

**VAST 2017 Professional Development Institute
"Celebrating Science"**

Friday Morning General Session Speakers

Andrés Ruzo, National Geographic Young Explorer
Kaleela Thompson, Student



The Scientific Journey: How bugs, volcanoes & curiosity can change the world

Truly "Celebrating Science" means acknowledging that there is a personal journey behind every new discovery and research paper. With the goal of exploring how to better connect students and adults to science, this session will explore the "scientific journey" from childhood curiosity to impactful initiatives. This session will open with an interview-style format moderated by National Geographic Explorer, Andrés Ruzo, and featuring budding butterfly expert, Kaleela Thompson. The latter part of the session will be a town hall style discussion where we will learn from each other as VAST educators, identifying tips and tricks that have worked in the classroom to keep students engaged on their scientific journeys.

Andrés Ruzo is a tri-citizen who grew up among Nicaragua, Peru and Texas -- which helped him see that most of the world's problems are not confined by geographic or cultural borders. While trying to imagine solutions, he realized the way we produce and use energy lies at the root of many of our biggest issues. Combined with his memories of summers on his family's farm on Nicaragua's Casita volcano, playing in the fumarole fields, this prompted him to pursue a PhD in geophysics at SMU, focusing on geothermal studies. He is also a National Geographic Young Explorer.

Kaleela Thompson is currently a 17-year-old high school senior at Kecoughtan High School in Hampton, Virginia who plans to attend college this fall. She was the 2013 recipient of the National Science Teachers Association's *Angela Award*, which is given annually to honor one female student in grades 5-8, who has a strong connection to science. Kaleela has also won a Prudential President's Volunteer Service Award and an Office Depot Adopt a Small Business Award (having founded her own organization *My Home, My History and Our World*, an online site where kids can go to learn about places and their history. As a sixth grader, Kaleela was a published author, with her first book *Oh Where Oh Where is my Swallowtail*. She won a full scholarship and spent a whole week as a 2013 Teen Ambassador to SeaWorld in San Antonio, Texas. Kaleela also won a full scholarship to be a 2014 National Geographic Teen Explorer, where she had the opportunity to spend 14 days exploring the rain forests in Brazil. In her free time, Kaleela raises and tags monarch butterflies along with presenting programs at local and state science events; including helping kids make "milkweed seed bombs" and sharing the "*Butterfly Bell*" butterfly habitat that she created (patent pending). She is currently working on a patent for a new way of tagging & tracking migratory species (including butterflies) throughout the United States and Mexico.