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WATCH Erika Ebbel videos



What role do suicidal crocodiles play in Erika's life? Has she ever been blinded by science? What's the stickiest part of a beauty pageant? [Watch](#)

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[Erika, Mrs. Kolbert, and The Kids](#)

Posted by [Tom Miller](#) | 22 March 2010

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Fourth graders have secret lives too: animators, chefs, artists, herpetologists, tennis players, etc. *Today's post is from Florida teacher, Lee Kolbert, who recently used video conferencing to arrange a meeting between her fourth graders and our beloved Secret Lifer, Erika Ebbel. (And see our update below with Lee on TV!)*

What do growing crystals, measuring centipedes, and Butt Glue have in common? They are among the many things my students learned about last week while videoconferencing with "Secret Life of Scientists" celeb, [Erika Ebbel](#). Most kids imagine scientists to be rather geeky, with their entire day's schedule filled with test tubes and data charts but the "Secret Life" series does a great job of breaking that stereotype by profiling successful scientists who are also jugglers, extreme athletes, rock stars, foot photographers, and beauty queens! Yes, beauty queens! And so, Erika is an MIT graduate, current biochemist, and a beauty queen who won Miss Massachusetts in 2004. So, when I was approached to blog about Erika, my response was, "How about a videoconference instead?" What a great opportunity for my 4th graders to learn something about stereotypes and science at the same time.

The timing was actually perfect because we were in the midst of our Science Fair projects. So, I figured, why not encourage the students to ask Erika questions pertaining to their projects (in addition to any other questions they may have). The students and I prepared by watching Erika's videos from the site and having some brief discussions in class.



Erika visits Lee's classroom Friday arrived and my students had never been so quiet and well behaved! They sat excitedly as I launched my web browser and then we saw Erika pop in! They were so excited! They loved seeing her "in-person" and they loved the fact that she could also see them.

After a brief introduction where Erika spoke about her background, how she got involved with the “Secret Life of Scientists” series, and what she is currently working on, a few of my students got their chance to stand before the camera and speak directly to Erika.

“How can I measure centipedes without getting bit?”

“How can I be sure I’m applying the same force to my hovercraft each time I give it a push?”

“How long does Butt Glue last?”

“What do people want to talk to you about the most, beauty pageants or science?”

“What was the first Science Fair project you won?”



The fourth graders talk with Erika Ebbel Erika spoke about many of the challenges she faced in pageant competition as well as with her own Science Fair experiments which, as it turned out, were not unlike some of the challenges my students are facing with their own experiments. Speaking with great ease, Erika answered my students’ questions, elaborated beautifully giving thoughtful anecdotes, and gave us all a lot to think about.

Bringing Erika into my class was a great experience for my students in so many ways. Beyond the obvious of getting to talk to a real-live scientist and beauty pageant queen (try that with a textbook), my students really enjoyed the “Secret Life” premise and have now created their own “Secret Life of Students” profiles where they wrote 3rd person articles about themselves and their areas of expertise. This has given us all a chance to get to know each other better and some of my more shy students an opportunity to shine.

Some of my [students](#) even posted on their own [blogs](#) about the experience. Additionally, I posted about it on my [class blog](#), hoping to inspire other educators to do something similar.

Thank you Erika, for taking the time with my class and inspiring my students to work hard, be resourceful, and not give up. Thank you also to Karen Laverty and Tom Miller who helped facilitate the entire project.

The SLoS Team sends along huge thanks to both Lee and Erika! And you can learn more about Erika’s ongoing work with children by visiting [Whiz Kids](#).

UPDATE: Here’s more from Lee: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Pmcp3orl7w>