ProTalk

Discussion Files



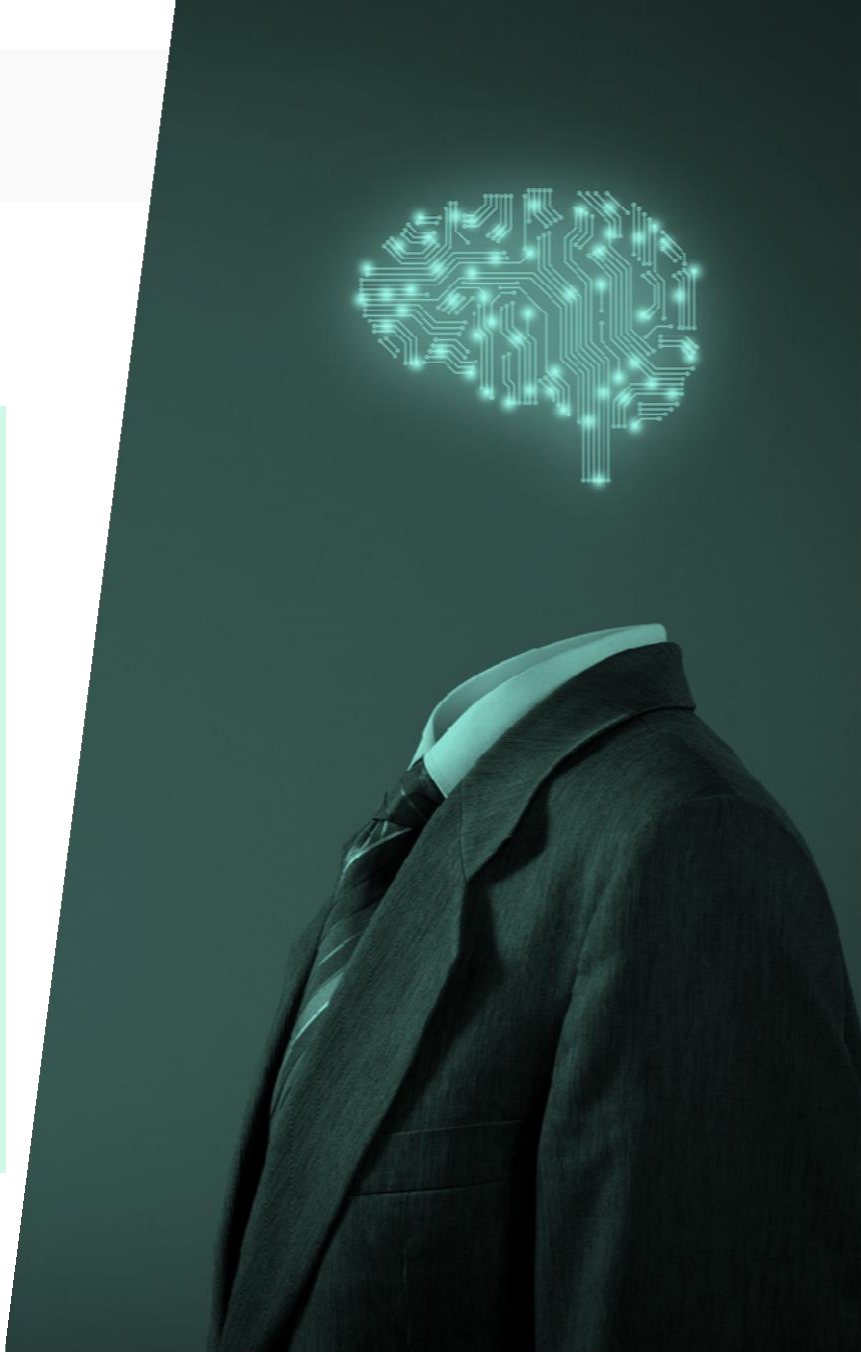
Language Center

C2. Einstein's stolen brain

Afaq Language Center

Goals

- Can read and understand a complex text about Einstein‘s brain.
- Can discuss the theft of Einstein's brain and speculate about the possible reasons behind it.



Stealing a **brain** might seem like the actions of a madman. But what if the same brain belonged to one of the most **intelligent** people in the world? Could studying it give us clues about our own intelligence?

Nobel prize-winners

Do you know any Nobel prize-winners? What did they win the prize for? Do you know anyone from your country who has won a Nobel prize?

