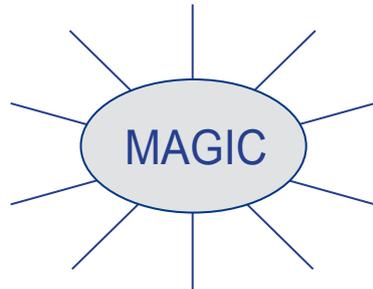


The magicians trying to change the world

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1 Warmer

- a. Complete the diagram with ten things that you associate with magic.



- b. Compare your answers in small groups.

2 Key words

Find key words in the article that match the definitions below. The section numbers are given to help you. Then read the article and note how the words are used in context.

Intro

1. a lot of lively and noisy activity that is intended to be impressive and exciting _____
2. notice something _____
3. the act of tricking someone _____

Section 1

4. decorated with complicated patterns or shapes _____
5. objects used on stage or during a performance _____
6. small and crowded _____

Section 2

7. a link or door into another place or dimension _____
8. hides or masks _____
9. in a very important or basic way _____

Section 3

10. someone who has a degree from a university _____
11. great skill in using your hands or your mind _____
12. the undersides of your hands, between your fingers and your wrist _____

Section 4

13. the ways in which separate things are similar to each other _____
14. a meeting with an expert or a professional person to get advice or discuss a problem, especially a meeting with a doctor _____

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The magicians trying to change the world – one card trick at a time

Some magicians are using their skills to help surgeons, refugee children and even imagine a better future

Claire Armitstead

9 September, 2019

With its razzmatazz, secrecy and ritualized trickery, being a magician is not a calling most associate with a social conscience. But there is an intellectual dimension to magic that was already old the first time someone thought of putting an egg into a bag and then making it disappear (believed to be in the 16th century). Good magicians have always understood and exploited the psychological blind spots of their audience. In 1876, a magician known as Professor Hoffmann wrote a book for boys, *Modern Magic*, which explained how classic tricks were performed. “He believed young people should learn to perform magic because it would be useful in their professional lives,” one present-day magician, Will Houstoun, tells me. “Magic teaches you to stand in front of a room and talk, problem-solve, deceive and spot deception.” Today, the practical applications of magic are being used by a new generation to conjure up a better world.

1 The ‘magic humanitarian’

Jamie Balfour-Paul

Balfour-Paul, whose stage name is Jamie Jibberish, is a former charity worker who works his magic on some of the world’s most deprived children in refugee camps in the Middle East and Africa. He travels with little except an ornate wooden box he picked up years ago in Egypt. “I try to make a point of getting everything into that box, and I choose props based on familiarity – newspapers, bottles, ropes,” he says. “But in Lebanon, where I am based, if you don’t have a rabbit, you might as well go home.” At one point, he had three of them hopping around his Beirut flat because they kept growing too big to fit into a hat. He has set up a charity called Magic for Smiles. “Being in a community where your parents don’t have any status and you can’t play because it’s quite cramped is very stressful. There’s obviously happiness and de-stressing through entertainment, but magic also helps with concentration, creativity and interaction. Funding

is a problem, and it’s quite a lonely life; just me and my bunnies driving around. But it’s worth it to see the children’s faces light up.”

2 Magicians in residence at Cambridge University

Clive Wilkins and Nicky Clayton

“Pick a number between one and a hundred,” says Clive Wilkins. For him and his professional partner, Nicky Clayton, magic is no less than a portal to the future. Clayton is a professor of comparative cognition in the psychology department at Cambridge University, where Wilkins – an artist and novelist as well as a magician – has a permanent residency.

But their showbiz style conceals a serious academic purpose, which they are promoting around the world in illustrated lectures designed to fundamentally challenge the way people think. “The argument we have been developing is that magic reveals a number of interesting roadblocks in our thinking,” says Clayton. “Magic capitalizes on these blind spots; magic occurs in the mind of the spectator, not the hands of the magician.”

“We suggest that the human brain has been very good at creating civilization over the last millennia, but in a postmodern world, scientists and artists are wondering what the next development is going to be. Perhaps the way forward is to find an alternative way of seeing.”

3 The student magician

Cat Lee

“At 19, I couldn’t cook or pour a drink and I’d never eaten with a knife and fork,” says Cat Lee. She is now a poised 22-year-old law graduate with cerebral palsy. The turning point in her life came when her mother signed her up for a summer camp for young people with hemiplegia, a condition that leaves one side of the body incapacitated. The camps are run by Breathe Arts Health Research, a charity set up more than a decade ago by a group of magicians who believed the dexterity used in magic tricks could be used therapeutically to help young people who had little support from the health system.

Working with occupational therapists from a London hospital, they discovered that some children could make life-changing progress in coordination – and confidence – in just a fortnight. Its co-founder, David Owen, demonstrates a trick – the mystery of the jumping coins – in

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which money appears to leap from one place to another. Repeating it in slow motion, he shows how it involves a series of ten movements, from pinching the coins to pick them up to pressing both palms flat on the table and turning hands over together and separately. "It's a professional-level piece of magic that some children master and others don't, but for all of them, it is building skills that most of us take for granted," he says.

