

Become a Solar Eclipse Outreach Agent

As the public becomes aware of the August 21 solar eclipse, science teachers and students can step up to explain the eclipse and help prepare communities to safely view it, becoming, in effect, “eclipse outreach agents.” This work can happen both within and outside the classroom as well as in print, broadcast, and social media.



Roughly half of the nation's schools will still be on summer break during the eclipse, so the time to act is the spring semester (see “Total Eclipse,” pp. 33–38, in this issue for classroom activities and the insert for safe viewing tips).

For practice, students can first share the information with family members and then, perhaps for extra credit, spread the news in other classes, using student-created handouts.

Teachers can work with the school librarian and the principal's office to organize a schoolwide assembly and set up exhibits or bulletin boards with eclipse information. Members of a local amateur astronomy club may be willing to work with students (see “On the web” for a link to a list of clubs). Highly discounted bulk orders of safe eclipse viewing glasses are available for sale (see “On the web”). The local parent-student-teacher association could fund the purchase for the whole school or resell the glasses as a PTA fundraiser to address other school needs.

Public libraries, especially in communities lacking college astronomy departments or science museums, can provide eclipse information. Resources for libraries, including supplies of eclipse watching glasses, are available online from STARNet (see “On the web”). Check the website to see if your public library is participating. If so, you and your students can volunteer to help. A local college or university astronomy department or a science museum may be planning public events and would likely welcome student volunteers as well.

Teachers can offer local TV, radio, and newspapers an early heads-up about the eclipse. Provide them with background information and invite them to cover eclipse events at your school or library.

Post news about eclipse events on your school's website and social media pages.

Again, the time to prepare is now, even if your school won't

be in session during the August eclipse. It is in the months leading up to the eclipse that outreach activities—information programs, training sessions, and selling or providing eclipse glasses to families—are most needed.

We know that people learn the most about something when they teach it to others. This is the perfect time to put this into practice. We hope you and your students find plenty of opportunities to teach others in your school and community, and we hope you enjoy clear skies and safe eclipse viewing on August 21.

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On the web

Astronomy clubs: <https://nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov/>

Eclipse viewing glasses: www.eclipsediscount.com

NSTA book of eclipse activities: www.nsta.org/solarscience

NSTA Eclipse observing brochure: <http://bit.ly/2bkGSvA>

NASA Eclipse 2017: <http://eclipse2017.nasa.gov>

Great American Eclipse: www.greatamericaneclipse.com

STARNet resources for libraries: www.starnetlibraries.org/2017eclipse

Universe in the Classroom newsletter: www.astrosociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/uic93.pdf

Resource guide to eclipses: www.astrosociety.org/eclipse