Nelson Mandela

Marie Curie

Mikhail Gorbachev

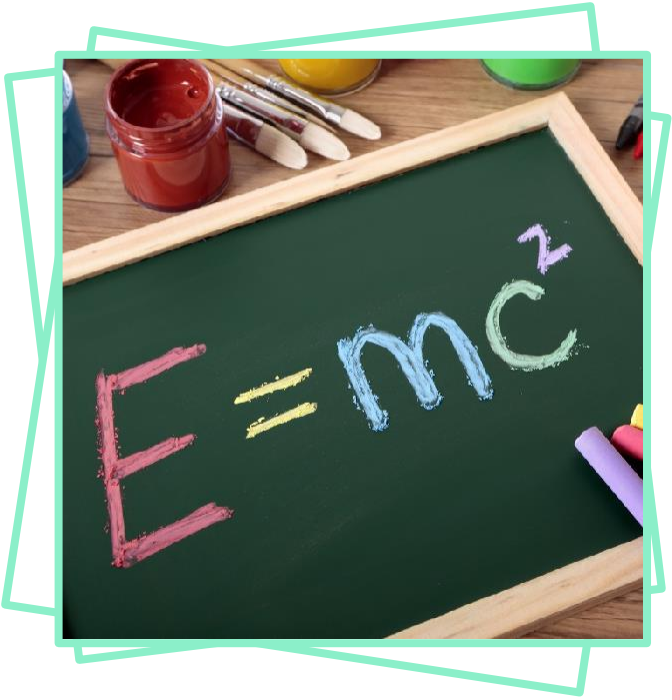
Answer the question

What do you think makes some people more intelligent than others?



Einstein

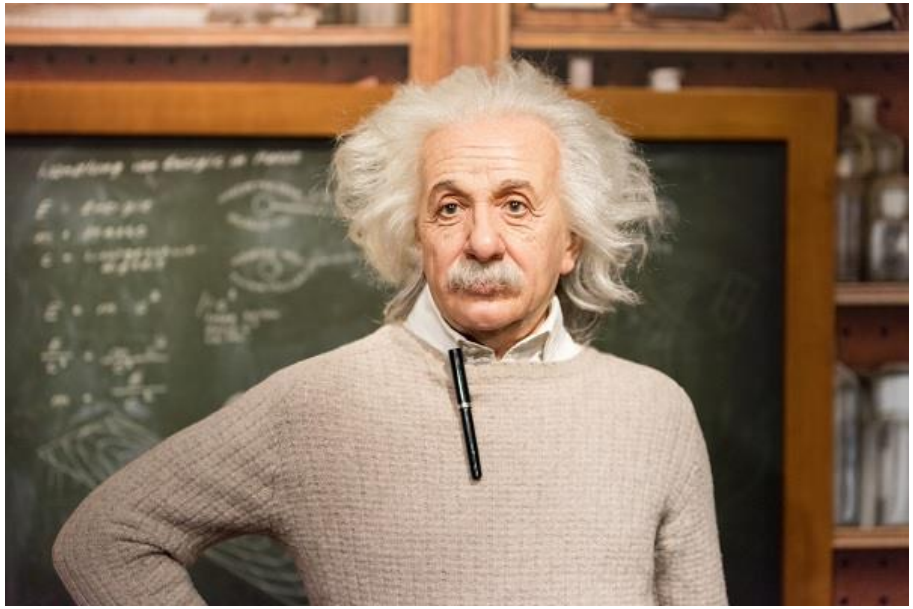
What do you know about Albert Einstein?





Read the text and summarize it.

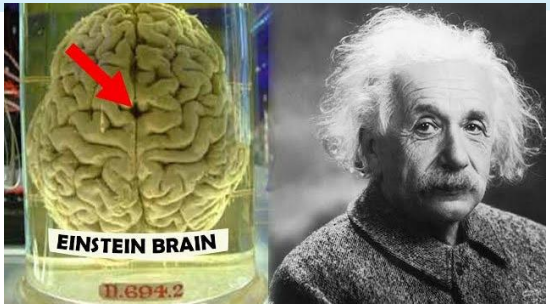
Einstein‘s stolen brain



Why would you steal a brain, you may ask. That’s a question for Dr. Thomas Harvey, a pathologist who stole Einstein’s brain after the scientist’s death in 1955. Harvey decided that he wanted to study the brain of the Nobel prize-winning physicist, in an attempt to glean the secrets of what made Einstein one of the cleverest people in the world.

Read the text and summarize it.

Einstein‘s stolen brain



Einstein had known that his brain would be of interest after his death, and had ordered for his body to be cremated and his ashes scattered secretly so as to “discourage idolaters”. His instructions, however, were disregarded by Dr. Harvey, who not only cut out Einstein’s brain but also took his eyes and gave them to the scientist’s eye doctor. Harvey’s excuse was that he knew the hospital for which he worked had permission to do the autopsy, and he had assumed that meant the brain too. This was a weak excuse, since Harvey in fact took the brain into his personal possession rather than giving it up to the hospital. Harvey did obtain permission from Einstein’s son to research the brain, but regardless, the hospital fired him after he refused to surrender the organ.

