

The ACC Imagination Foundation (A Right-Brain Enterprise)

A Proposal to Transform and Revitalize the Education Outreach Committee

Recently NASA has, reportedly, hired a PR firm to help improve its image with the public. Why is this necessary? Why has NASA had trouble keeping *we the people* excited about its work? Is it possible that in focusing on the technology of its mission we've neglected to make room for the wider diversity of human aspirations and interests? And when you think about it, is it best that the enterprise of leaving the planet (one way or another, that is the idea, right?) be the exclusive domain of civil servants, engineers and scientists? Shouldn't philosophers, dramatists, adventurers, daydreamers, mythmakers (Apollo, Saturn, Titan, Mercury?), fortune-seekers, free-thinkers, poets, con-artists, political scientists, utopians, crackpots, dystopians, musicians and gamers be equally involved in energizing this (at least virtual) migration? Isn't that how the West was "won"?

So here's the proposal. Let's use a bit of that ACC treasury to reach out to kids in the Valley, middle school and high school, and challenge them to challenge us with their unfettered creativity, sort of a right-brain challenge. Let's make it some kind of contest with scholarship money as the reward. Without trying to predispose or predefine the results, we might set up a general framework of categories to encourage, over time, intriguing submittals from kids of all kinds. As a way to mark out the the mental territory, the following kinds of activities might be elicited:

- Compose a string quartet celebrating the discovery of a new planet;
- Design a video game for inter-galactic warfare;
- Create a new political-economic system for Mars colonies;
- Write a play set on the moon, including a Declaration of Independence from Earth's hegemony;
- Invent your own sport for use on multi-generational expeditions in enormous spacecraft;
- Write an epic poem about love's separation in space;
- Figure out a way to make a billion chrons (\$) in space--write a business plan;
- Produce fertile speculation about agricultural opportunities on Mars;
- Design a house for an extended communal family on the moon;
- Develop the curriculum for the University of the Sea of Tranquillity;
- Write a science fiction story about a utopia that falls into turmoil and chaos;
- Create a new product based on what a space expedition will need a lot of;
- Invent a justifying myth about the colonization of other "peoples" and cultures;
- Stock a trading ship for commerce with a recently found but unknown civilization nearby in the galaxy.

You get the idea. The sky's the limit. Wait a minute, there is no box; there is no sky. This list is simply a yeasty mix intended to spur discussion. For a start, to help ensure that we begin with success, we may want to create a specific topic, one for middle school kids, one for high schoolers. For each age we could offer a first, second and third prize (e.g., \$1,500, \$1,000, \$500). The amounts would be based on the advice of our treasurer and the sanction of the council. Selection of the judges and presentation of the awards can be creative endeavors in themselves. The first go-round might be limited to school districts in the Valley, and expand later. To solicit interest and entrants, we can, for example, tap into the contacts we all may have with school district officials, or get our hands on lists of school guidance counselors.

What do we need to get started? Council approval in principle of this proposal. A small handful of excited contractors to help pull this together and get it out the door.

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