



lingoda

# Einstein's stolen brain

SPEAKING

LEVEL  
Advanced

NUMBER  
C1\_1036S\_EN

LANGUAGE  
English

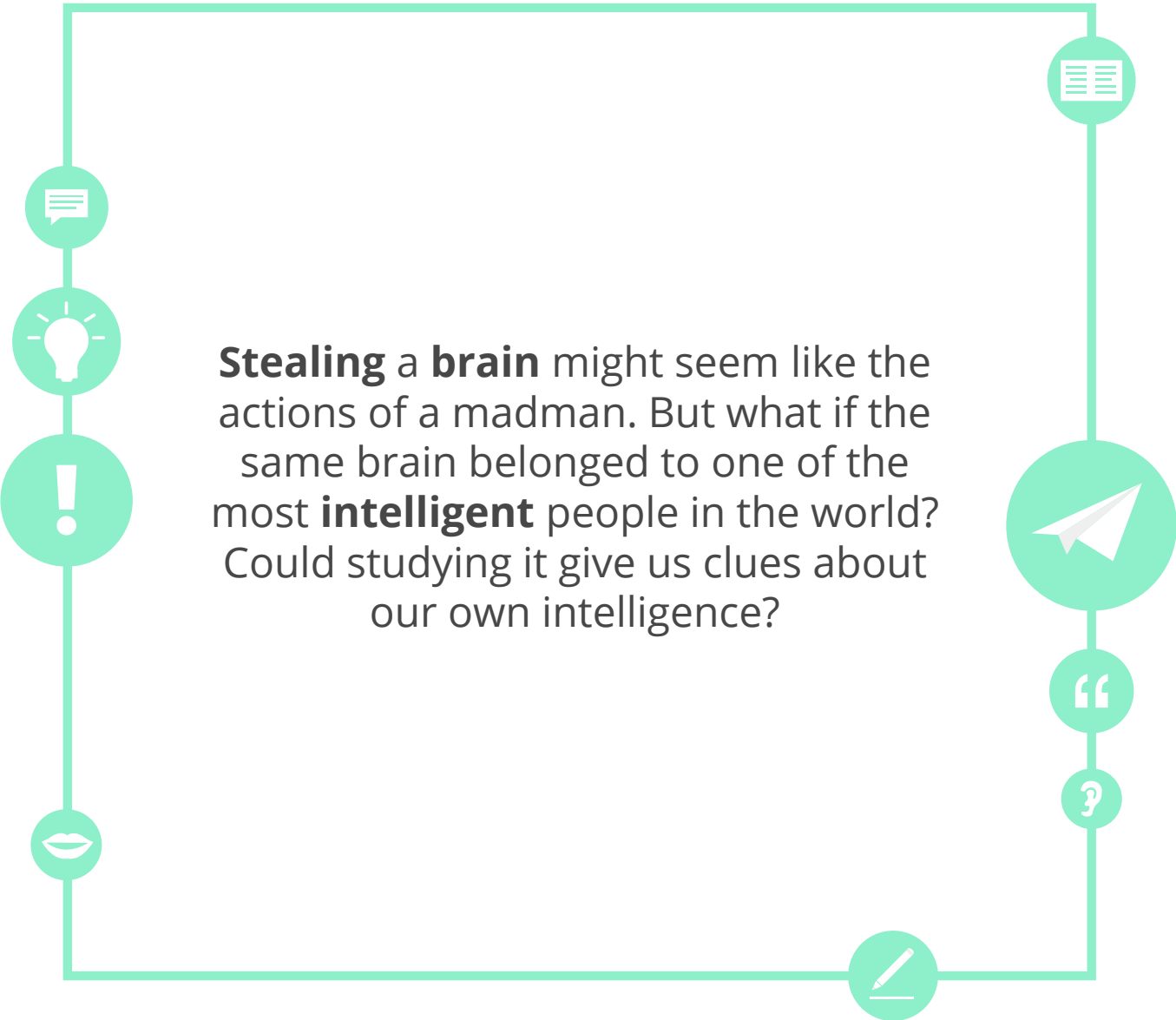




## Goals

- 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

