



**MENSA**  
INTERNATIONAL

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# MENSA WORLD JOURNAL



*Photocup 2021 winning entry “Angler Angling” p7*

*what's in the MWJ this month...*



**- *Magritte: A Reflection on the Pandemic* by Hong Kong Mensan, Gary Lai, a runner up in the 2021 International Mensa Poetry Competition, is on p2, while the new Chair of Mensa Germany gives us some insight into their success on p3.**

**- On p4, meet British Mensan Shereen Sally who was in the finals of Ms Great Britain, 2021.**

**- p5 brings us more information on the fabulous Mensa first - the Mensa stamp introduced to the public by the Isle of Man Post Office.**

**- Two Mensan-authored book reviews are on p6, while on p7, read more about our cover story, the winning entry in Photocup 2021. The runners-up and finalists will feature in next month's MWJ.**

**- Supplementally... and Therese's Teasers feature as usual on pp10 and 12.**

**Happy reading!  
Kate**

## **Magritte: A Reflection on the Pandemic**

***Gary Lai of Hong Kong Mensa was one of two runners-up in the International Mensa Poetry Competition 2021. Congratulations, Gary!***

When shops were closed  
and workers huddled at home, hunched  
over their laptops –  
and when airplanes stopped flying in  
from disparate places on Earth and  
bus drivers stared at their passengers  
with masked expressions –  
I remember thinking how surreal  
it was, like a Magritte painting.  
The bowler-hatted man, buffered  
from the viewer by an apple,  
is so anonymous. Is it  
really the Great War once again, the mortality,  
rounded off, is but a string of zeroes?  
The universality of the person portrayed  
leaves room for imagination, transcending  
place and time. The fog of uncertainty  
pushes down like the perennial smog on  
this city – leaving its residents gasping  
for some semblance of relief,  
while sitting in the warm staleness  
of hope, sandwiched between the horrors of what  
came before and what is  
to come. In the meanwhile, they are  
who they are and where they are.  
The metaphors are replaceable, being  
creations of the painter's mind,  
however lonely it may be.

**Gary Lai**

**To celebrate Mensa's 75th birthday, Mensa Germany has produced a special edition of their MinD magazine. It's available for you to download here:**

**<https://www.yumpu.com/de/document/view/65912448/mensa-75th-anniversary-special-issue>**

# FROM THE EXCOMM

*Yu Jin Son, Chair, Mensa Germany*

**Dear Members,**

**How much does our Constitution affect you in your daily Mensa life?**

As a board member, it helps me as a guiding light on how to focus and prioritise our numerous projects. In Mensa Germany the board recently affirmed the vision in line with the Constitution: “We want to use intelligence for the benefit of humanity. For that, we want to establish a stereotype-free image of highly gifted people.” We see this as the necessary basis to enable an open dialogue and be able to choose ourselves how to present and ultimately have an impact.

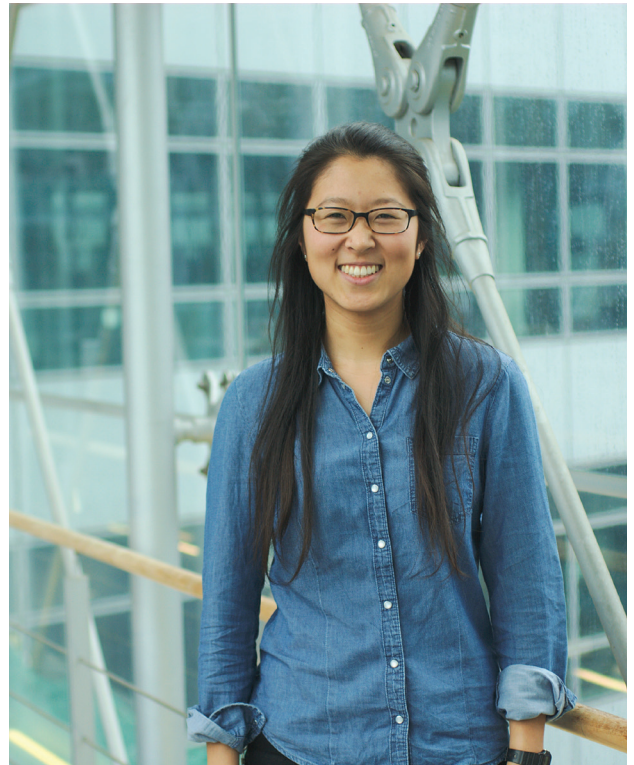
Specifically it means that our mission is to improve the environments of highly gifted people within and outside of Mensa, connect people from all walks of life through a variety of event formats and that the connections formed at Mensa may enrich you personally, professionally or in your leisure time.

