

“Are we alone out there?”
NASA No Boundaries Contest
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<http://web.prairieschool.net/~avandenheuvel/astrobiology/>
Project Summary

Few teenagers know what their eventual profession will be, and the advent of the internet and the technology revolution have made the search for a career path even more overwhelming as teens are inundated with information. The *No Boundaries* competition allowed us to provide our peers with a concise and teen-friendly, yet information-packed site about our chosen field – astrobiology. So, out of all of the occupations in this world, why astrobiology? We decided on astrobiology because these scientists are doing some of the most fascinating and proactive research of our age – from searching for other life in our universe to researching the creation of life on our own planet. Also each of our group members has different academic interests, from molecular biology to ecology, and we felt that the interdisciplinary nature of astrobiology mirrored our group. Intrigued by this topic we four classmates split up the research, writing, and work on our website and song, converging at the end of the project to collaborate and polish our efforts.

We chose a website as our medium of communication because we feel that since teenagers spend much of their time surfing the web they would naturally search there first for any questions they might have on possible careers with NASA. None of us would go through our teacher’s stash of PowerPoints or go to the library for a brochure when we had all of the information at our fingertips. Knowing that our targets were teenagers, we strove to keep the content compact, informal, clear, and humorous. Furthermore, we hand designed and coded a website to make it visually appealing while still functional, professional, and clean. To get teens interested, we also used a video format, realizing that if we could provide something catchy and “cool” as a promotion, teens would be more inclined to research the field. After being flooded with messages telling us that our generation is horrible at math and science, we decided to write a new version of a “reverse it” video, inspired by YouTube, with original music, hopefully inspiring teens to pursue a STEM career, specifically, astrobiology. Information-wise, we provided substantial information on what astrobiology is, what astrobiologists do on a daily basis, and what skills and education are needed for the job. To further enhance the approachability of our site, we also included other amusing options like a quiz, an interview with an actual postdoctoral scholar working in astrobiology, and a “What’s happening in astrobiology now?” page to get young people interested in pursuing this remarkable career. Hopefully, our user-friendly, entertaining format will allow teens to easily access the “SparkNotes” version of the information about astrobiology that they need.