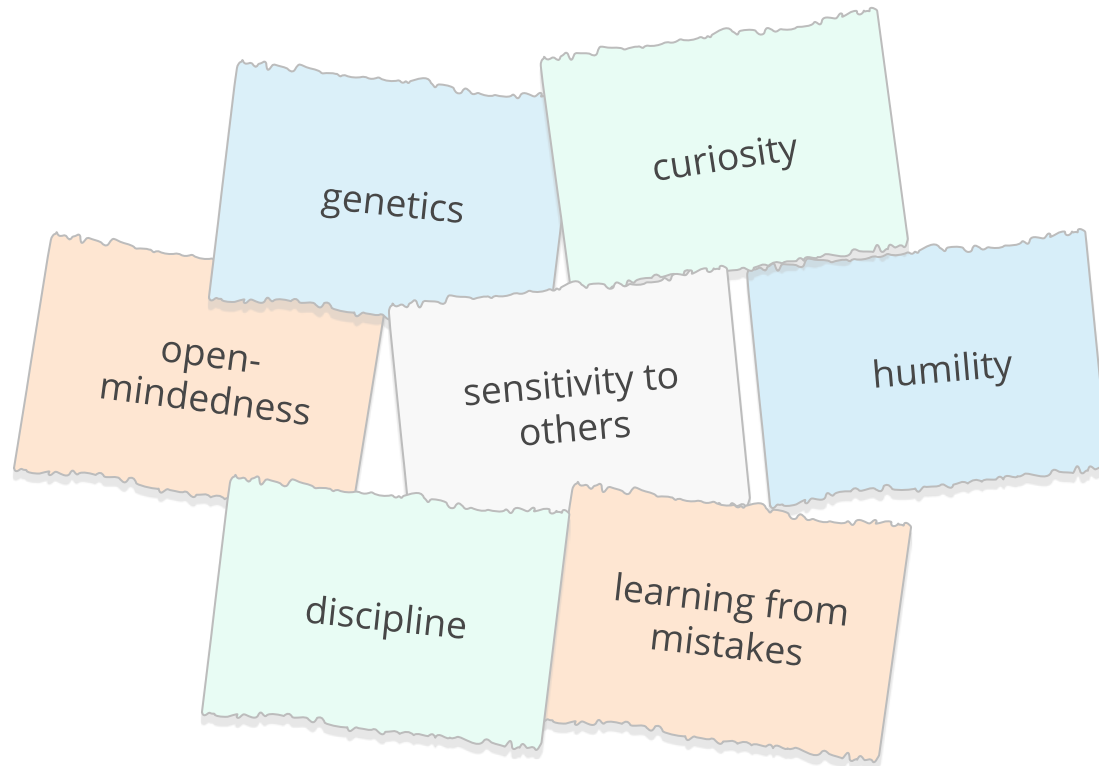
Marie Curie

Mikhail Gorbachev



## Answer the question

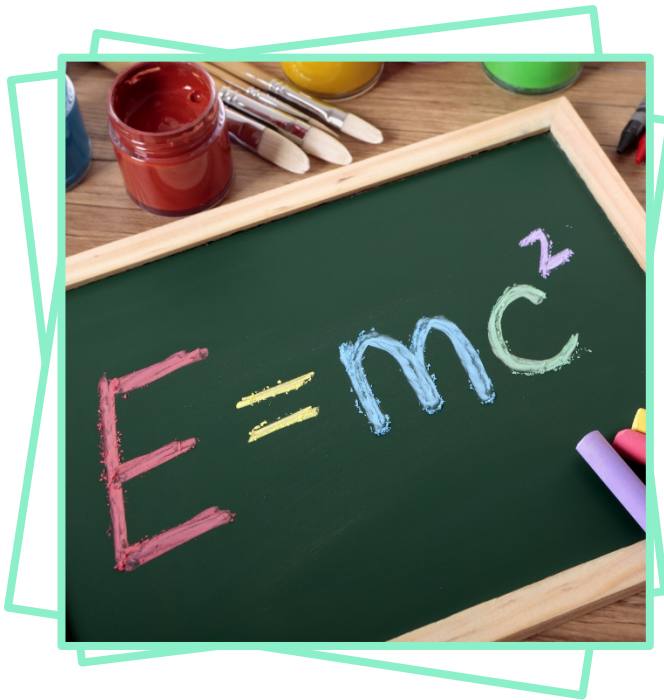
What do you think makes some people more intelligent than others?