Furthermore, we want to be an internationally easily accessible National Mensa. In order to achieve those things we need a resiliently set up organisation. With more than 15,000 members and a continuous growth trend, it’s time to reevaluate and restructure our organisation within Mensa Germany. After years of stable

staff size, we’re planning to expand beyond the handful we’re relying on at the moment to strengthen strategic initiatives.

What I really appreciated during this transformation process was the expertise and knowledge exchange so readily available through Mensa International. This whole other world where I can find peers to bounce ideas with and get an outside perspective that is still based on an understanding of the constraints I’m facing. Though it should not come as a surprise, I was still delighted that we share similar woes – so that we can solve them together and leverage each other’s experiences. That is the tremendous benefit I see for all National Mensas under the umbrella of Mensa International and I’m looking forward to contributing with the learnings we have at Mensa Germany.

And while we revamp the internal matters, in parallel, we’re setting up our external chan-



nels by updating our style guide at Mensa Germany. Now closer to Mensa International than ever, it’s the basis for our modern website relaunch (at <https://www.mensa.de>) that is responsive and tailored to interested parties. We now have our “digital face/business card” setup and are ready for 2022. To approach more prospective members again and convince them with the variety and fun to be found at Mensa.

An often said saying at Mensa Germany is that “Mensa is what you make of it.” I hope that 2022 becomes what you make of it!

**Yu Jin Son  
Chair, Mensa Germany**

## A New Charitable Venture...

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**Mensa members can be found in every corner of society – and Shereen Sally is delighted to be representing the society in the finals of Ms Great Britain 2021. The pageant is the latest adventure for Shereen, who lists helping to set up a bereavement charity, volunteering at a refugee camp in Calais while pregnant, and taking her new daughter on a four-month round-the-world trip amongst her previous activities.**

Shereen, from London, was inspired to enter the Ms Great Britain competition – which is distinct from the better-known Miss Great Britain – because of its focus on supporting charities, encouraging diversity and providing role models for women and girls.

“The pageant is about charity, raising awareness and funds through fantastic finalists for the chosen charities. It is about confidence and self-belief!” she said.

Shereen helped found and is a trustee of the *Loss Foundation*, a charity set up to support people bereaved by cancer. One of the charities supported by Ms Great Britain is *Cancer Research UK*, which increased her interest in the competition.

The event also supports *Alex’s Wish*, a charity seeking to eliminate Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy which is based in Leicestershire, where the Ms Great Britain finals were held in September.

Shereen adds: “I lost my brother five years ago when he was just 34 years old. He was my only sibling, and it was a huge loss and shock to my family. Losing him reminded me of not only how precious life is but also to make every day count. I entered the competition when 34 years old myself and I don’t want to let any opportunity pass me by.

“As a British-Asian woman, I never would have thought to apply for something with the title of Ms Great Britain. Growing up I struggled with my identity and not always knowing where I ‘fitted.’ I was born and bred in the UK but I looked different from my friends and our neighbours.

“I was eight years old when I first visited Sri Lanka where my parents were born. I wasn’t able to speak the native languages Sinhala or Tamil and my accent sounded different and funny to my cousins. Whilst my family looked like me, we dressed and sounded different. It was hard to know where I belonged.

