Science Societies

‘Saturday With a Scientist’ events bring awareness to soil science

By Melanie Szulczewski and Wale Adewunmi

March 20, 2026



Melanie Bayles and visitors playing the "matching game" during a "Saturday With a Scientist" event. Photo by Susan Chapman.

The *Saturday With a Scientist* events, organized by the Soils K-12 Outreach Committee, provide SSSA members the opportunity to share their passion for soil science directly with people of all ages and to promote soil science education. Learn more.

“Can I touch it?” the little girl asked, looking at the boxes of sands, silt, and clays. “Can I paint one?” asked the boy, checking out the postcards created with paints made from different colored soils. The answer to both of these questions was an enthusiastic, “Yes!” from the members of the Soils K-12 Outreach Committee staffing the table. Thanks to a two-year cooperative grant from the USDA-ARS in 2024, we connected with hundreds of museum visitors through two *Saturday With a Scientist* events. The goal was to bring awareness of soil science to the public through simple and interactive educational activities, displays, and demonstrations.

Our committee organized the first *Saturday With a Scientist* with the Witte Natural History Museum in San Antonio, TX. Setting up tables with supplies the day before the CANVAS meeting, three members of the SSSA Soils K-12 Committee (Melanie Szulczewski, Wale Adewunmi, and Susan Chapman) interacted with approximately 250 museum visitors with hands-on activities and giveaways on Saturday, Nov. 9, 2024. Adults and children spun a wheel to answer soils trivia questions for prizes such as a "Dig It! I Heart Soil" colorable ruler or an "I Heart Soil" activity book. We invited visitors to immerse their hands in containers of sand, silt, and clay and to paint pictures with paints made from various hued soils while soil scientists explained how important and interesting the soil beneath our feet can be.



Melanie Szulczewski and Wale Adewunmi at the Natural History Museum of Utah. Photo by Susan Chapman.

Our second *Saturday With a Scientist* took place at the Natural History Museum of Utah in Salt Lake City, on Nov. 8, 2025, the day before that year's CANVAS meeting began. Soils K-12 committee members Melanie Szulczewski, Wale Adewunmi, Liz Gillispie, and Susan Chapman were joined by Melanie Bayles and Daniel Adamson, members of the ASA–CSSA K-12 Committee, to showcase soils as well as agronomy activities such as matching seeds to final products and extracting strawberry DNA. Almost 200 museum visitors stopped by to enjoy the activities. Many visitors had questions about their garden soils while others shared their personal connections to soil. The attention grabber was the soil biodegradation display, "Soil Your Undies," showing the breakdown of cotton fabric by soil organisms over time. The dramatic disappearance of the fabric

over time inspired numerous questions—and jokes.

Many of the Soils K-12 Outreach Committee's initiatives focus on teachers, such as the in-service teacher training workshops, classroom resources, and the teacher grant program. These events provided the opportunity to share our passion for soil science directly with people of all ages and to promote soil science education. We know the future health of our soils depends on everyone caring for this important resource, so these events connect us with more people to create more soil advocates and to tell the story of soils. Learn more about our work and view outreach activity resources at soils4teachers.org.

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Back to issue

Back to home

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