

Hands-on Public Outreach in the Internet Age

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Summary

For over 15 years staff associated with our Earth materials collections have been using their experience in sample science to offer public education and outreach to groups of all ages, from kindergarten to residents of seniors' homes. Classes and groups come to us or we go to them. (Herd et al. 1998).

The basis of these presentations, randomly throughout the year, or annually at National Science and Technology Week open houses, mineral and gem shows and repeat visits to some schools, continues to be physical samples of rocks, minerals, ores, fossils and industrial products made or derived from them, like glass or petroleum, synthetic quartz crystals and silicon chips. We supplement these physical samples with suitable brochures, posters, maps and pamphlets, produced by our organization or others.

In our experience, presentees of all ages respond positively to touching and examining real physical samples, hefting them, testing hardness, magnetism, streak etc. in ways that online resources cannot duplicate. While discussing the samples, we discuss their use, often much to the surprise of the audience, and encourage them to investigate the use of non-renewable resources in the world around them, and to consider a career in geology and related sciences.

Related activities include marathon annual sample identification clinics for rocks, minerals and fossils, and seminars on how to spot pseudo-science in the media, especially in films.

References

Herd, R. K., Dougherty, B.J., Therriault, A.M., Vodden, C., Frieday, L. and Pellikan, C. , 1998, GSC Ottawa's use of local, simple and existing resources in effective public education: In Abstracts with Programs – Geological Society of America 30 (7), 158.