

The REALL News

The official newsletter of the Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land

"It's a very dangerous thing to believe in nonsense." — James Randi

Volume 13, Number 5

June/July 2005

REALLity Check by Wally Hartshorn

Summer is here already! Who would have thought it? Well, if you subscribe to the theory that the earth orbits the sun, then I guess you were expecting it. However, a 2001 National Science Foundation survey found that 25% of Americans responding believe that the sun orbits about the earth.

Let me repeat that. **25% of Americans responding believe that the sun orbits the earth.** I guess it shouldn't be surprising that we're having problems getting people to accept Darwin when one person in four hasn't caught up with Copernicus! (By the way, although one quarter of Americans still believe in an earth-centered solar system, that's better than in Europe, where one third believe so.)

Court TV's "Psychic Detectives" Now Playing on NBC

Do you watch Court TV? Neither do I, not even during the O.J. Simpson trial. However, apparently enough people tune into Court TV to watch a non-fiction series called "Psychic Detectives" that it has attracted the attention of NBC. Starting June 8, NBC has begun airing 8 half-hour episodes in one hour shows. Assuming they do 2 episodes per week for 4 consecutive weeks, they'll be showing the last episode just about the time this newsletter goes into the mail.

With any luck, the ratings will be poor enough that they

won't choose to air additional episodes after that.

Tulsa Zoo Ordered by Park Board to Create Creationism Exhibit

In the "surely this must be a hoax" department, the Tulsa Park and Recreation Board has instructed the Tulsa Zoo to create an exhibit that presents the Biblical account of the creation of the world in 6 days. The "logic" behind this instruction is that, since the zoo has displayed a statue of the Hindu god Ganesh (who looks like an elephant) near the elephant exhibit, and since the zoo has a globe inscribed with the American Indian saying, "The earth is our mother. The sky is our father.", then the Christians require equal time with an exhibit depicting the creation of the world.

I'm stunned by this display of logic — and very glad that I don't live in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

<http://www.cnn.com/2005/US/06/08/zoo.display.ap/>

Dutch minister puts Darwinism in the dock

In the Netherlands, the Minister of Education, Maria van der Hoeven, brought up the topic of Intelligent Design on her blog and announced that she wanted to start a debate on the topic, which could

be incorporated into the educational curriculum.

Why did she raise the issue? Well, apparently some Muslims object to evolution and she views a discussion of Intelligent Design as a way to help integrate Muslims into Dutch society.

I would hope that Muslims and Christians both can participate in science education by discussing **science**, not by retreating from science whenever it conflicts with their religious beliefs.

<http://www2.rnw.nl/rnw/en/currentaffairs/region/netherlands/nl060610>

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Purpose

The Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land is a non-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) educational and scientific organization. It is dedicated to the development of rational thinking and the application of the scientific method toward claims of the paranormal and fringe-science phenomena.

REALL shall conduct research, convene meetings, publish a newsletter, and disseminate information to its members and the general public. Its primary geographic region of coverage is central Illinois.

REALL subscribes to the premise that the scientific method is the most reliable and self-correcting system for obtaining knowledge about the world and universe. REALL does not reject paranormal claims on *a priori* grounds, but rather is committed to objective, though critical, inquiry.

The REALL News is its official newsletter.

Annual Membership Rates: Regular, \$20; student, \$15; family, \$30; patron, \$50 or more; subscription only, \$12.

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From the Chairman

Wally Hartshorn

I hope everyone has a safe and fun Independence Day holiday this year! My wife and I will undertake something a bit more dangerous and exciting than normal — we'll be going on our first overnight trip with our 6-month-old son!

This will be the first time Orlando has slept away from home (not counting naps in the car seat during trips to the store). We'll be going to southern Illinois to enjoy a gathering of friends from my former hometown (Centralia), as well as visiting with my brother and his wife, who are expecting their first child in October! Hopefully sleeping in a hotel room won't be a problem for him — or us!