“When I read about Ms Great Britain I was instantly drawn to it because it wasn’t a typical beauty pageant - it stands for values I hold close: empowerment and encouragement of diversity.”

She hopes that her inclusion in Ms Great Britain will inspire other



young people who don’t fit into a neat identity box to follow their dreams. She said her Asian background meant education was always going to be important in her life but, “I knew I was never going to be a doctor or an accountant, so I did a degree in journalism, and absolutely loved it.”

She did well at school without ever being “the best” - it was only as an adult she joined Mensa - and has gone on to enjoy a successful and varied career. She now manages student experience services at TEDI -London - a new higher education institution concentrating on engineering disciplines - and widening

participation.

A big part of her role is supporting students in hardship, and creating and implementing policies and practices in equality, diversity and inclusivity.

Over the years Shereen has raised over £15,000 for various charities such as mental health, cancer awareness and for orphanages in developing countries such as Sri Lanka, Ethiopia and Peru, as well as volunteering at them.

“Helping those that are in need is a huge passion of mine,” she says, adding that she wants to use the Ms Great Britain platform to raise awareness about charitable causes, different cultures and what it is to be a British/Asian/Sri Lankan.

**Anne Clarkson**

*Reprinted with kind permission from Mensa Magazine, editor Brian Page*

# A Mensa World First!

***A world first featured on a special issue of commemorative postage stamps to celebrate Mensa’s 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary.***

For the first time anywhere in the world, the Mensa stamps will include ‘what3words’ addresses as part of the design. ‘what3words’ is an app which can pinpoint a location, anywhere on earth, to within three metres, and is already being widely used by the emergency services to find casualties in remote locations.

The stamps were issued by the Isle of Man Post Office on October 1, the day of British Mensa’s 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. They will be in general circulation on the island itself, but commemorative packs of stamps, presentation packs and first day covers can be ordered at [iompost.com/mensa](http://iompost.com/mensa)

Presentation packs will also include a glossy brochure explaining

the history of Mensa as well as detailed information about the stamps themselves. Commemorative packs prices range from £9.27 to

£92.70.

British Mensa chief executive Cath Hill said: “The Isle of Man Post Office has worked with some iconic and well-regarded brands and organisations, and we are delighted that they approached us to celebrate Mensa’s anniversary in this way. The stamps are beautiful and very clever in their design and I expect a lot of members will want to own a set.”

The Isle of Man Post Office has previously worked with brands and organisations including the Royal Air Force, the Royal British Legion, the Stephen Hawking Foundation and the Freemasons to develop stamp issues.

The blue and gold stamps feature a Mensa-style puzzle as their centrepiece, but the clever designs include many more challenges and layers of information to search. There are ciphers to solve, GPS co-ordinates and ‘what3words’ addresses for places significant to both Mensa and the Isle of Man, significant dates in Mensa history, Mensa regions and newsletter names, and microtext featuring all 100+ SIGs.

The Isle of Man Post Office and the designer, Ben Glazier, worked with Mensa staff and members to develop the multiple layers to create an appropriate anniversary souvenir for the world’s oldest high IQ society.

**Anne Clarkson**

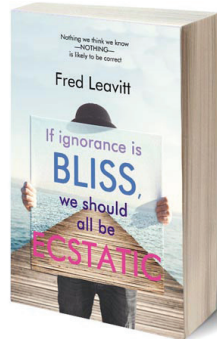


*Cath Hill, British Mensa’s Chief Executive, with Chris Leek, Chairman of British Mensa on October 1, 2021.*

## book reviews

**Fred Leavitt. *If Ignorance Is Bliss, We Should All Be Ecstatic.* Chicago, Ill.: Open Books Ltd, 2021. 297 pp. US\$19.95 paperback, \$9.99 Kindle. ISBN-13: 978-1948598446**

