

Science Fair

Take a bunch of earnest and gifted young people, provide background on their lives and hopes, enlist them in a contest, and get us to both root for a winner and ponder what winning means.

The movie, produced by the National Geographic Channel is an absolute treat. The annual International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF) pulls students and projects from around the globe.

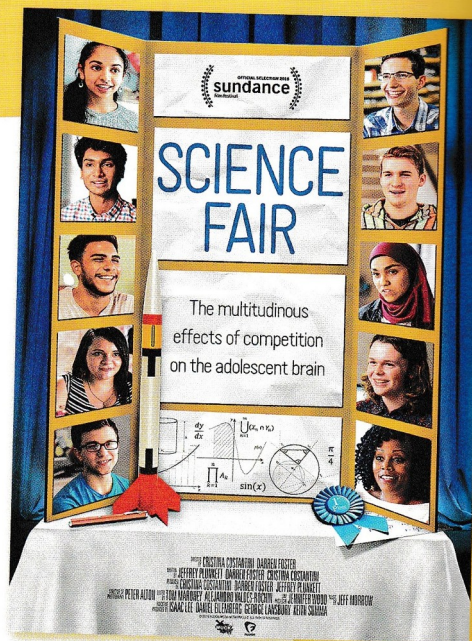
Most refreshingly, “Science Fair” illustrates the many different kinds of STEM students out there. A girl like Anjali, from a high school in Louisville, Ky., can be an ambitious type-A with a gawky, endearing arrogant streak, while her schoolmates Ryan, Harsha, and Abraham happily muddy distinctions between nerds and bros, with Ryan a gifted programmer who comes off as a surfer dude and Harsha a hard-studying son of immigrants who loves trap music.

Kashfiya’s project for the fair is studying adolescent risk behaviors – drinking and taking drugs – by looking at brain waves. Anjali has developed a sensor to detect arsenic in drinking water. One of the most heartening teams comes from a poverty-ridden village in rural Brazil: Myllena and Gabriel are working to develop a medication that stops the spread of the Zika virus that has hit their corner of the country especially hard. Myllena’s father is a farmhand, her mother a maid; one of her teachers despairs over the limited local options: “Most of our students are like a plant inside an apartment.” You can see the horizon start to grow in Myllena’s eyes.

You want them all to succeed, and “Science Fair” adroitly leads us through the preparations, the travel, the arrival at the Los Angeles Convention Center.

“Science Fair” says things about aspiration and innovation, immigrant strivers and academic opportunities, where boys and girls today can go and why we should encourage and support them. It’s a movie that traffics in a rare commodity: hope for the future.

Adapted from “Celebrating the science of hope in ‘Science Fair’”
(Ty Burr, The Boston Globe, 2018)



◆ A movie directed by Cristina Costantini and Darren Foster (2018).



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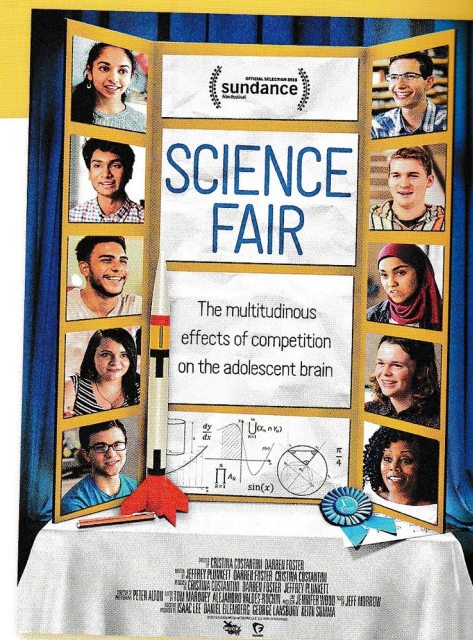
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