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EDUCATOR FEATURES

Earth's Wild Ride

09.01.05

Imagine Earth were a distant place you once called home but could never visit again. What would you remember most about the planet, and how would you describe it to your grandchildren?

Image to right: Navigate through a stormy river canyon in this clip from Earth's Wild Ride. Credit: NASA [[video](#)]

It is this scenario that sets the stage for "Earth's Wild Ride," a new movie that immerses audiences in a 3-D tour of Earth's history and natural wonders, now showing in planetariums and dome-shaped theatres around the country.



Set on the surface of the Moon in the year 2081, the movie opens with a grandfather and his grandchildren gazing out into space. As they watch the Moon's shadow move across Earth, the grandfather tells stories of crashing asteroids, erupting volcanoes, roaring dinosaurs, electrifying lightning and booming thunder.

While learning about eclipses, the ice age, Earth's water cycle and differences between the Earth and Moon, the audience is taken on a roller-coaster-like ride through canyons of raging rivers and hot flowing lava. Multiple projectors display the computer-generated images around all 360 degrees of a planetarium or large dome-shaped theatre. A single-projector system allows for showings in portable inflatable domes, small enough to be brought out to schools and other venues.



Image to left: Go back to a time when dinosaurs ruled the land in this clip from Earth's Wild Ride. Credit: NASA [[video](#)]

Surrounding viewers, especially students, with video -- an approach known as "immersion" -- is an effective way to engage them in Earth science, according to Patricia Reiff, executive producer of the movie and a professor of physics and astronomy at Rice University.

"Museums today have to compete with the Internet, cable TV and video games for student interest. More and more students even have high-definition TVs at home, so even the prospect of a very large screen has less attraction than before," Reiff said. "Using immersion, we provide an experience that the visitors can't get at home with images that surround them."

"Earth's Wild Ride" is the first of three movies planned for production as part of Immersive Earth, a NASA-funded project to teach Earth science concepts using dome-shaped theaters. Rice University and the Houston Museum of Natural Science are partners in the five-year, \$3.1 million project that involves a total of six museums, two universities and three private companies.

A desktop viewer is also in the works that will allow the movies to be seen on a personal computer.

For show locations and times, please visit the following:

[Houston Museum of Natural Science](#)
[Oregon Museum of Science and Industry](#)
[Carnegie Museum of Natural History](#)

To book a showing for a school or venue, please visit the [e-planetarium](#) Web site.

Running Time: About 20 minutes

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