In this sequel to his 2018 book *The Profound Limitations of Knowledge*, which I reviewed here in the MWJ some years ago, Mensan pharmacology PhD Leavitt continues his quest to assert radical skepticism as the true philosophical stance for the doubting epistemologist. Many people, presumably Mensans among them, wish to believe that they are better than the believing masses in their approaches to what they believe they know, but Leavitt is radically skeptical about even this. Starting from Socrates, he traces the knowledge that we have no knowledge down through intellectual history, concluding that knowing you do not know is the only wisdom possible in an unknowable world. Nothing can be conclusively proven or disproven. Reality, if it exists, is utterly different from what it seems, although Leavitt admits early in chapter 2 that he wears “two hats,” one the everyday life hat in which he behaves as though he perceives reality in order to function and the other

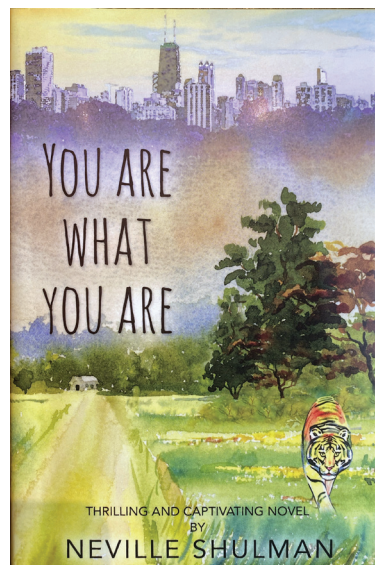


Fred Leavitt  
If ignorance is  
**BLISS,**  
we should  
all be  
**ECSTATIC**  
OPEN BOOKS  
ACADEMIC

his radical skeptic’s hat in which he proudly proclaims that no one can ever know anything. Most of this book reiterates Leavitt’s previous one, including his claim that there are “four pillars of knowledge” from which most of what we think we know derive, and all of them are unreliable. Any knowledge worker might be interested in reading this.

**Neville Shulman, CBE. *You Are What You Are.* Palm Beach, FL: Ironic Publisher, 2020. 244 pp. US\$13.70 hardback, \$18.00 paperback, \$15.18 Kindle. ASIN: B08Q5ZPF6W**

This is an adventure novel by a distinguished Mensan explorer who is, inter alia, a member of the Royal Geographical Society in Britain and the Explorers Club in New York. Although Shulman is a Commander of the



British Empire (CBE), his story is set in America among lowly folk, specifically a young man named Gabe who lives with his mother in Kansas after they are both devastated by Gabe’s father’s abandonment of them. Gabe keeps himself together by composing a jazz musical, that genre giving meaning and form to his life, but then he is devastated again when his mother dies. When Gabe discovers a fragment of a letter written by his father referring to a bar in Chicago called The Two Rivers, he leaves his girlfriend on a journey to find him. Shulman claims that his own travels among poor peoples of the world inspired him to write on such a quest among ordinary Americans, and the plot of this novel indeed demonstrates that even average citizens can embark on odysseys to discover the truth about their origins and

futures, perhaps like Homer’s Telemachus. Whoever you are, some time in your life you are bound to go on a journey to discover it.

**Books reviewed by  
Hal Swindall**

# Photocup 2021: The Competition to find the Mensa International Photographer of the Year

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**Theme: "Balance"**  
**Countries of Entrants**

Australia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Serbia, Singapore, Spain, South Africa, and The United States of America.

## International Panel of Judges

Serbia – Vuk and Ranko Rajovic  
Germany – Wolf-Dieter Roth  
Australia – Dale Wahren  
France – Agnes Bousteau  
Sweden – Björn Liljeqvist, International Chairman

**The Winner: John Page (Great Britain) with his photograph entitled  
"Angler Angling"**



*(continued on p11)*

## learning to learn...

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**Cognitive training designed to focus on what's important while ignoring distractions can enhance the brain's information processing, enabling the ability to "learn to learn," finds a new study on mice.**

"As any educator knows, merely recollecting the information we learn in school is hardly the point of an education," says André Fenton, a professor of neural science at New York University and the senior author of the study, which appears in the journal *Nature*. "Rather than using our brains to merely store information to recall later, with the right mental training, we can also 'learn to learn,' which makes us more adaptive, mindful, and intelligent."

