

BOOK STUFF

#28

“Imagination is more important than knowledge” Albert Einstein

A limerick to make you laugh

The writer Brendan Behan was once invited to Oxford to take part in a debate about the difference between prose and poetry. His opponent spoke for almost two hours. Behan rose to his feet and promised to be brief. He recited an old Dublin rhyme:

*There was a young fella named Rollocks
Who worked for Ferrier Pollocks
As he walked on the strand
With a girl by the hand
The water came up to his ankles.*

“That”, declared Behan, “is prose. But if the tide had been in, it would have been poetry.”



Whose initials?

Who's the famous person with these initials?

1. H.N. Kiss me Hardy
2. E.P. First Lady of Argentina
3. R.A. Won the race to the most Southern place
4. J.C. Murdered on the Ides of Marc
5. J.W. Led PE sessions during 2020 lockdown
6. F.C. Revolutionary Cuban leader
7. B.D. Began life as Zimmerman
8. G.L. Walkers crisps and Match of the Day
9. A.E. Discovered the theory of relativity
10. A.H. Psycho, Vertigo, The Birds – and many more

Joke of the week

Why does Karl Marx drink only herbal tea?

Because proper tea is theft!



Out for the Count

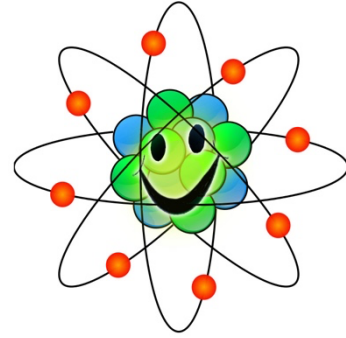
WE'RE TRYING to explain the size of atoms to a child who himself is the size of someone who needs help to reach the middle shelf in the fridge: the round of Gouda he wants sits up there like the gold ring on a carousel ride.

He wants to know, 'Is an atom smaller than a cheese?' 'Yes, it is.'

'But if I cut it up into the size of a dice, would that be an atom of cheese?'

'Cheese is made up of many, many atoms. An atom is so much smaller even than a dice.'

'So how small is an atom, even of cheese?'



We try to strike this nail on its infinitesimal head. 'An atom is smaller than a spider's knee joint. It is thinner than the chamber of a beetle's heart; it is tinier than a crab's stomach-tooth; it is smaller than the knot the wind ties in your hair; skinnier of course than a single hair. There are maybe a billion billion in the dot of this 'i'.' I tap a pen to the shopping list pinned to the fridge. Now it looks as if we might need to buy a speck. 'There are, say, fifty quintillion in a grain of sand.'

'Ridiculous!' he shouts. He drops down on the couch, puts his hands over his eyes. He thinks. Then he says, 'So how many when I shout "ridiculous!"?'

One of us makes a half-happyoooooossh. Like an old dog shown a big new stick. Not sure he's got the chops for it now. 'That's hard. What do we include? Your whole body that gives the yell? The tiny hairs and drum skins in our ears, all the nerves in our brains that catch the syllabic waves? The air particles that vibrate like a train that carries the cry?'

'Stop!' he gasps, 'Stop it, I hate it, atoms! Go away, horrible atoms!' and he climbs off the couch, lies down on the floor, like a man motion-sick from a fairground ride: a man who ate that one atom too much melted cheese before he buckled in.

We join him there. He is shaking. We put our arms around him the way the wilderness manuals say to treat someone who has been lost in a snowdrift. He has slipped into time's flooded winter river. Or his space capsule has ejected him into an arctic, foreign ocean. We need to bring his body core temperature back to normal. We want to call him up from the mind's dark province, the netherworld spiral. We say, *it's okay, you're safe; atoms aren't monsters; atoms aren't bad. We're all made of atoms. Right now, we're atoms holding atoms. We're atoms loving atoms.*

'But the all of them hurts. There's too many for inside my head.'

'You know, you won't ever have to count them, if you don't want to. Nobody ever has to count exactly how many there are.' He sits up, dazed. It has been a long ride. 'Oh! Oh, that's okay.'

Then he's laughing, and we join him, as if up through the carpet fibres we feel it: our skins and spines tingle with the dazzle and buzz of the full, entire earth's atomic spin.

Emma Neale

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With thanks to our volunteer, Katy

Answers

1. Horatio Nelson
2. Eva Peron
3. Roald Amundsen
4. Julius Caesar
5. Joe Wicks
6. Fidel Castro
7. Bob Dylan
8. Gary Lineker
9. Alfred Einstein
10. Alfred Hitchcock



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