

Teflon diet, garlic milk and zebra cows triumph at 2025 Ig Nobel prizes

Level 1: Elementary

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

- What scientific discoveries do you think are the most interesting or important? Why?
- If you could investigate anything using scientific research, what would you choose and why?

2 Key words

a. Write the words in bold in the article next to the following definitions.

1. the exact time when something happens _____
2. lines of colour on something, often in a pattern _____
3. things you win in a game or competition (usually money or a gift) _____
4. used before a person's name to show that they died _____
5. having a bad or unpleasant smell _____
6. the study of a subject to discover new facts or ideas _____
7. damaged by fire or heat so that it becomes black _____
8. a change caused by something else _____

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity.

1. Millions of people around the world loved the _____ Queen.
2. We left the cake in the oven for too long and it was _____.
3. My cat has black and white _____ on its body.
4. The relay team won _____ in the 100- and 200- metre events.
5. Scientists are doing _____ to see if there is any life on Mars.
6. The rubbish bin is very _____. Can you clean it?

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7. Drinking too much coffee can have a(n) _____ on how well you sleep.
8. At _____ when I left the restaurant, my date arrived—45 minutes late!

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- 1 The Ig Nobel awards happen every year and give 10 **prizes** to scientists who carry out **research** into unusual or funny things. For example, one group of winners discovered that vodka helped people speak a foreign language better, another group found out that insects didn't bite cows that were painted to look like zebras. A doctor even won a prize for measuring his nails for 35 years! However, the Ig Nobel prizes are very different from the Nobel prizes. People receive those for more serious and more important scientific research.
- 2 Food was a common theme in the 2025 Ig Nobel awards. A study into the **effect** of diet on mothers' milk flavour won a prize. It turns out that babies drank for a longer time after their mothers ate certain foods. An Italian team won the physics prize for understanding **the point** at which cooked pasta sticks together. Another group won a prize for discovering that lizards in Togo preferred "four cheeses" pizzas.
- 3 Indian researchers won the engineering prize for coming up with a shoe rack that stopped trainers from being **smelly**. The rack had a lamp inside that got rid of the smell. It also **burnt** the trainers. The psychology prize went to a team that found that when people were told they were intelligent, they believed it, and then started telling everyone how clever they were!
- 4 Dr Tomoki Kojima at the National Agriculture and Food Research Organization in Japan won the biology prize. His team showed that cows got fewer insect bites when scientists painted them with black **stripes** to look like zebras. "I couldn't believe it," he said. "I thought I was dreaming."
- 5 The literature prize went to the **late** Dr William Bean of the University of Iowa. In his papers, he measured his fingernails and toenails over 35 years. His son Bennett said the whole family took part in the effort. "He was interested in the world, and we were part of it," his son Bennett told the Guardian. "He would have loved this prize!"

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3 Comprehension check

a. Read the article and answer the questions.

1. What is the difference between Ig Nobel prizes and Nobel prizes?

2. What did Dr Bean do for 35 years?

3. What happened to babies after their mothers ate certain foods?

4. Why did Dr Kojima say, 'I thought I was dreaming'?

5. What TWO things did the shoe rack lamp do?

6. What did people do after they were told they were intelligent?

4 Key language

a. Find these phrases in the article. Then match them to the correct definitions.

1. carry out

- a. joined in an activity with other people

2. found out

- b. thinking of or creating a new idea, plan or answer

3. coming up with

- c. stopped having something that you didn't want or need anymore

4. got rid of

- d. learned new information, especially something surprising

5. took part in

- e. to do, and finish, a plan, a task or research

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b. Complete the sentences with the phrases from the previous activity.

1. Caitlyn finally _____ the old sofa because it was broken.
2. The vet will _____ more tests on my dog next month.
3. Zac _____ in the school play last year.
4. Mr Lovatt is good at _____ fun games for the class.
5. We _____ that the museum closes at 2pm on Sundays.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- Which research from the text do you think is the most interesting and why?
- What research would you carry out to win an Ig Nobel prize?

6 In your own words

a. Work in pairs to research other awards that celebrate unusual things (e.g. the Golden Raspberry awards for the worst films, or the Pluto award for the most boring or pointless tourist attractions). Gather information on the following things:

- when and why they created the award
- who organises it
- how they choose the winners
- one or two memorable winners and what they won the award for

b. Prepare a presentation and present it to your classmates. Then decide as a class which award you like best.