

tions, and more. Recommended. Aud: K, E, P. (J. Williams-Wood)

## NATURE, MATH & SCIENCE

### **BLAST!** ★★★

(2008) 2 discs. 74 min. DVD: \$249.99. Paul Devlin Productions. PPR.

The title of Paul Devlin's documentary stands for Balloon-borne Large-Aperture Submillimeter Telescope, which is a billowy white sphere carrying a metallic contraption that can "see" billions of light-years into space. Devlin travels to various locations, including Sweden, Canada, and Antarctica, to follow the team assigned to launch and recover the BLAST, which would hopefully enable scientists to view some of the oldest galaxies formed during the origins of the universe. Aided by animated graphics, the University of Toronto's Barth Netterfield explains how BLAST works (noting that "there are a lot of things that can go wrong"). The researchers (including astrophysicist Mark Devlin, the filmmaker's brother) receive assistance from NASA, while graduate students help with the assembly and maintenance. The project faces various obstacles along the way—uncooperative weather, technical difficulties, and unforeseen mishaps (a landing far off course in a remote part of Canada requires the services of an Inuit guide to lead the recovery crew and protect them from animal predators). While the participants also make personal sacrifices—spending large amounts of time away from families—their dedication is readily apparent, and their diverse religious and philosophical perspec-

tives add a larger context to the story. This two-disc set includes both the full-length documentary and a 56-minute classroom version, as well as a teacher's guide, and deleted scenes (including one with director Werner Herzog, who was filming *Encounters at the End of the World* at the same time). Recommended. [Note: the single-disc 56-minute classroom version of *BLAST!* is also available with public performance rights for \$169.95 from Films Media Group, [www.films.com](http://www.films.com).] Aud: H, C, P. (K. Fennessy)

### **The Classification of Organisms** ★★★

(2010) 20 min. DVD or VHS: \$99.95 (teacher's guide included). Visual Learning Company. PPR. ISBN: 978-1-59234-566-3 (dvd), 978-1-59234-565-6 (vhs).

Over 10 million species of living organisms exist on Earth, with more being discovered all the time. How do we describe and classify this incredible abundance of diverse life? This brief but informative program begins with an explanation of Carolus Linnaeus' hierarchy of classification—a binomial nomenclature system that has held up since the 18th century—before taking a look at current trends in taxonomy. Vocabulary words such as taxa, domains, evolutionary, phylogeny, and others are introduced and defined with onscreen graphics and computer animations, while excellent nature footage provides examples for the concepts discussed. Viewers will learn that evolutionary relationships and history form the basis for organizing living things, with species exhibiting both shared and different characteristics found within a taxonomic category. Part of the *Biology* series, other new titles include *Amazing Amphibians and Reptiles*, *Features of Fish*, *The Life of Birds*, and *Magnificent Mammals*. Backed with a