

EXPLORING THE WONDERS OF SCIENCE WITH LEAH ELSON

Morgan Ramsey



Photo source: <https://www.leahelson.com/>

The Wisconsin Science Festival—a weeklong, statewide celebration of science—takes place each October, offering a diverse array of activities for all ages. In 2024, the festival highlighted agriculture, a cornerstone of Wisconsin’s economy and identity.

Welcoming people from all backgrounds, the festival thrives on inclusivity, and Leah Elson’s experience exemplifies that spirit. A renowned scientist, nonfiction author, and advocate for science communication, Elson engaged with young K-12 scientists at the public expo and captivated adults at Big Ideas for Busy People, a marquee festival event. With expertise spanning orthopedics to neuroscience, she was the perfect fit for the festival’s mission of making science accessible and engaging.

“The experience not only felt immersive, but it catered to all age ranges. The WiSciFest did a wonderful job of balancing eye-catching experiments and demonstrations with scientific rigor,” Elson said.

The festival’s hallmark Field Trip Expo at the Discovery Building was Elson’s first moment of engagement, where she delivered an interactive talk to over 250 eager younger students: “The morning I spent with the younger students was a wonderful reminder that we are all scientists. As I reminded the students, science is an exploration of why—as such, the fundamental characteristic of a good scientist is an insatiable curiosity for the world around them. From the moment I took the stage, I saw hands shoot up—a room bubbling over with wonder and awe and so many questions. The students were locked in and ravenous for scientific explanations. What a wonderful and encouraging peek into the future generation of STEM experts,” Elson remarked.

Elson was struck by the enthusiastic response from attendees, with students eagerly lining up to get her autograph on their brightly colored WiSciFest drawstring bags. “I certainly never went into the sciences expecting to feel any kind of celebrity status, but it’s an excellent testament to the power of scientific intrigue, nevertheless!” Elson exclaimed. “I had so many post-lecture questions and ‘thank yous.’ I had a parent reach out to me on social media, telling me that her daughter had been buzzing about my lecture for days—an honor, truly.”

Another memorable event for Elson was “Big Ideas for Busy People: Fields of Wonder,” a unique interactive night at the Majestic Theatre, filled with flash talks from scientists covering a wide array of topics. Here, Elson talked about artificial intelligence and food systems at an event she called “incredibly meaningful.” “I got to take the stage with colleagues from drastically different areas of science and community outreach, joining forces to educate (and entertain) an adult audience—interdisciplinary collaboration at its finest (and most impactful!).”



Leah presents at *Big Ideas for Busy People*.

She also connected with the broader community and campus through her involvement with the Wisconsin Book Festival, a long-standing partnership that showcases books and authors across a range of topics, including science and beyond. During the festival, Leah discussed her new book, *There Are (No) Stupid Questions in Science*, which is aimed at a science-curious audience. In addition to the crossover festivals, Elson gave a guest lecture in the Life Sciences Communication course LSC 350, taught by Professor Nan Li. There, she shared insights into her world as a professional science communicator—demonstrating how complex scientific concepts can be made accessible to diverse audiences through engaging storytelling and clear communication.

Leah Elson’s reflections on the Wisconsin Science Festival highlight the significant role the weeklong celebration plays in sparking curiosity and promoting exploration. She also emphasized how it builds trust and a sense of community—qualities that are increasingly valuable in a time of growing public mistrust of science and scientists. As the festival approaches its 15th year, its dedication to bringing science to the public remains unwavering—continuing to ignite the imaginations of people across the state. This year’s festival, taking place October 16-26, 2025, will once again offer a wide array of events and activities throughout Wisconsin, engaging and educating all ages.

To stay up to date on the latest announcements, or to learn more about the exciting events coming up, visit www.wiscifest.org or subscribe to the WiSciFest mailing list at: <https://www.wisconsinsciencefest.org/subscribe/>.