High School. The Astronomical Society of Kansas City (ASKC) provided me with an initial club activity that was "out of this world." After organizing a few interested students and taking care of the perfunctory activities, such as electing officers, we jumped right into the essence of a science club—science activities.

Astronomy is a real science which anyone can participate in. Amateur and professional alike can study in the same laboratory. Only twenty miles south of Stanley, in the Lewis-Young Park of Louisburg, Kansas, is the newly constructed Powell Observatory. An evening trip to the Powell Observatory was our first science club excursion. This facility houses the largest telescope in the region. It is a 29-inch f/4.5 Newtonian on a fork equatorial mount. The telescope is computer controlled, making it easy to find any object in the sky.

Mr. Larry Madison, of ASKC, and other club members greeted us when we arrived. The observatory has a small classroom with pictures of sky objects on the walls and the other essentials—chalkboard and restrooms. After an introductory presentation and preview of the objects we could expect to view the students were privileged to look through the large telescope. Other smaller telescopes were set up outside. On their first science club outing my students were able to get fantastic viewings of Jupiter and its moons, Saturn and its rings, the Andromeda Galaxy and another smaller neighboring galaxy. They saw several star clusters and nebulae, and other deep sky objects. Just as exciting to them was viewing a comet which was just discovered in August of this year.

With interest high we wasted no time in a follow-up science activity. Our next trip was planned for the world famous Kansas Cosmosphere and Space Center (KCSC), in Hutchinson, Kansas, also known as "Right Stuff Central." Emporia is about half way between the KCSC and our school, so we took a rest stop there and used the opportunity to visit the excellent geology and natural history museums on the campus of Emporia State University. They are both small, but you
should never pass them up when you are in the area, especially with students along. In fact, arrangements can be made for a fine presentation at the ESU planetarium.

When we arrived at the Cosmosphere and Space center, club members were ushered into the Omnimax Theater for a museum production projected onto their 44-foot wrap-around tilted dome. With their customized six-channel sound system there is a remarkable sense of "being there" for any presentation. Next in the tour was a planetarium presentation which included the current night sky arrangements and instructions on observing the comet currently in view. Club members also visited the Hall of Space. The newly renovated Kennedy Theater includes parts and pieces of a Mercury/Atlas capsule and other space paraphernalia. There is the world's largest space suit exhibit and "hands on" computerized scenarios that allow students to experience a lunar landing.

The Kansas Cosmosphere and Science Center planetarium produces several educational programs and discovery workshops, which are described in their 1987-88 School Brochure. Planetarium programs suitable for middle and high school students which will continue showing through May, 1988, include: Our Sky Tonight, Family of the Sun, The Moon After Apollo, To The Edge Of The Universe, and Are We Alone?

Needless to say, these excursions were the "right stuff" to get our science club started. Both of the trips were fee-based, but very affordable. A similar approach would surely be successful with your students.

Resources:

KANSAS COSMOSPHERE AND SPACE CENTER. Tel: 316-662-2305. Mr. Max Ary, Executive Director. 1100 North Plum, Hutchinson, Kansas 67501.

POWELL OBSERVATORY, c/o The Astronomical Society of Kansas City. P.O. Box 400, Blue Springs, MO 64015. Or, Larry Madison (ASKC president and Hickman Mills Junior High School teacher) at 816-356-8030.

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