

# **BE CREATIVE: 30 WAYS TO USE YOUR DOME**

**Bess Amaral**

**St. Mark's School Of Texas Planetarium (Dallas, TX)  
Previously at the Goddard Planetarium (Roswell, NM)**

Traditional star shows/lessons are the mainstay of most planetariums. As a clearing house for information and basic skills on astronomy/space science, the planetarium represents the best link with public and school audiences for imparting that knowledge. With the new millennium, planetariums are becoming increasingly creative with their use of 'dome time' not only for expanding their programs to a wider audience but also for increasing revenues to cover the growing costs of state-of-the-art technology. Below are listed 30 ways the dome came alive while I was at the Robert Goddard Planetarium. These ideas may inspire you to try something new under the stars when you plan your next annual calendar of events (not in order of importance nor complexity):

- 1. POETRY READINGS:** Invite poets to do readings under the stars. Jointly select appropriate images and music to enhance the experience. Provide a red light glowing on the poet so they can read their notes and the audience can still have a sense of their presence beyond their voice.
- 2. SCIENCE & ART CONNECTIONS:** Invite your local art museum staff to promote works from their collections that have celestial themes, especially Native American art and artifacts. Have curators share information on how color and light are used by artists to create certain effects....Show slides of these works. Carry the discussion further and have a demo on the difference between 'color' and 'light' (how combining pigments is different than combining lights...) Work in information and slides on the colors of stars and their significance....colors of gases in nebula and their significance.
- 3. LARGE SCREEN VIDEO SHOWS:** For those with large screen video projection capabilities, invite computer graphic artists to show their work at a film festival.... perhaps you can entice them to include some celestial/sci-fi themes.....
- 4. LIVE INTERNET CONNECTIONS:** Get a simple interface to allow whatever is on your computer to be projected on your large screen video projector. Go live on the Internet with audience participation or for workshops.....
- 5. AUDIENCE GAMES:** Have a school or city wide invite to compete as teams at the planetarium. Use pointers or beepers for each team..... Compete on a variety of topics such as constellation or star names, famous astronomers, objects in astronomy they have to identify.... the sky's the limit!!!

**6. LIVE BAND MUSIC:** Invite local bands to perform live in the back of the planetarium [or in front if you have a staging area!]. Jointly choose dome images and effects that could enhance each song.

**7. TRIOS/QUARTETS UNDER THE STARS:** Invite members of your high school, college or local symphony to perform under the stars. Provide red lights for them to see their music. Jointly select appropriate images to enhance the experience.

**8. READ-WRITE SHOOT & SHOW:** This is a school project for middle or high school teams of students who research, write a script and shoot slides and video, choose music and record a soundtrack to use for a planetarium presentation that can literally be on any school topic: The Civil War, Geometry in Life & Space, Impressionist Artists, The History of Cars.....great interdisciplinary stuff. Invite parents to the premier performances. Give them a simple layout of what areas on the dome are available for images and some simple suggestions about leaving time on their recording to allow for images to change, etc.

**9. CHILDREN'S KODALITH CONSTELLATION OR CHARACTER DRAWINGS:** Invite local school children to draw figures for the next show's constellation or story characters. Shoot them on kodalith film (or whatever you use) and overlay color filters for a little pizzazz and put them in you pre-show star talk or as part of the regular show. Boy does that get them excited!

**10. LIVE LINKS WITH THE SHUTTLE OR ASTRONOMER:** Ask your local phone company to put in a speaker phone or simply take your portable microphone and place it next to the speaker on your ATT phone so the audience/class can participate in a live discussion with an astronaut or astronomer. Arrangements for shuttle talks are made through NASA. Most universities have astronomers that would be willing to share their time to do this. We had a live link with Andy Thomas when he was aboard the Mir space station.

**11. LASER LIGHT SHOWS:** What a gas... pardon the pun! Great money makers and a great way to get in the teenage and young adult crowd. Try showing classical music or kids fare for a change to expand the programs to other audiences. If you can't buy a system, there are several companies who rent them.

