

**Student**

Megan Hinkle  
Ponte Vedra, FL

**Summary**

An 8th grade astronomer and a Science Buddies Project Idea made an out-of-this-world team in the Science Buddies—Lick Observatory Astronomy Contest!

**Astronomy Contest Recognizes Student's Stellar Efforts**

In the fall of 2010, Megan Hinkle was an 8th grader with a love of science and a growing interest in astronomy. While searching for a science fair project, she spotted the Science Buddies' Project Idea, "[Correlation Between Sunspots and Coronal Mass Ejections.](#)" Thinking that it looked challenging and had potential real-world applications, she decided to give it a try.

The sunspots project was Megan's first astronomy project, and she spent hours of her free time analyzing the data—and learning more about astronomy and the vocabulary that goes along with it! As she got deeper into her research, she discovered a correlation between halo coronal mass ejections and the sunspot cycle. "I was surprised and excited to find this because it made the information [in my project] more applicable to life on Earth," says Megan.

Excited by her experience working on the astronomy project, Megan was disappointed when she earned only an honorable mention at her school's science fair, which meant she couldn't move on to the regional science fair as she had the previous year. She chalked up her outcome to bad timing—her school had recently eliminated the astronomy category, so her project was placed in the physics category, where she felt it wasn't as competitive.

She didn't succeed at the school fair, but the project let her better understand the sun's cycles and gave her a hands-on look at what is involved in astronomical research. Not all astronomy projects involve setting up a telescope at night and studying the stars! "I learned a lot about how the sun and its features can affect life on Earth and cause things that aren't expected, such as geomagnetic storms," says Megan.

When she heard about the Science Buddies—Lick Observatory Astronomy Contest, Megan submitted her project and won best in her category. The honor included a cash prize and a Celestron telescope, but more importantly, she won recognition for her hard work and initiative. Megan isn't sure yet what direction her future will take, but with determination like hers, it's sure to be bright!

