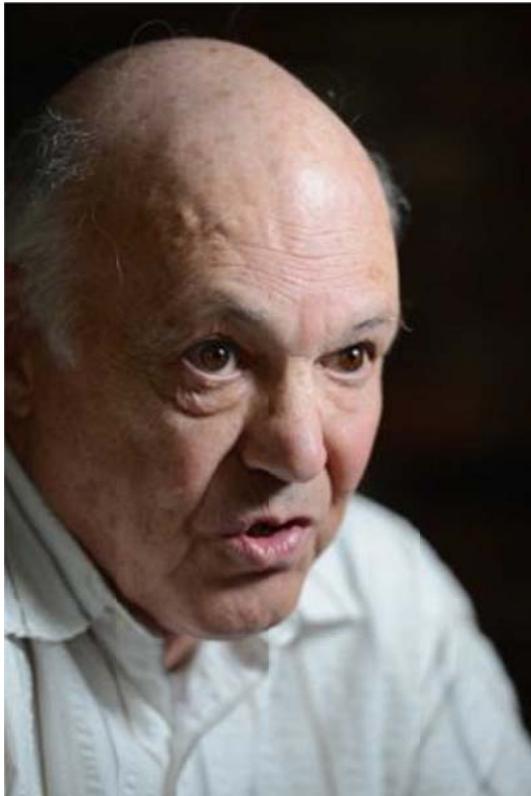


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# That's a bright answer!

## Burning 'flame' question: Will he win?



Caption: Richard Frauenglass, a retired Huntington engineer, one of eight finalists in Stony Brook University's global contest, "What is a flame?"

Retired Huntington engineer Richard Frauenglass helped put men on the moon. Now he's trying to make science easier for sixth-graders to understand.

One of eight finalists in a global [Stony Brook University](#) contest, Frauenglass did his best to answer the question: "What is a flame?" Frauenglass, 72, described it as the light and residue caused by heating something and creating a chemical reaction.

"A flame is an object, a 'thing,' something you can see, something you can touch (but don't do that because it is hot)," he wrote in his five-paragraph entry. "It is not like other objects such as a rock because it 'happens' and then goes away.

"So a flame is what you see when something burns."

Frauenglass entered the contest at the urging of his wife, Judy Merl. He's retired but still works as an adjunct professor at [Nassau Community College](#).

"Scientists in the education system are uniquely unprepared to explain what it all means," he said. "Kids are naturally inquisitive. They want to learn. It's important for them to understand the world around them."

Frauenglass worked with Grumman Aircraft Engineering on the Apollo Lunar Module project until 1967. He later worked at Airborne Instrument Laboratory in [Deer Park](#), developing defense technology during the Cold War, including the highflying SR-71 Blackbird.

The contest stems from an experience that actor Alan [Alda](#) had in science class as an 11-year-old, when he asked how a flame was created. He was flummoxed when his teacher answered, "Combustion and oxidation."

Alda, a visiting professor at Stony Brook, is a founding member of the university's Center for Communicating Science, which is sponsoring the contest as part of the World Science Festival this week in Manhattan. More than 800 entries were submitted.

The contest is being judged by sixth-graders around the country, including from 18 [Long Island](#) schools. The young judges will select the best answer, which will be announced Saturday afternoon in Manhattan at [Hunter College's](#) Kaye Playhouse.

Students judged the answers based on five criteria: if they learned something; if the answer was clear, confusing or boring; if the answer made them want to learn more; and if it was easy to understand.

The other finalists are Nathan Anderson of Seattle; Rachel D'Erminio and Ted Londner of Cambridge, Mass.; Ben Ames of [Innsbruck](#), Austria; Simon Schreier of Central, S.C.; and Larry Li and Villian Lo of Cambridge, [United Kingdom](#).

Elizabeth Bass, director of the Center for Communicating Science, said the goal is to help scientists talk more clearly to the public about their work.

"Any really technical and specialized material can be difficult to explain, and science has a language of its own," Bass said. "Some scientists are so deeply involved in their fields that they don't realize they're speaking a different language to outsiders that might not understand."

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Appeared in print Newsday on p 16, with a smiling picture of Frauenglass and a small oreviously published picture of Alan Alda at Brentwood South Middle School.]