



All Science Teachers Should Go to Space Camp

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INSPIRE Scholarship Recipient Shares Her Experience

"This summer I went to space camp". Can you imagine the reaction of students when you greet them at the door wearing a NASA flight suit and have videos of toys in space playing when they sit down? What better way to grab their attention! As it turns out, it is also a great way to keep their attention. Being sent to Space Camp for Educators by The INSPIRE Project has given me valuable experiences and materials I use daily, a new energy in my lessons, and a fun factor in my classroom that goes through the roof nearly every day. I truly believe that every science teacher should go to Space Camp for Educators.

Last March one of the usual "opportunities for professional development" emails came to me. I opened it, planning to close it quickly, but something stopped me. Maybe it was the name, The INSPIRE Project, because I was surely in need of some inspiration. I had been trying to think of some new way to start the next year with a bang; to grab them the minute they came into the classroom. When I clicked the link and read about what you get to do at space camp, I started smiling immediately. "I have to do this!" I thought to myself. Well, one essay, two recommendations, and four months later, I was on a plane for Huntsville Alabama and SPACE CAMP!

I felt like a kid the whole time I was there. Not only did I get to dress up in (and keep) real NASA flight suits, but I met astronauts and test pilots, was given mountains of free stuff, built and fired rockets, constructed and flew balloons, made and burned up heat shields, trained for and completed two simulated shuttle missions (awesome!), was spun around along all axes, propelled backwards from great heights down a zip line and into the water. Did I mention being spun around along all axes, free stuff, and meeting astronauts? And please don't think that it is in any way like going to an amusement park. The whole time you are at space camp, you know it is the real thing. You can feel the living history all around you. There are rockets everywhere you turn: big ones, small ones, old ones, new ones, rockets that have been into space, and even the dreams of rockets yet to come. For it is in imagining that the true lesson of space flight can be found. How can we get there? What will we find? How will it change us? I brought all of this back to school with me in September and it has made all the difference.

For a teacher, one of the best things is being given lessons, activities, and materials for free! At Space Camp we attended two or three workshops a day learning about ways to cultivate in our students the different skill sets used by NASA. We didn't have to take notes; all the activities were included in a CD set given to us upon graduation at the end of the week. Fully differentiated, multimedia, and 100% hands-on, the activities given to us are a highly qualified teachers dream! My group was contained of elementary, middle school, and high school science teachers, right through AP Physics, and we were all delighted with the lessons and materials and were eager to bring it all back to the classroom and really start to have fun.



Many of the activities I brought back I use daily for team building and to increase students mental math skills (you know, math without a calculator!). Other activities I am incorporating into the lessons as I go. Using NASA videos to introduce a topic on acceleration, inertia, or momentum is a great way to both demonstrate large concepts, and to give real life applications to the work we do in class. I also apply the differentiated nature of the space program in my classroom. There are so many ways to be involved in the space program, and anyone can be a part of it, engineer or not.

Space Camp gave me much more than just a week away from home, and I am grateful to The INSPIRE Project for sending me. I have gained a renewed spirit of adventure, love for the space program, hope for the future, and new ideas and materials for the classroom. Being able to share with students the intrinsically positive point of view associated with space exploration is an excellent way to blend science, math, and engineering with citizenship, leadership, creativity, and the purely human ability to dream. Even high school juniors and seniors get a bit dreamy eyed when you design a lunar settlement and tell them they are just the right age and could well be on such a mission, if they so choose. Sharing my experiences at space camp with my students began creating the bond I have with each of them. They know that teacher is fun-loving, adventurous, and does really cool things during class. What student can resist that combination? None, as far as I can tell. And that is why all teachers should go to space camp. Just go to The INSPIRE Project website and apply! (www.TheINSPIREProject.org)