June Picnic

The annual picnic we held in June went fairly well. We had a decent turnout (but still had plenty of people we could complain about for not showing up) and the clouds opened up and dumped rain for about 5 minutes near the start of the picnic. We were under a picnic shelter, so we didn't get wet, and the rain cooled things off a bit, so it was welcomed!

July Meeting

At our July 5th meeting, we'll be showing a few episodes of "The Eyes of Nye", a new PBS program hosted by Bill Nye, the Science Guy. Unlike his earlier show, this one is targeted at adults and takes on such controversial topics as human cloning, nuclear power, and other areas in which an understanding of the science is needed before informed decisions about policy can be made. However, like his earlier show, Bill Nye infuses each episode with plenty of humor and energy! ♡

A Nod to Our Patrons

REALL would like to thank our patron members. Through their extra generosity, REALL is able to continue to grow as a force for critical thinking in Central Illinois. To become a patron member of REALL, please use the membership form insert. Patron members are:

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(“REALLity Check” continued from page 1)

Pennsylvania Legislature Considering “Intelligent Design” Bill

Pennsylvania’s House Subcommittee on Basic Education is considering a bill (HB 1007) that would allow school boards to require that Intelligent Design be taught in science classes.

Testifying for the anti-evolution side at a public hearing on June 20 were Michael Behe of the Discovery Institute and John Calvert of the Kansas-based Intelligent Design Network.

However, with a limited number of sponsors and the legislative session drawing to a close on June 30, it seems unlikely the bill will pass in this session.

Pennsylvania is also the site of *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District*, an upcoming court case contesting the constitutionality of the Dover Area School Board’s requirement that biology teachers present “Intelligent Design” as an alternative to evolution.

http://www.ncseweb.org/resources/news/2005/PA/68_hearings_on_pennsylvania_inte_6_29_2005.asp

Titanium Athletes

Remember when copper bracelets were supposed to have wonderful therapeutic powers? Or when magnets were supposed to be just the thing to cure what ails you? Well, the latest pseudoscience fad among professional athletes appears to be titanium necklaces.

Phiten, a company based in Japan, was selling titanium necklaces to Japanese baseball players. Somehow, the trend carried over to the U.S. and now Phiten estimates that 200 major leaguers have bought their titanium necklaces.

How does it “work”? According to Scott McDonald, a sales representative for Phiten, “Everybody has electricity running through their bodies. This product stabilizes that flow of electricity if you’re stressed or tired.”

Well, how useful! I know that if I had an unstable flow of electricity in my body, I’d sure feel better if I had a titanium necklace!

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/22/sports/baseball/22shea.html>

Cancer Myths Flourishing

One person in four believes that we already have a cure for cancer, but that the drug companies are suppressing it because they can make more money by treating sick patients for years than by curing them.

According to 40% of those surveyed, surgery can spread cancer through your body.

The researches noted that differences in beliefs about cancer might help explain why some groups are more likely to die of cancer. Since early treatment helps survival rates, those groups who are more likely to believe cancer myths (and therefore delay treatment) would have lower survival rates.

<http://www.cnn.com/2005/HEALTH/conditions/06/27/cancer.myths.reut/index.html>



There is no harm in doubt and scepticism, for it is through these that new discoveries are made.

— **Richard Feynman, physicist**

Some thoughts on the Moore amicus brief

by Timothy Sandefur

I looked through the Roy Moore amicus brief that Reed Cartwright posted below. It makes a remarkable argument: that the evolution disclaimer could not possibly violate the Establishment Clause because “[a] sticker is not a ‘law,’” (p. 13), so it couldn’t possibly be a “law respecting an establishment of religion.” As far as those cases like *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 403 US 602 (1971), which hold that any state action which endorses a religious viewpoint is a violation of the Clause, those cases were wrong and ought to be overruled.

The argument that a sticker is not a law is the worst kind of lawyerly manipulation. Of course a sticker is not a law, but it is not the sticker that is being challenged in this case; it is the school board’s resolution requiring school officials to place the sticker on the textbooks. That resolution has the force of law. If the school board ordered teachers to tell all their students that real baptism requires total submersion and any person who just sprinkles is going to Hell, one might say that a teacher telling students that isn’t a law—but the school board’s orders have the force of law.

