

# The flame challenge: How well can a scientist answer a child's question?

March 2 2012

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Famed actor Alan Alda, founding member of the Stony Brook University Center for Communicating Science and a Visiting Professor in the School of Journalism, is challenging scientists to answer an 11-year-old's "not-so-simple" question, "What is a flame?" The challenge, to explain a flame in a clear, engaging, meaningful way so an 11-year-old can understand, is presented in a guest editorial, "[The Flame Challenge](#)," in the March 2 issue of the journal *Science*.

Alda asked that very question as an 11-year-old 65 years ago and the [answer](#) he received left him in the dark. He hopes that scientists will be better equipped to communicate answers and instill a love of science. "The natural curiosity of a child can be both the beginning of the next generation of science, and a stimulating challenge for this generation's scientists to communicate with clarity and imagination," Alda said. This editorial challenge kicks off a month-long contest that will be judged by a panel of 11-year-olds for scientific accuracy.

The Flame Challenge contest is open for entries between March 2 and April 2, with winners to be announced in June. Entries can be in writing, video or graphics, playful or serious, as long as they are accurate and connect with the young judges. For more information and entry forms, or if your school would like to participate in the judging, please visit [www.FlameChallenge.org](http://www.FlameChallenge.org).

The Flame Challenge is sponsored by the Center for Communicating Science, which is dedicated to helping current and future scientists learn

to communicate clearly and vividly with the public. “We’re also asking children to email us with other questions they would like scientists to answer,” said Elizabeth Bass, Director of the Center for Communicating Science. “We’ll select one for our next Flame Challenge. This is a fun way to help both [scientists](#) and kids learn new things about science.”

**More information:** Questions can be emailed to [communicatingscience@stonybrook.edu](mailto:communicatingscience@stonybrook.edu) .

Provided by Stony Brook University

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