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Grad Students Show That Anyone Can Be a Scientist

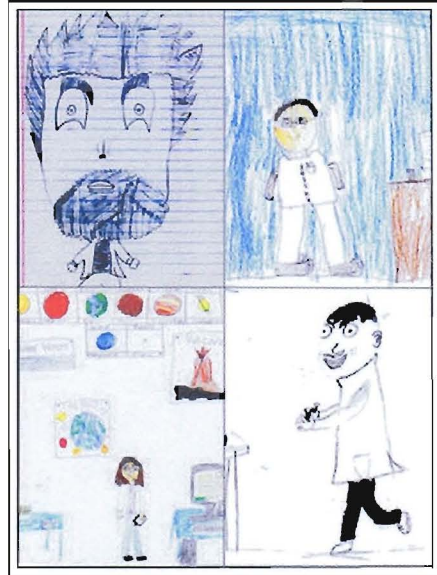
Three graduate students from Caltech's Tectonics Observatory recently visited a class of 33 sixth-graders at Pasadena Unified School District's Burbank Elementary to lead hands-on activities and teach about Earth science.

Before the visit, the teacher asked the sixth-graders to describe what a scientist does. Some responses:

- "Scientists look at things we wouldn't even know what to call."
- "Without scientists, the world would just be caves, forests, and oceans. The thing I would need is my TV. Plus I need my Internet. . . . So that's why it's great to have scientists."
- "A scientist studies and tries to help the world. If we didn't have any scientists, more of us might have been sick or dead from all the sickness. Scientists help us fight the diseases in the world."

The teacher also asked each of the students to draw a scientist (right). When the class members saw the three real scientists—graduate students Marion Thomas, Kristel Chanard (below, right), and Thomas Ader—they seemed very surprised.

"I was expecting old, white, bald guys," said one student. In the words of one of the Caltech graduate students: "One of the great goals of this outreach is to show the kids that anyone can be a scientist."



During their visit with the class, the grad students introduced the concept of mountain building and brought samples of ammonite—fossil remains of a sea creature—from the top of Mount Everest. They also discussed different types of volcanoes and why some are explosive while others, like those in Hawaii, are not.

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