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WNET.ORG

Donald Lee, 212.560.3005, LeeD@wnet.org**Alan Alda hosts *The Human Spark*, a search for what makes us human, in January 2010 on PBS**

Three-episode series follows Alda as he explores our uniquely human brains and tackles the differences between us, our extinct Neanderthal cousins, and modern chimps.

[The Human Spark Online](http://pbs.org/humanspark) (pbs.org/humanspark) *expands the debate and lets users discuss what being human means to them.*

Three and a half billion years of evolution has produced uncountable billions of living species. But only one—humans—can think in symbols; recombine those symbols into infinite meanings; invent a technology to disseminate the message; worry how others might react to it; ponder the past; speculate about the future; and imagine the unknown.

The Human Spark, a three-part series hosted by actor, author and science buff Alan Alda, premieres January 2010 on PBS (check local listings). The series brings Alda's trademark humor and curiosity to an exploration of the latest scientific research into what differentiates us from all other species.

The series companion website, [The Human Spark Online](http://TheHumanSparkOnline), recently launched "[Share Your Spark](#)," a feature calling for user-generated content that lets individuals share their thoughts on the topic. This special online campaign enables the public to submit art, photos, video, or essays to the site. A selection of the best submissions will be broadcast along with the series.

The Human Spark is a co-production of Chedd-Angier-Lewis Productions and [THIRTEEN](#) in association with [WNET.ORG](#)—one of America's most prolific and respected public media providers.

"Alan Alda's fascination with how the world works is infectious," says Neal Shapiro, president and CEO of WNET.ORG. "In ***The Human Spark***, he displays his curiosity as he seeks answers to vexing universal questions. We are delighted to be carried along on his journey, and with Alan as our guide, there is no doubt it will be an interesting and entertaining one."

"What makes this series unique," says executive producer Jared Lipworth, "is that it crosses into so many different scientific disciplines. Archaeology, primatology,

neuroscience, behavioral psychology, even philosophy—Alan makes connections that transcend the normally narrow focus of the experts he meets.”

From the caves paintings of Lascaux to the plains of Kenya and from crucial chimp sanctuaries to the inner recesses of his own brain, Alda, the long-time host of the PBS series *Scientific American Frontiers*, observes our most defining abilities and examines how they arose. Whether he is holding a 120,000-year-old skull in his hands, firing throwing spears at a plastic deer, or contemplating his ability to read other people’s minds, he brings with him a warmth and familiarity that puts even the most camera-shy experts (and chimpanzees) at ease.

In the series, Alda makes tools like Neanderthals, checks out ancient jewelry made from human teeth (and knockoffs made from mammoth ivory), and even has his head examined to see where his most human abilities reside. Pointing out that humans and chimpanzees share 99 percent of our DNA, he takes viewers on a far-reaching quest to uncover why we are genetically so similar, yet behaviorally, a world apart.

Alda also participates in hands-on experiments that explore some of our defining human attributes—like the ability to teach, socialize, and cooperate—seeing first-hand how we use these skills to tackle new challenges and solve problems. “The biggest surprise of all for me,” says Alda, “is how close science has come to being able to say, ‘this is it’ ... this is the human spark.”

Launched more than a year before the broadcast premiere, [The Human Spark Online](#) lets viewers dig deeper into the exploration of what makes us human, with behind-the-scenes production [blogs](#) and [videos](#), web-only video segments, and original essays. On June 1, 2009, the site went live with “[Share Your Spark](#),” a call for user-generated video, photos, artwork, and essays exploring our human uniqueness. A selection of the best submissions will be broadcast along with the series.

WNET.ORG is also launching an educational initiative with public television stations and science museums around the country to develop local ***Human Spark***-related events and materials. Primary partners include Fort Wayne Public Television and Science Central; Twin Cities Public Television and the Science Museum of Minnesota; University of North Carolina Center for Public Television and the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences; and KAET and the Arizona Science Center. Alda will be attending events at three of these locations, and events will include screenings, science cafés, panel discussions, and museum exhibits. Five additional public television station/science museum partners were selected in June, and events will be scheduled to coincide with the broadcast premiere.

Major funding for ***The Human Spark*** is provided by the National Science Foundation, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, and the John Templeton Foundation. Additional funding is provided by The Winston Foundation. ***The Human Spark*** is a co-production of Chedd-Angier-Lewis Productions and THIRTEEN in association with WNET.ORG. Series host is Alan Alda. Graham Chedd is producer and executive producer. Larry Engel is director. For THIRTEEN, Jared Lipworth is executive producer. William R. Grant is executive in charge.

About WNET.ORG

New York public media company WNET.ORG is a pioneering provider of television and web content. The parent of Thirteen, WLIW21, and Creative News Group, WNET.ORG brings such acclaimed broadcast series and websites as [Worldfocus](#), [Nature](#), [Great Performances](#), [American Masters](#), [Charlie Rose](#), [Wide Angle](#), [Secrets of the Dead](#), [Religion & Ethics Newsweekly](#), [Visions](#), [Consuelo Mack WealthTrack](#), [Wild Chronicles](#), [Miffy and Friends](#), and [Cyberchase](#) to national and international audiences. Through its wide range of channels and platforms, WNET.ORG serves the entire New York City metro area with unique local productions, broadcasts and innovative educational and cultural projects. In all that it does, WNET.ORG pursues a single, overarching goal—to create media experiences of lasting significance for New York, America, and the world. For more information, visit www.wnet.org.

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