Researchers have frequently studied the machinations of memory - specifically, how neurons store the information gained from experience so that the same information can be recalled later. However, less is known about the underlying neurobiology of how we "learn to learn" - the mechanisms our brains use to go beyond drawing from memory to utilize past experiences in meaningful, novel ways.

A greater understanding of this process could point to new methods to enhance learning and to design precision cognitive behav-

ioral therapies for neuropsychiatric disorders like anxiety, schizophrenia, and other forms of mental dysfunction.

To explore this, the researchers conducted a series of experiments using mice, who were assessed for their ability to learn cognitively challenging tasks. Prior to the assessment, some mice received "cognitive control training" (CCT). They were put on a slowly rotating arena and trained to avoid the stationary location of a mild shock using stationary visual cues while ignoring locations of the shock on the rotating floor. CCT mice were compared to control mice. One control group also learned the same place avoidance, but it did not have to ignore the irrelevant rotating locations.

The use of the rotating arena place avoidance methodology was vital to the experiment, the scientists note, because it manipulates spatial information, dissociating the environment into stationary and rotating components. Previously, the lab had shown that learning to avoid shock on the rotating arena requires using the hippocampus, the brain's memory and navigation centre, as well as the persistent activity of a molecule (protein kinase M zeta [PKM]) that is crucial for maintaining increases in the strength of neuronal connections and for storing long-term memory.

"In short, there were molecular, physiological, and behavioral reasons to examine long-term place avoidance memory in the hippocampus circuit as well as a theory for how the circuit could persistently improve," explains Fenton.

Analysis of neural activity in the hippocampus during CCT confirmed the mice were using relevant information for avoiding shock and ignoring the rotating distractions in the vicinity of the shock. Notably, this process of ignoring distractions was essential for the mice learning to learn as it allowed them to do novel cognitive tasks better than the mice that did not receive CCT. Remarkably, the researchers could measure that CCT also improves how the mice's hippocampal neural circuitry functions to process information. The hippocampus is a crucial part of the brain for forming long-lasting memories as well as for spatial navigation, and CCT improved how it operates for months.

"The study shows that two hours of cognitive control training causes learning to learn in mice and that learning to learn is accompanied by improved tuning of a key brain circuit for memory," observes Fenton. "Consequently, the brain becomes persistently more effective at suppressing noisy inputs and more consistently effective at enhancing the inputs that matter."

*(Sciencedaily.com November 10, 2021)*



# Our Brains Have a Fingerprint Too

**“I think about it every day and dream about it at night. It’s been my whole life for five years now,” says Enrico Amico, a scientist and SNSF Ambizione Fellow at EPFL’s Medical Image Processing Laboratory and the EPFL Center for Neuroprosthetics.**

He’s talking about his research on the human brain in general, and on brain fingerprints in particular. He learned that every one of us has a brain “fingerprint” and that this fingerprint changes over time. His findings have just been published in *Science Advances*.

“My research examines networks and connections within the brain, and especially the links between the different areas, in order to gain greater insight into how things work,” says Amico. “We do this largely using MRI scans, which measure brain activity over a given time period.”

His research group processes the scans to generate graphs, represented as colourful matrices, that summarize a subject’s brain activity. This type of modelling technique is known in scientific circles as network neuroscience or brain connectomics.

“All the information we need is in these graphs, commonly known as ‘functional brain connectomes,’” Amico reports. “The connectome is a map of the neural network. It

reveals what subjects were doing during their MRI scan—if they were resting or performing some other tasks, for example. Our connectomes change based on what activity was being carried out and what parts of the brain were being used,” says Amico.