**12. WEDDINGS:** Yes, there are couples who really want to do it under the dome. It can be quite moving if planned very well. Work with ministers who are willing to be creative with the experience and dome images.

**13. BOARD/COUNCIL MEETINGS:** Invite your school board, museum board or *city council* to hold their next meeting at your planetarium. Great PR. Offer to do

a short show following the meeting. The next time you need work on budget requests those events will be remembered by those officials.

**14. NOON SERVICE CLUBS MEETINGS:** Invite your local Rotary, Lions Club, etc. to have one of their noon meetings at the planetarium in conjunction with a short planetarium show. We have the local sandwich shop provide the food and clear sodas so they can eat during the show. We have never had a problem with spills.... This of course can be done if you have an eating area near the planetarium for the meeting, then move to the planetarium for the show.

**15. DISTINGUISHED SCIENTIST LECTURE SERIES:** Invite prominent scientists/astronomers to provide an evening lecture. Promo the event well in advance with newspaper and other media. Get businesses to sponsor the visit. Have book signing or picture signing after.

**16. ASTRONOMY CLUB/YOUNG ASTRONAUT CLUB:** Sponsor a local astronomy club for families, adults or kids. Many “win-win” arrangements are possible (e.g., provide them with a meeting space in exchange for help at public star parties or astronomy fairs). Try the Young Astronaut program, too.

**17. BOY SCOUT EXPLORER POST:** Sponsor an astronomy post for high school students interested in scouts. Both boys and girls attend with this special program backed by your local Boy Scout Council.

**18. TEACHER IN-SERVICE WORKSHOPS:** Offer your planetarium for teacher workshops in science/astronomy. Be one of the resources or bring in experts.

**19. PLANETARIUM STORE:** You don't have to have a formal store. Just put up a long table and sell space-related merchandise for 10 minutes after the shows. Great money maker!!!! I have raised thousands doing this. You can expand as time and budget permit.

**20. LEARNING CENTERS:** Set up astronomy related table-top learning centers with hands-on materials and books on specific concepts for audience to interact with before or after shows.

**21. “CAMP INS”:** Sponsor a camp-in under the stars with youth groups. Do games and shows.... Sleeping bags in the aisles and entry....

**22. TELESCOPE WORKSHOPS:** Before the holiday season, sponsor a telescope workshop for all those interested in purchasing a scope for the holidays. Invite local amateurs to show off their stuff and answer questions.

**23. KIDS SPACE CAMP:** Sponsor a summer day camp for an hour or two each day for week long sessions. Learn about astronomy, play space games, design a Mars Colony, build and launch model rockets.

**24. SONGS UNDER THE DOME:** Get out your guitar or someone who will lead audiences in songs that accompany or are part of the show. Sing alongs are great fun.

**25. PUPPETS:** Use puppets to introduce the star stories or lessons with family shows or primary grade school shows.

**26. HAVE AUDIENCE MAKE GLOW IN THE DARK CONSTELLATION CARDS:** Before the show, set up a table with glow-in-the-dark paint and outlines on index cards for them to make before the star talk. Then when the lights go down, they show their cards and you can do lessons with them.

**27. COSTUME OR OBJECT THEME SHOWS:** If you are doing “Bear Tales” or stories on Ursa Major & Minor, have students bring stuffed bears. For the “*Cowboy Astronomer*” have everyone wear cowboy hats or western outfits. For Greek myths, they can wear sheet togas. Use your imagination!

**28. TEACH HIGH SCHOOL OR ADULT ASTRONOMY CLASSES:** Talk with local school officials about using the planetarium as the “classroom” for high school astronomy classes (students drive to and from campus the first hour of the day). Offer the planetarium as a site for adult classes on astronomy.

**29. SENIOR FREE DAY, AIR FORCE FREE DAY, ETC:** Offer free admission to certain groups on the day....use your imagination. RED HAIR free day....

**30. PUT YOUR IDEA HERE....**

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