Moreover, the First Amendment’s literal text is not strictly relevant to this case, because, strictly speaking, the First Amendment doesn’t have anything to do with the states; it applies only to Congress. It is incorporated to the states by the Fourteenth Amendment, which declares that no person shall be deprived of liberty without due process of law. By the time the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified in 1868, the disestablishment principle was seen as an individual right: that is, the concept of “liberty” by 1868 included the right to be free from established religion. Depriving a person of that right by putting the government’s endorsement on a competing religious view is not for the public benefit, and therefore is just a mere act of force—which means, it deprives a person of liberty without due process of law. The Fourteenth Amendment does apply the bill of rights to the states, but as Akhil Reed Amar so brilliantly shows, it acts as a lens, not a window. Moore’s brief doesn’t understand this, and so it ends up making silly, hypercritical arguments. The question isn’t whether the “sticker” violates the First Amendment, but whether the school board, in placing the sticker on textbooks, has deprive people of their right to be free from religious establishments. Moore can certainly answer that question “no” if he wants to, but he shouldn’t pretend that it isn’t the real question.

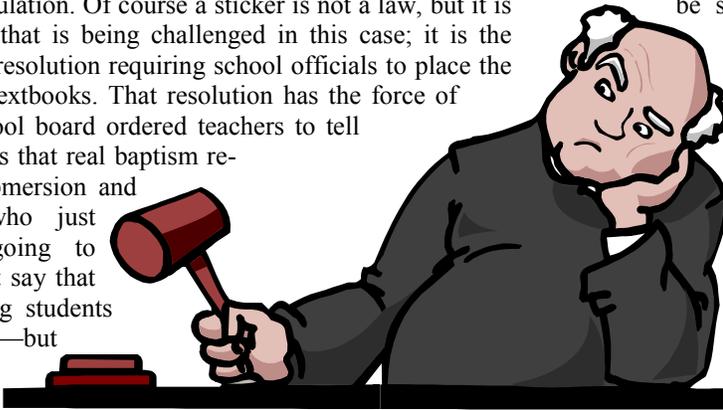
Moore goes on to argue that the sticker also isn’t about religion, because religion is defined as “the duty we owe our Creator.” (p.19). But the Supreme Court has never actually defined “religion”—something that is extremely difficult to do. See Note, *Toward a Constitutional Definition of Religion*, 91 Harv. L. Rev. 1056, 1063 (1978); Stanley Ingber, *Religion or*

Ideology: A Needed Clarification of the Religion Clauses, 41 Stan. L. Rev. 233 (1989). And Moore’s proffered definition would be worthless: a government declaration, for example, saying “America is a Christian country and Muslims ain’t welcome” would violate the Establishment Clause by any reasonable interpretation—but not by Moore’s.

The rest of the brief is full of Moore’s Patented Politico-Religious Grandstanding. He considers it “invidious discrimination” (p. 20) for the District Court to have recognized that the disclaimer was adopted at the behest of religious fundamentalists who refuse to believe evolution and insist that their children be shielded from it; he claims that removing the sticker means “banning God from the discussion of the creation of life,” (p.22-23). Most amusing is his claim that the sticker doesn’t violate the Georgia Constitution because it doesn’t give money from the public treasury in support of any religious group. Who, then, paid the school employees that put the stickers on the textbooks? Evidently Moore thinks they volunteered. More, he rests this argument on a 1922 decision, *Wilkerson v. City of Rome*, 152 Ga. 762 (1922) which held that it was constitutional to require bible reading and prayer every day in public school classrooms—a proposition that is, shall we say, not exactly the law today.

Yes, I know it’s a waste of time responding to such sophomoric arguments; Moore writes like a first year law student with a Lexis password and no time to bother with trying to learn the big picture of what’s legal and what’s not. I won’t say I agree with Judge Pryor’s rejection of the brief—but I certainly understand it.