Do you know what these words mean? Why were they mentioned in the text?

idolaters

physicist

ashes

possession

autopsy

Nobel prize

to cremate

permission

to fire

pathologist

Read through the dialogue with your teacher. Do you agree with any of the theories?





Why do you **think** Einstein wanted to discourage idolaters?

I think he **might have been** a modest man, and didn't want to be famous after his death.

Yes, **maybe**. **If I had to guess**, **I'd say** that he knew there was nothing special about his brain and just wanted to rest in peace.

He **can't have thought** of himself as an idol. I **suppose** he knew he was quite an ordinary person, but with extraordinary intelligence.

He **may not have wanted** to be turned into a God-like figure either. He didn't want to be worshipped blindly.

Free talk

Using the language of speculation from the previous page, talk to your teacher about why you think Dr. Harvey stole Einstein's brain and kept it for himself.

fascination

curiosity

obsession

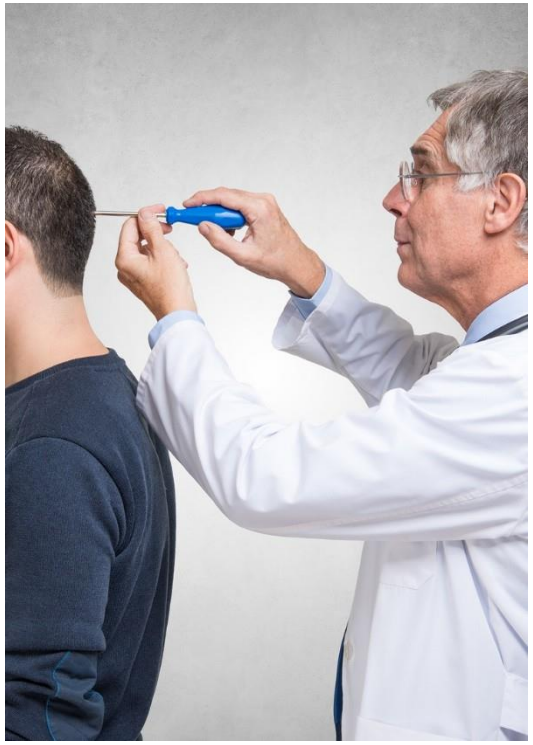
selfishness

What about you?

Have you ever done anything as strange as stealing a brain? Do you know anybody who has?

Free talk

Would you like to learn more about the workings of the brain? Is there anyone in particular that you would like to learn more about? How would you do this?



psychoanalysis

neurological studies

cutting up the brain after death

Doctors and scientists

In popular culture, doctors and scientists have a history of being a little bit crazy.

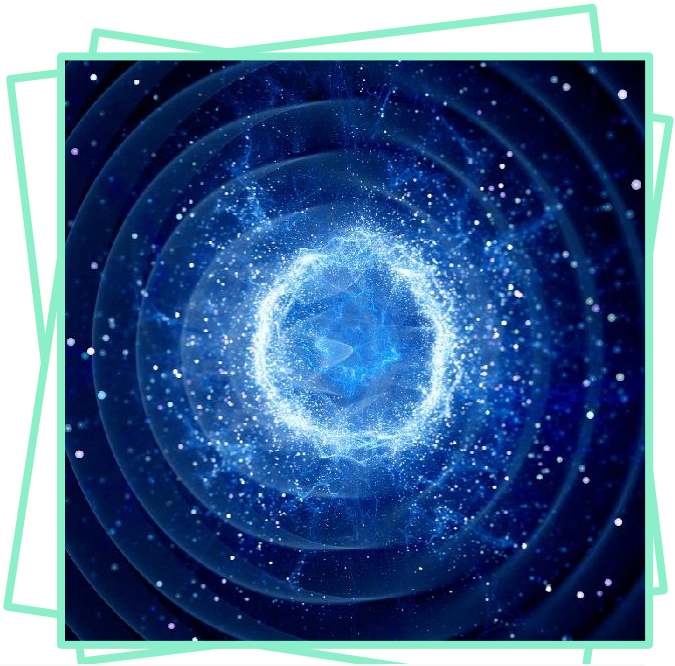
Can you think of any other doctors who, like Harvey, lost the plot a bit?

Do intelligence and madness go hand in hand?

Presentation

If you were Einstein, how do you think you would feel about all of this?

Imagine you are Einstein and you have the chance to speak from beyond the grave: who are you going to talk to and why? Are you going to pass on sage advice? ...or will you speak to your enemies?



Prepare a two-minute presentation.
Include several reasons to support your point of view.
Give your presentation to the class. Answer questions and get feedback.