

profile

Jennifer 'Jupiter Jen' Moorehead

"If it's not fun, we're not doing it"

is Jennifer Moorehead's motto. Specifically, it's her approach to science. It's also why, as founder of Science Explorers (www.scienceexplorers.com), a Lancaster County-based science "edutainment" presenter, she calls herself "Jupiter Jen." The organization gets kids and adults excited about science via school assemblies, after-school clubs, in-service days, family science nights, summer camps and more.

In your presentations you might make slime, ice cream, silly putty or a volcano. What's your most popular experiment?
Anything that blows up, turns color or sets off the smoke alarm.

Were you a science whiz in school?
I was not; it wasn't fun. I would like to apologize to my 10th-grade biology teacher, Mr. Hendricks, now. He tried to reach me, but I needed science to be less book work and more inquiry or hands-on. It's just not how they taught science.

Isn't science mostly math?
Students that do well in math usually do well in the sciences as well as music. Science Explorers works mostly on introducing children to the wonder of science, how things work, why they work. We're putting the wonder back in the world.

How'd you become "Jupiter Jen"?
I used to switch things up: If we were doing physics, I'd be "Jenergy"; dissections, I'd be "Jennifang"; launching a gazillion rockets, "Jupiter Jen" just stuck.

What's the difference between a Science Explorers after-school club meeting and a school assembly?

The school assembly is an awesome 50-minute program where I bring children on stage to volunteer and help with an assortment of experiments. The after-school clubs enable each child to participate and create their own experiment.

What's the craziest thing you've ever done in the name of science education?
Recently we developed a very cool air pressure experiment that uses a large trash can and a fog machine, and it makes huge smoke rings. Well, I learned that when you send them into the very excited audience of children, the fog machine will set off the smoke alarm, which is wired to the fire department. The school was grateful that there really weren't any flames and they got in a practice fire drill. I also learned that I need to do that experiment outside or completely edit it from the assembly.

What's the S.P.A.R.K. Foundation?
The nonprofit leg of Science Explorers. It was set up to enable all children [to have] the experience of hands-on learning regardless of socioeconomic status. This has become more important with the implementation of the science component on the PSSA tests that all of our fourth-grade public-school children will be taking this year.

If you could meet one great scientist of the past, who would it be and why?
Albert Einstein. I am fascinated that he was denied acceptance to the Zurich Polytechnic Institute because they thought he was "slow" and how he overcame the obstacles to achieve the level of success he had in the sciences. He followed his passion. I believe that's what we should all do.

— STEVE KENNEDY

