

ROBERT FERGUSON OBSERVATORY

2025 STRIKING SPARKS

TELESCOPE AWARDS PROGRAM



Previous Striking Sparks telescope winners, sponsors, mentors and teachers. Photo by Len Nelson.

This will be the 40th year annual of the “Striking Sparks” telescope program.

Previously the program was conducted by the Sonoma County Astronomical Society (SCAS) and has been transferred to the Valley of the Moon Observatory Association (VMOA), Robert Ferguson Observatory (RFO).

The purpose of the program is to promote science education and interest in astronomy. Our goal is to *Strike Sparks* of interest with students in Sonoma County.

This year we will again be awarding the contest winners easy to use, new 6-inch reflecting Dobsonian mount telescopes to students that have been nominated by their teachers or by RFO members.

Applicants must be Sonoma County students in first to eighth grade to be eligible. Attendance of one or more Robert Ferguson Observatory events between now and February 28, 2025, is required. Lastly, the candidate must write an essay about their interest in astronomy.

CONTEST RULES

- 1. Teachers:** Select and nominate up to two (2) students who have demonstrated genuine interest in science and astronomy. Consider if the student will have parent/guardian support to participate in astronomy events. Please photocopy the application and send home with each nominated student a copy of pages 4 and 5 (Parents' Information Sheet and meeting attendance) so parents will know about the contest and the program. You will also need to photocopy one nomination form for each student you nominate. Please read the Parent Information Sheet as it contains more detailed student information.
- 2. Students:** (1) Attend one or more public nights at the Robert Ferguson Observatory events between now and February 28, 2025. (2) Write an essay, up to 150 words, which describes their interest in astronomy and how having their own telescope would support that interest. Here are some questions for students to consider when writing their essay. When did you become interested in astronomy? What have you done to learn about astronomy? Where would you use a telescope if you won one? Are other members of your family interested in astronomy? Have you ever looked through a telescope? What after-school activities are you involved in and what are your other hobbies? Describe any astronomy projects you have completed. Describe what you learned or experienced at the Robert Ferguson Observatory event. The essay is to be in your own words. It may be hand-written or typed. See Page 4 for schedules, dates, times, and places.
- 3. Teachers:** For each nominated student, a maximum of two (2) per class, complete the Nomination Form on Page 3. Make a separate copy of Pages 4 and 5 for each nominated student. Carefully read each student's essay and then compose a required supporting statement and attach it to the Nomination Form (Page 3). Try to be specific as to how a telescope might 'Spark' the student's interest in astronomy. 'Spark' nominations without a teacher's supporting statement will not be judged.
- 4. Teacher:** For each nominated student send:
 - a. RFO Striking Sparks Nomination Form (Page 3).
 - b. Student's signed entry essay.
 - c. Student's attendance verification (Page 5).
 - d. Teacher's supporting statement.

Send To: RFO Striking Sparks Telescope Contest
P.O. Box 898
Glen Ellen, CA 95442

All contest entries must be postmarked no later than Saturday, March 1, 2025.

We will contact the winning students and teachers at home before **March 7, 2025**.
The telescopes will be presented to the contest winners in **March 2025**
(The specific location in Santa Rosa, California will be announced.)

Questions? Contact the Striking Sparks Coordinators:

Larry McCune Email: lmccune@rfo.org , Michael Eckstein Email: meckstein@rfo.org or
Nancy Cummings, Young Astronomer Advisor - Email: ncummings@rfo.org

Sincerely,



Larry McCune,
Striking Sparks Program Coordinator

Striking Sparks Telescope Contest Nomination Form 2025

Teachers, please complete:

Student's Name _____

Home Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Home Telephone _____ Email Address (**required**) _____

Grade _____ Age _____

School _____

Parents/Guardians first and last names: _____

Teacher _____ Principal _____

Teacher's Telephone(s): _____ Email: _____

Teacher's Signature _____ **Date** _____

Please staple all parts together securely in this order for each student:

1. Nomination Form (Page 3)
2. Student's Signed Essay
3. Student's Attendance Verification Form (Page 5)
4. Teacher's Supporting Statement

**MAIL TO: RFO Striking Sparks Telescope Contest
P.O. Box 898
Glen Ellen CA 95442**

Entries must be postmarked no later than Saturday March 1, 2025.

Judging will be held on or before **March 4, 2025**. Winning students and their teachers will be notified by phone and email. The telescopes will be presented to the contest winners in March 2025. The specific location in Santa Rosa, California will be announced.