A few years ago, neuroscientists at Yale University studying these connectomes found that every one of us has a unique brain fingerprint. Comparing the graphs generated from MRI scans of the same subjects taken a few days apart, they were able to correctly match up the two scans of a given subject nearly 95% of the time. In other words, they could accurately identify an individual based on their brain fingerprint.

“That’s really impressive because the identification was made using only functional connectomes, which are essentially sets of correlation scores,” says Amico.

He decided to take this finding one step further. In previous studies, brain fingerprints were identified using MRI scans that lasted several minutes. But he wondered whether these prints could be identified after just a few seconds, or if there was a specific point in time when they appear - and if so, how long would that moment last?

“Until now, neuroscientists have identified brain fingerprints using two MRI scans taken over a fairly

long period. But do the fingerprints actually appear after just five seconds, for example, or do they need longer? And what if fingerprints of different brain areas appeared at different moments in time? Nobody knew the answer. So we tested different time scales to see what would happen,” says Amico.

His research group found that seven seconds wasn’t long enough to detect useful data, but that around 1 minute and 40 seconds was. “We realized that the information needed for a brain fingerprint to unfold could be obtained over very short time periods,” says Amico.

His study also showed that the fastest brain fingerprints start to appear from the sensory areas of the brain, and particularly the areas related to eye movement, visual perception and visual attention. As time goes by, also frontal cortex regions, the ones associated to more complex cognitive functions, start to reveal information unique to each of us.

The next step will be to compare the brain fingerprints of healthy patients with those suffering from Alzheimer’s disease.

“Based on my initial findings, it seems that the features that make a brain fingerprint unique steadily disappear as the disease

*(continued on p11)*

# supplementally...

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by John Blinke

## The Body Electric

Are you ready for electric vehicles? The auto industry definitely is. Here's why! Make a list of the parts in a four cycle gasoline engine: Pistons, piston rods, wrist pins, lifters, crankshaft, flywheel, camshaft, oil pump, water pump, valves, valve covers, alternator, starter, air cleaner, radiator, injectors, spark plugs, ignition wires.

Now list the parts in an electric motor:

Rotor, stator.

So the simplified power plant alone is a huge saver of labor and potential quality problems, because every individual part is a possible failure point. Every part must be created, qualified, shipped, and assembled.

Electric vehicles could get even better in the future. Imagine having a motor at each wheel. Then, you could use a Hummer style suspension with maximum ground clearance. The vehicle's computer would handle all-wheel-drive and stability control. No transmission, clutch, differential, or torque convertor to deal with. You would just need the computer, power cables, and batteries. There are no tailpipe emissions from EVs, eliminating the need for expensive catalytic converters, exhaust pipes, mufflers, and manifolds.



Sure, we could ask for more powerful batteries, and they are coming. Charging stations are not as numerous as we would like. But, that will change. Remember, we did not have gas stations on every corner in 1886, when German inventor Karl Benz made his Benz Patent-Motorwagen. Infrastructure takes time to develop. But we need to fix the aged power grid anyway after decades of neglect. Now, we can rebuild it with electric vehicles in mind.

Automobiles are not alone in their drive toward electrification. Every kind of powered tool now has a battery powered replacement, including hand drills, screwdrivers, saws, lawnmowers, and even snowblowers. The future will run on batteries.

## Solid Progress

ScienceDaily, September 23, 2021. "A New Solid-State Battery Surprises the Researchers Who Created it."

The world needs better batteries. The best hope for the near future is solid state lithium batteries — as opposed to traditional lithium batteries that have a wet electrolyte. But there have been problems with the anode material. Engineers at University of California, San Diego, decided to try anodes made of silicon, even though they degrade quickly in the usual liquid electrolyte — and it worked! Silicon unexpectedly gets along fine with the solid electrolyte. And the energy density of silicon is much greater than for the graphite that was previously used for anodes. So this promises significantly better battery performance from lithium when it gets off the lab bench and onto store shelves.

## Books for Brains

New Scientist. October 2, 2021. P. 16. "Books in Childhood Home Provide Brain Boost in Later Life."

