Rhonda L. Reist
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"The more relevant a lesson is to the student, the greater chance it has of taking hold and becoming an integral part of the student's working knowledge," says Rhonda Reist. "If I can get them thinking about chemistry after they have left the classroom setting and gone home, the closer I am to achieving that goal." Ms. Reist has developed many wonderful ways to make chemistry relevant to students, including her "take home labs" homework projects in which students use chemistry principles to understand common kitchen phenomena. Others include her use of basketballs, funny chemistry songs, Hot Wheels cars, Snickers bars, and flashy demonstrations involving thermite and molten iron to explain chemistry concepts.

Ms. Reist believes there are three steps in the process of getting her students involved. First is to convince students that she views them as people, not children to be managed, by giving to them what she expects to get from them respect, openness, and honesty. Second is to use charming demonstrations and humor to convince them that chemistry is fun, interesting, relevant, and something they can do. Third is to get them to actually do chemistry.

Outside of school hours, Ms. Reist works with the Faraday Club, a group of students who perform science demonstrations at elementary schools, shopping malls, and museums. The students have sole responsibility for determining the presentation strategies, building the equipment, developing safe procedures and disposal, and setting up programs. They have learned that you must really know and understand a concept in order to teach it. Most of all, they have become very aware of the art of reading the faces of their audience to determine if they are "getting it."

Ms. Reist earned a bachelor's in secondary education at Kansas State University. She has continued her education through work in soil ecology, chemistry, and materials science. She is a frequent presenter at in-service workshops and conferences, including the Kansas Association of Teachers of Science KATS Kamp, the National Science Teachers Association Regional Convention, and the American Chemical Society. With the Faraday Club, she is responsible for many more workshops and presentations. A person of boundless energy and contagious enthusiasm, she is involved in a host of educational and voluntary activities in her community.