# Einstein

What do you know about Albert Einstein?





## 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.



## 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

autopsy

possession

to cremate

Nobel  
prize

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?

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

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

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



## 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?**



## Get ready to listen



The next few slides will focus on training your listening comprehension. Your teacher will read an extract to you.



Here are some segments of the text. Can you put them in the order you hear them?

1

2

3

4

A

Early studies showed that Einstein's brain had abnormal numbers of certain cells and other differences between cells when compared to normal brains. Researchers hoped that Einstein's brain would be able to shed light on the foundations of intelligence.

B

Harvey kept the brain in a jar in his home office before going to the University of Pennsylvania and, with the help of a technician, cutting the brain into a thousand slides and 240 blocks.

C

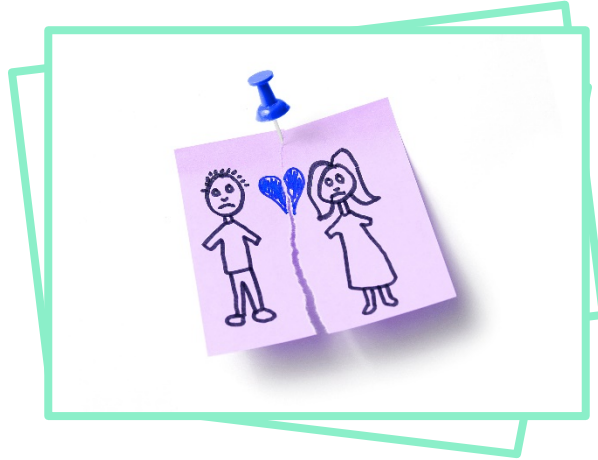
Today, you can see pieces of Einstein's brain in the Mutter Museum in Philadelphia.

D

It took Harvey until 1985 to begin researching the brain properly and to publish any research into it.



## Why were these things mentioned in the text?





## Answer the questions

Answer the following questions related to the text you listened to.



1

Why do you think Dr. Harvey did nothing with the brain for so many years?





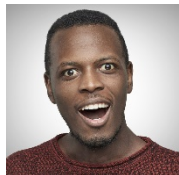
## Answer the questions

Answer the following questions related to the text you listened to.



1

Why do you think Dr Harvey did nothing with the brain for so many years?



2

Are you surprised that Einstein's brain turned out to be just like everyone else's?



## Answer the questions

Answer the following questions related to the text you listened to.



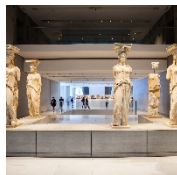
1

Why do you think Dr Harvey did nothing with the brain for so many years?



2

Are you surprised that Einstein's brain turned out to be just like everyone else's?



3

Would you like to go and see Einstein's brain in the Mutter Museum? Why (not)?