(continued from p10)

Want to stave off mental decline in your later years? Forget the crossword puzzles. Your best bet is to get a time machine and fill your childhood home with books. According to a study done by researchers at Ben Gurion University in the Negev, books in the home were a better predictor of mental performance in the golden years than social status or family income. The reason could be that early mental stimulation leads to more neurons in the brain, and this could provide a buffer against inevitable losses that occur late in life.

**JB**

Graphic: Michael Marais on  
Unsplash.com

(continued from p7)

The runners-up and other finalists will be announced in the February issue of the *Mensa World Journal* along with as many of their photographs that space allows.

Information about the Photocup 2022 competition will be included in the March *MWJ*, and this year the organisers would like suggestions from members as to what the 2022 theme could be.

Please send your suggestions to me at [mwjeditor@mensa.org](mailto:mwjeditor@mensa.org) or [katenacard1@gmail.com](mailto:katenacard1@gmail.com) by January 12.

Many thanks to the International Judging Panel for their not inconsiderable time and effort in judging this year's competition.

(continued from p9)

progresses," says Amico. "It gets harder to identify people based on their connectomes. It's as if a person with Alzheimer's loses his or her brain identity."

Along this line, potential applications might include early detection of neurological conditions where brain fingerprints begin to disappear. Amico's technique can be used in patients affected by autism, or stroke, or even in subjects with drug addictions.

"This is just another little step towards understanding what makes our brains unique: the opportunities that this insight might create are limitless."

*Neurosciencenews.com October 15, 2021*

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# THERESE'S TEASERS

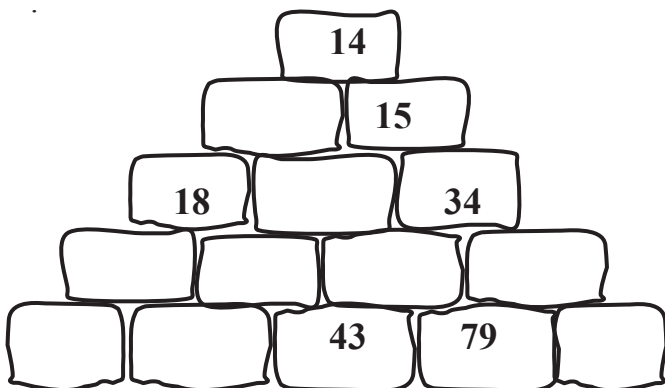
## Cryptosum

Each symbol represents a different digit from 1 to 9. The sum of the digits in each row and column is shown. Find the sum of the numbers along the diagonal line starting from the top left-hand corner.

♁	◆	□	●	13
Ω	∞	●	⊠	28
ε	⊗	⊠	Ω	27
∞	♁	ε	◆	11
17	15	22	25	?

## Cairn

The number on each stone represents the difference between the numbers in the two stones on which it sits. There is a two-digit number in each of the bottom stones, using the digits 0-9 once each.



## Rebus

Decipher the rebus to find a saying:



## Wordplay

- \* Which kind of poem can have its letters rearranged to spell types of musical compositions?
- \* Which friend can have its letters rearranged to make a circuit?
- \* Which health worker can have its letters doctored to form magical symbols?

## Cryptic Wordsquare

Each of the following has a 5-letter solution.

Place your answers in a 5x5 grid so that 1

Across – 1 Down, 2A = 2D etc.

- Principle X, back and forth.
- Sap will err again
- Medical device; model after gun!
- One is English plant
- Celebs in the sky!

You will need to rearrange the order of solutions.

## Answers

**Cryptosum:** 17 (1 + 5 + 9 + 2) **Cairn:** 25 60 43 79 81  
**Rebus:** Divide and conquer **Wordplay:** Sonnet (nonets); Pal / Lap; Nurse / Runes **Cryptic Wordsquare**  
**Answers::** Tenet Resin Stent Anise Stars **GRID:** Stars  
 Tenet Anise Resin Stent

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