If you have questions, contact:

Larry McCune at lmccune@rfo.org, (Striking Sparks Coordinator)

Michael Eckstein at meckstein@rfo.org, or

Nancy Cummings at ncummings@rfo.org

To attend a Young Astronomers meeting contact: Nancy Cummings at ncummings@rfo.org

Robert Ferguson Observatory Striking Sparks Parent/Guardian Information Sheet

Dear Parent or Guardian,

This is the 40th year of the annual “**Striking Sparks**” **Telescope Awards Program**. Previously the program was conducted by the Sonoma County Astronomical Society (SCAS) and has been transferred to

the Valley of the Moon Observatory Association (VMOA), Robert Ferguson Observatory (RFO).

The purpose of the program is to promote science education and interest in astronomy.

The program’s name comes from Robert Ferguson and a student building a telescope and this struck a “Spark” of interest that contributed to the student ultimately graduating with a Ph.D. in Astrophysics. Our program’s goal is to strike other sparks of interest in Sonoma County students.

We purchase new 6-inch Newtonian Reflecting Telescopes and present them to Sonoma County students who are the winners in our Striking Sparks Telescope Contest. These are quality entry level telescopes. The optical tube is 6” in diameter and 46” long and mounts on an easy-to-use Dobsonian mount. Telescopes are financially sponsored by interested individuals or businesses. Students should participate in the Robert Ferguson Observatory programs or other special events where they will receive telescope instruction and learn more about astronomy.

Contest Rules

1. Teachers or RFO Docents will nominate students; No more than two (2) students per class.
2. Students who enter the contest must attend a Robert Ferguson Observatory event or a school astronomy night program between now and February 28, 2025.
3. Nominated students write an essay, up to 150 words, describing their interest in astronomy and how having a telescope supports that interest. Here are some questions for students to consider when writing their essay. When did you become interested in astronomy? Where would you use a telescope if you won one? Are other members of your family interested in astronomy? What did you learn or experience by attending the Robert Ferguson Observatory event? What interests you most about astronomy? What after-school activities are you involved in and what are your other hobbies? What have you done to learn about astronomy? Some suggested topics are galaxies, planets, comets, constellations, moon phases, light years and meteors. The essay may be handwritten or typed and must be in the student’s own words.
See attached Observatory meeting and event schedule. Applications must be postmarked no later than **Saturday, March 1, 2025**. The students must deliver their essay to their teachers for mailing well in advance of March 1, 2025.
4. Teachers must complete a Nomination Form for each student and add their supporting statement. The teacher’s supporting statement is considered as well as the student’s essay. Entries without a teacher’s supporting statement will not be judged.
5. Teachers must send: the
 - (1) the Nomination Form-Page 3,
 - (2) the student’s signed essay,
 - (3) the teacher’s supporting statement and
 - (4) the signed Attendance Verification Form-Page 5 to:

**RFO Striking Sparks Telescope Contest
P.O. Box 898
Glen Ellen, CA 95442**

Sonoma County students from the first through eighth grade are eligible. We judge the entries on the student's enthusiasm and interest in astronomy as well as attending one or more Robert Ferguson Observatory public events. The winners will be notified at home by **Friday, March 7, 2025**. This year's telescopes will be presented to the contest winners in **March 2025** in Santa Rosa, CA. There is additional information at the www.rfo.org web page.

If you have questions, contact:

Larry McCune at lmccune@rfo.org, (Striking Sparks Coordinator)
Michael Eckstein at meckstein@rfo.org, or
Nancy Cummings at ncummings@rfo.org

To attend Young Astronomers meetings contact: Nancy Cummings at ncummings@rfo.org

Robert Ferguson Observatory Attendance Information

The Robert Ferguson Observatory (RFO) is located in Sugarloaf Ridge State Park east of Santa Rosa near Kenwood, California. It is located north of Highway 12 at the end of Adobe Canyon Road. After entering the State Park parking is available to access the observatory.

The observatory is staffed by volunteers and is dedicated to promoting education in astronomy.

The Robert Ferguson Observatory is open to the public on the dates listed on the Robert Ferguson Observatory calendar dates, weather permitting.

See www.rfo.org for additional RFO 2024 and 2025 event information or Schedule Changes.

Attendance Verification Form (must submit with application)

Students who enter the contest must attend a Robert Ferguson Observatory public event between now and February 28, 2025.

The Attendance Verification Form is to be signed by a Robert Ferguson Observatory Board Member or Docent while attending the event.

Enclose the signed Attendance Form with the Striking Sparks application.

VMOA Board Member or RFO Docent Signature

Date

VMOA Board Member or RFO Docent Signature

Date