[This article originally appeared on the Panda’s Thumb web site and is reproduced as permitted by the Creative Commons License. The original article can be viewed at <http://www.pandasthumb.org/pt-archives/001174.html>. The Creative Commons License can be viewed at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd-nc/1.0/>. Timothy Sandefur is an attorney in Placerville, California, specializing in constitutional law. He is a contributing editor for Liberty magazine, and blogs regularly at Freespace. He holds a JD from Chapman University School of law and a BA in Political Economy from Hillsdale College. He is a fellow in the College of Public Interest Law at the Pacific Legal Foundation, and was a 2002 Lincoln Fellow at the Claremont Institute. In law school, he wrote a student note on the Establishment Clause implications of the accreditation of the Institute for Creation Research’s graduate school. (Dinosaur TRACS: The Approaching Conflict between Establishment Clause Jurisprudence and College Accreditation Procedures, 7 Nexus J. Op. 79 (2002)). His views as expressed on Panda’s Thumb are solely his own and do not in any way represent those of the Pacific Legal Foundation, its employees, clients, or supporters.] ♡



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Letter to the Editor

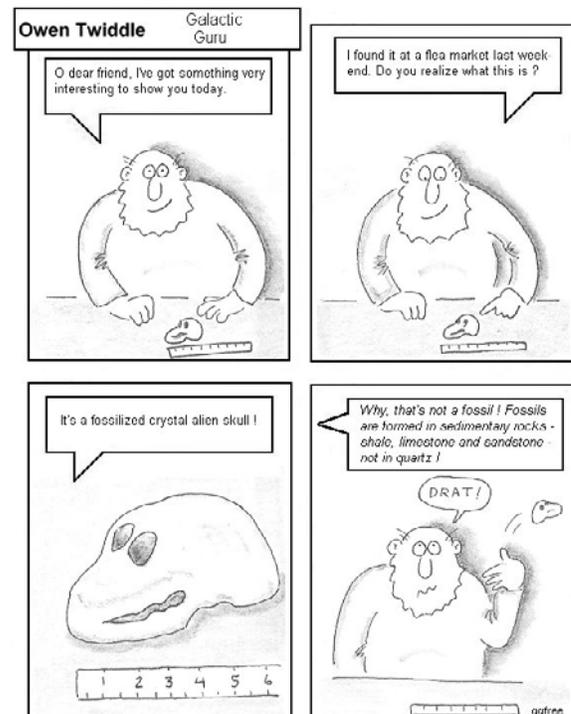
Diane Greenholdt, in a letter to the *State Journal-Register*, asked why anyone should care if humankind is the result of evolution or creationism. This is a worthwhile question and while it may appear that this debate is nothing more than academic nitpicking, it is, in fact, a cultural debate with social implications.

Creationists have an ideological agenda and it is important that scientists and educators as well as the general public be aware that their goal is to have creationism taught in the public school science class as an alternative to biological evolution. Failing that, they would have the theory of evolution, itself, removed from the classroom. Although the Supreme Court has been successful in keeping religion out of the science classroom thus far, religious fundamentalists, fearful that their ideological beliefs are in peril, are continually trying to push their agenda at the state level. More information on this is available at the National Center for Science Education website.

But creationism is not science and it does not belong in the science classroom nor does it deserve federal funding. Are we going to teach the best of what we currently know about the world or are we going to teach a supernatural creation; chemistry or alchemy; mathematics or numerology; astronomy or astrology?

Finally, I would like to submit a question. Given the widespread lack of critical thinking, the inability to understand the difference between science and religion, and the attempts of religious zealots to censor scientific research, are we entering a new anti-intellectual dark age?

George Free
Pleasant Plains, IL ♡



Discovery Institute's Doctor Shopping

by Burt Humburg

Two days ago, word of a survey reached the ears of the Panda's Thumb. (Not to mix metaphors too much.) A Jewish theological seminary in New Jersey had polled doctors to see what their feelings were on evolution, intelligent design, etc. Additionally, they stratified the results based on religious identification. The results were hardly surprising to those who have been critics of the intelligent design movement. As the resident doctor here at the Thumb, I deferred commenting on this particular survey because the results were so predictable.