## 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

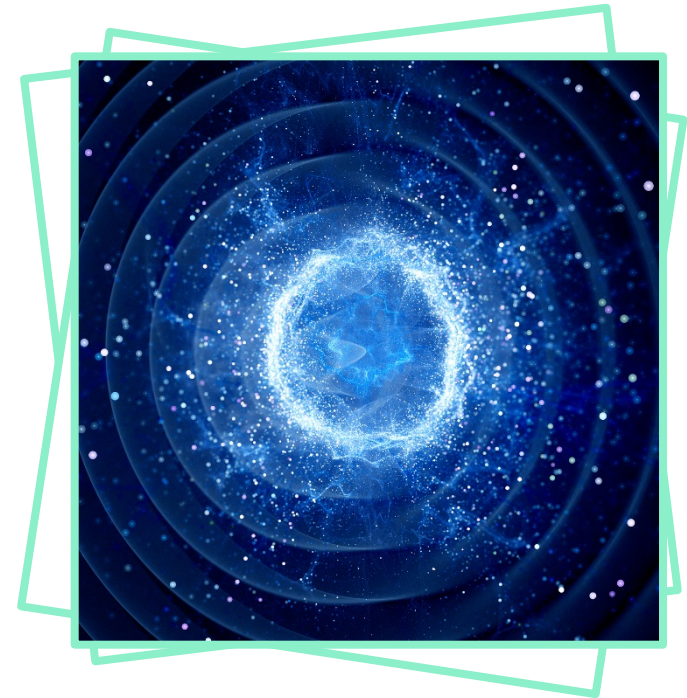
cutting up the brain after death



## A different perspective

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?





## 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?**



## Reflect on the lesson

Take a moment to review any new **vocabulary, phrases, language structures** or **grammar points** you have come across for the first time in this lesson.

Review them with your teacher one more time to make sure you don't forget!





