

Event sparks interest in science

By Ruth Campbell rcampbell@oaoa.com | Posted: Thursday, March 28, 2019 6:42 pm

Complete with cockroaches and squid, neuroscientist Greg Gage brought his field to life for students from across Ector County Independent School District Thursday.

Called “Neuroscience for the 99 Percent,” Gage presented to 700 students in grades four through 12 in the Odessa High School Performing Arts Center. A workshop for students and teachers is scheduled for Friday at the same venue.

Student volunteers eagerly took to the stage to anesthetize a cockroach, cut the leg of one off one of the pests and use electrodes to take one student’s free will away from the other. The audience could see the electrical activity through a SpikerBox projected on a screen.

Audience members also viewed what happens to a squid when music is played through it.

Chief Innovation Officer Jason Osborne said students and teachers would take part in a workshop Friday so teachers can teach teachers and students can teach students.

“Then that way we can tie this in to the standards of teaching and use it as a tool in the classroom. It’s more ... hands-on and it’s also a way that we can elevate their learning; in other words, teach them a little bit more sophisticated things about science, math (and) technology. And they love it. You can see it here today. They’re super ambitious and very excited about being a part of this,” Osborne said.

He noted that students can find Gage’s presentations online through his TED fellowship, his website Backyard Brains and his YouTube channel.

Fourth-grade Sam Houston Elementary School science teacher Rebekah Mena, said her students were 110 percent engaged Thursday. Students and teachers were wearing black Backyard Brains T-shirts with slime green writing.

“This is amazing for any level of student, and to have a speaker of this caliber brought in to ECISD is amazing opportunity,” Mena said.

Mena said keeping students engaged is vital.

“What the Innovation Department is bringing in with SharkFinder and with Backyard Brains is giving us the key to keeping them engaged and tying it into the lessons,” Mena said.

SharkFinder is a citizen science program used throughout ECISD.



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Odessa High School sophomore Anthony Fuentez reacts to a fellow student grabbing a cockroach during a Backyard Brains presentation Thursday afternoon in the Odessa High School Performing Arts Center.

Fourth-grade Sam Houston student Javier Solis cut the cockroach's leg off.

Solis, 9, said he didn't mind doing that and he thought the presentation was fun.

Something that surprised him was when the cockroach was put in ice water and it didn't move.

Asked if he liked science, Solis said, "Now I do."

Keyla Chung, a 13-year-old seventh-grader from Wilson & Young Medal of Honor Middle School, was the student who anesthetized the cockroach in ice water.

"I really liked it. I got kind of scared because I had to get the cockroach, but I really liked it. It was really fun," Chung said.

She said she didn't really get grossed out.

"... It was just a fast moment for me. I didn't feel anything ...," Chung said.

Joshua Ensey, a seventh-grade science teacher and coach of girls' athletics at Wilson & Young, said the program gave students a chance to see real-world science that they can do themselves.

"... I think a lot of them when they can see it, they get more interested than when they just hear about it," Ensey said.