Cat was one of their successes, who left the ten-day course capable of building an independent life and is now a mentor, encouraging younger children at the camps. She doesn't do magic tricks herself but uses the props to exercise her hands. She credits the performance skills she learned with enabling her to overcome her physical difficulties and the resulting psychological ones. Her tears well up as she recalls the camp's impact on her life. "Now I am who I am, and I can never thank them enough."

4 The medical magician and the surgeon

Will Houstoun and Roger Kneebone

"As a student, I saw medicine as a science. As a surgeon, I saw it as a skill. As a GP, I saw it much more as a performance, and as a patient, I see it as all three," says Professor Roger Kneebone.

Kneebone runs a master's course in surgical education at Imperial College, London, and the man with him is Will Houstoun, one of the UK's leading close-up magicians. In 2014, they started working together to investigate the parallels between magic and surgery.

"First, I was looking at dexterity, as both involve sleight of hand," says Kneebone, "but most of a surgeon's time isn't spent in the operating theatre."

There is a separation between a magic trick and the techniques used to make it work. "If you want someone to look at an object, look at it. If you want them to look at you, look at them," Houstoun says.

A medical consultation is a complicated process in which a surgeon has to listen to a patient while simultaneously making judgements and taking clinical notes. The ability to create a connection is as important to clinical practice as it is to a magic show, they explain. For the patient, it's the difference between feeling heard and safe, or just being another statistic. "A medical consultation is all about two things: what is really going on and what seems to be going on," Kneebone says.

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3 Comprehension check

Complete the table using information from the article.

name	works with ...	works in ...	profession / studied to be / used to work as ...	now works as ...	How is magic important to their work or life?
Jamie Balfour-Paul					
Clive Wilkins					
Cat Lee					
Roger Kneebone					

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4 Useful phrases

Underline these phrases in the article. Then match them with their meanings.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 1. psychological blind spot | a. when people look really happy |
| 2. pick up | b. used for saying that it would not make any difference if you did something else |
| 3. make a point of | c. clever and quick use of your hands, especially when performing a magic trick |
| 4. might as well | d. a time when an important change takes place in a situation, especially one that makes it better |
| 5. faces light up | e. an area that your mind does not understand well |
| 6. permanent residency | f. fail to appreciate something, especially as a result of overfamiliarity |
| 7. turning point | g. involving working with people who are ill, rather than in a laboratory |
| 8. take for granted | h. find or buy something |
| 9. sleight of hand | i. an indefinite period of time during which a writer, poet, artist etc is invited to work at a university or other organization |
| 10. clinical practice | j. be certain that you do something |

Now ask and answer these questions in pairs.

1. What do many people take for granted?
2. What do you make a point of doing every single day?
3. What was a big turning point in your life or career?
4. On what occasions would you hope to see children's faces light up?
5. Have you ever picked up anything beautiful or exciting in a market?

5 Discussion

- Have you ever been to a magic show?
- Do you know any magic tricks?
- Do you know anyone who can perform magic tricks? Give more details.

6 Webquest

- a. Find out more about the two organizations in the article, Magic for Smiles and Breathe Arts Health Research.
 - Watch any videos you come across on their websites.
 - Which of the two charities would you prefer to donate money to? Give reasons for your answer.
- b. Find a video that shows how to do simple magic tricks. Choose one trick and learn it so that you can perform it in your next lesson or during a future class party or celebration.

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KEY

2 Key words

1. razzmatazz
2. spot
3. deception
4. ornate
5. props
6. cramped
7. portal
8. conceals
9. fundamentally
10. graduate
11. dexterity
12. palms
13. parallels
14. consultation

4 Useful phrases

1. e
2. h
3. j
4. b
5. a
6. i
7. d
8. f
9. c
10. g

3 Comprehension check

name	works with ...	works in ...	profession / studied to be / used to work as ...	now works as ...	How is magic important to their work or life?
Jamie Balfour-Paul	children in refugee camps	the Middle East and Africa	charity worker	a magician / entertainer called Jamie Jibberish	brings happiness to the children, alleviates stress, helps them to concentrate, be creative and interact with others
Clive Wilkins	Nicky Clayton (professor of psychology)	Cambridge University	an artist and novelist	has a permanent residency at the university; holds lectures around the world together with Nicky Clayton	to help reveal a number of interesting roadblocks in our thinking
Cat Lee	children with hemiplegia	camps run by the charity Breathe Arts Health Research	studied law	a mentor at the camps	taught her how to overcome her physical (and resulting psychological) difficulties
Roger Kneebone	Will Houstoun (a close-up magician)	Imperial College, London	medical doctor and surgeon	a lecturer on a master's course in surgical education (and perhaps also still a surgeon)	investigates the parallels between surgery and magic