## Answer key

**Exercise p. 14**  
1. B, 2. D 3. A, 4. C



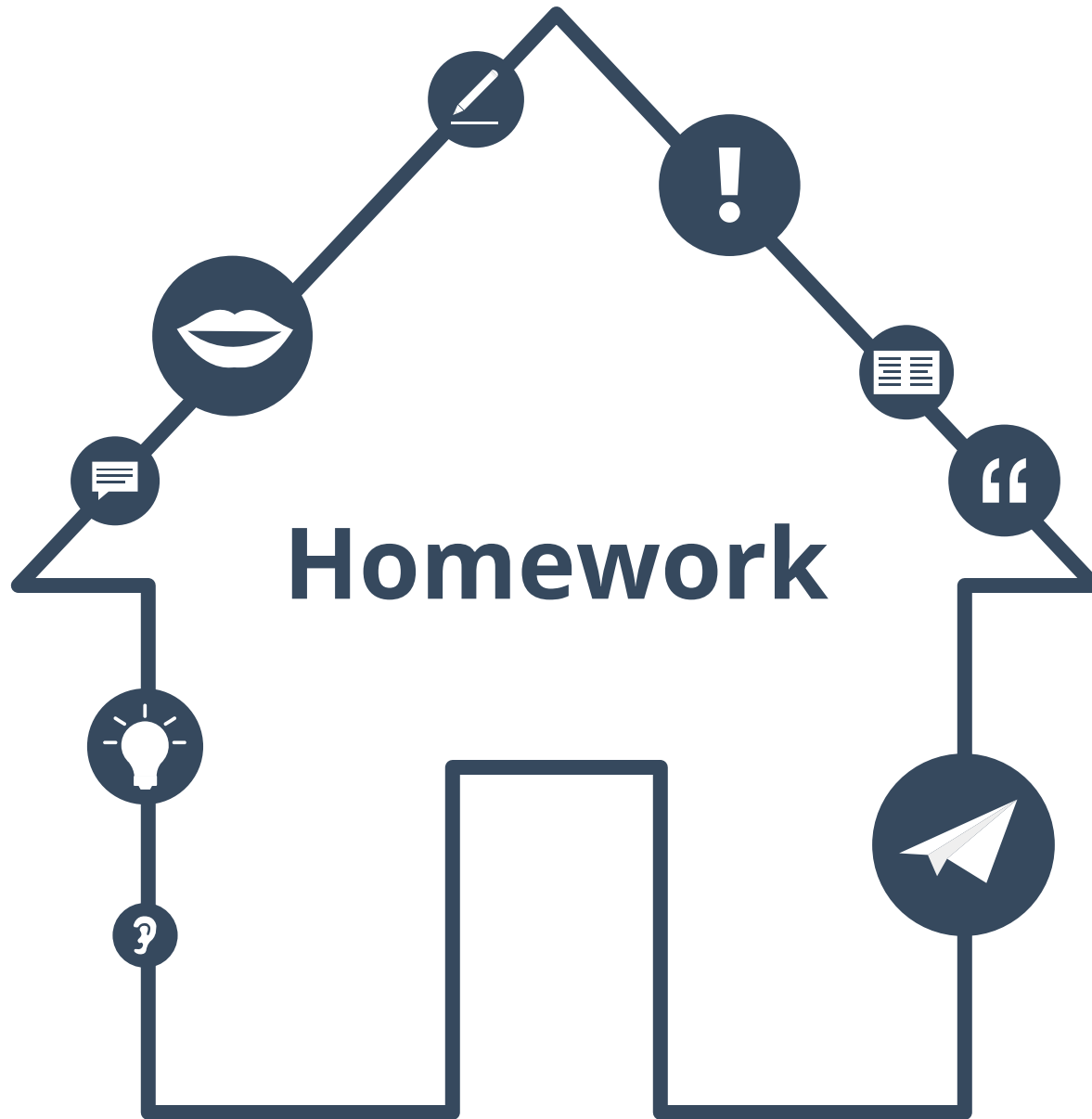
## Transcription

Harvey kept the brain in a jar in his home office before going to the University of Pennsylvania and, with the help of a technician, cutting the brain into a thousand slides and 240 blocks. Harvey gave a few pieces of the brain to another doctor to study, but kept the majority for himself. After a divorce, during which Harvey's wife threatened to destroy the brain, Harvey moved to the Midwest, where many years later he lost his licence to practise medicine after failing a competency exam. During his time in Kansas, Harvey is said to have kept the brain in a cider box under a beer cooler – a rather ignominious place for such an organ.

It took Harvey until 1985 to begin properly researching the brain and to publish any research into it. Early studies showed that Einstein's brain had abnormal numbers of certain cells and other differences between cells when compared to other normal brains. Researchers hoped that Einstein's brain would be able to shed light on the foundations of intelligence. However, the research has since been debunked and Einstein's brain is thought to be much the same as anyone else's.

Just before his death in 2007, Harvey donated the brain to Princeton Hospital, where he had taken it from in the first place. Today, you can see pieces of Einstein's brain in the Mutter Museum in Philadelphia.







## Match the beginnings and endings

1. After Einstein died,...

2. Einstein didn't want his brain to be studied and had asked...

3. Einstein asked to be cremated...

4. Dr Harvey gained permission to...

5. After a divorce, Harvey moved...

6. Early research showing that Einstein's brain was special...

7. Before his death in 2007, Harvey...

a. research the brain from Einstein's son.

b. has been debunked by later research.

c. for his body to be cremated.

d. to the Midwest, where he eventually lost his medical licence.

e. a pathologist stole his brain.

f. donated the brain to Princeton hospital.

g. in order to discourage idolatry.



# Unscramble

A

Dr Harvey  
brain.  
Einstein's  
stole

B

The  
fired  
hospital  
Dr Harvey.

C

in a jar.  
kept  
the brain  
Harvey

D

in 1985.  
started  
Harvey  
research



## Homework answer key

A. Dr Harvey stole Einstein's brain. B. The hospital fired Dr Harvey. C. Harvey kept the brain in a jar. D. Harvey started research in 1985.

### **Exercise p. 23**

1. E, 2. C, 3. G, 4. A, 5. D, 6. B, 7. F

### **Exercise p. 22**



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