Well, the Discovery Institute is shopping around the idea that this survey provides evidence of a growing body of scientists that endorse ID creationism. (To be fair, their language only said that this survey was evidence of "a lively debate," as though their enthusiasm was less about any scientific breakthrough and more about simply being prominent.)

There are several interesting things about the data reported for that poll. Mainly, of course, and most obvious, is the distribution of responses across religions. For example,

The majority of all doctors (78%) accept evolution rather than reject it and, of those, Jews are most positive (94%), Catholics are next (86%) followed by Protestants (59%).

The pattern is even more striking when the responses of other religious/ethnic groups are included. While 43% of Protestant physicians agree "More with evolution", 61% of Catholics, 86% of Jews, 68% of Hindus, 71% of Buddhists, 95% of atheists, and 86% of "spiritual but no organized religion" agree. Most striking, just 20% of Muslim respondents agree.

What does this mean? The press release says

"As our earlier physician studies indicated, religion, culture and ethnic heritage have an impact on their views of science, even from this relatively homogenous group of physicians who share similar education, income and social status," noted Glenn Kessler, co-founder and managing partner, HCD Research.

Controlling for education, income, and social status, the variables that govern opinions on the evo-creo issue are extra-scientific, and specifically heavily loaded on religious beliefs. Again, ID creationism receives its support for reasons not related to science. ID creationism is a response to socio-religious issues, even among highly educated people who (though they tend not to be as well educated in the doing of science as popular opinion believes) presumably at least use the results of sci-

entific research every day.

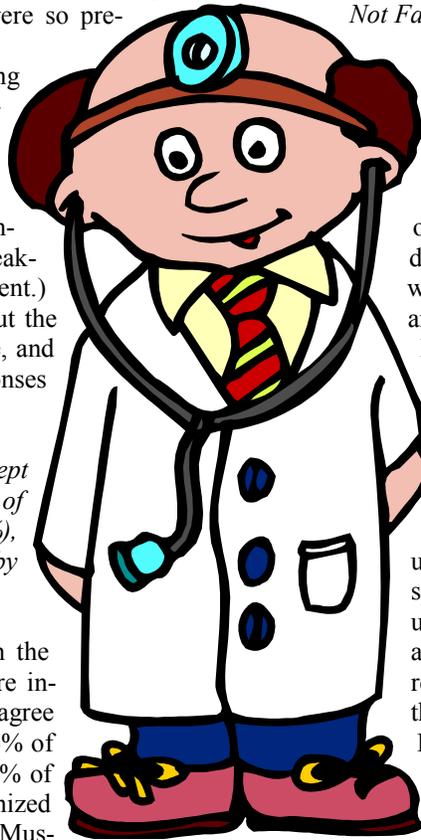
I do wish these polls would ask the question that the Cleveland Plain Dealer asked:

QUESTION: Would you say that you are very familiar, somewhat familiar, or not that familiar with the concept of "intelligent design?"

Very Familiar — 18%;

Somewhat Familiar — 37%;

Not Familiar — 45%



Writing from personal experience, I can attest that all of the people in medical school who endorsed intelligent design creationism (who made their affinities known) did so due to strictly religious reasons. Further, the majority of my classmates did not know what intelligent design was nor what the big deal about evolution was. (This was a medical school in Kansas City and Wichita populated almost exclusively by Kansans; not exactly an American Atheists meeting.) Needless to say, the claims made by the creationists in Topeka - that it is not possible to be a Christian and an advocate of evolution — are false.

It remains for me to mention that, in medical school, intelligent design concepts were never used in lectures. Contrarily, evolutionary perspectives not only made the material easier to understand, it provided the basis for the research about which we were learning and concepts directly related to evolution were a portion of both the USMLE Steps 1 and 2 when I took it.

In another essay, I intend to describe why it is that most doctors should not be considered scientists. Suffice it to say that for the DI to shop around a list of "scientists" who endorse

ID creationism whose scientists are mainly M.D.'s is telling.

BCH

— Richard Hoppe assisted greatly in the development of this post.

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Foes of Evolution Set Sights on New Target: Gravity

Satire by Cole Walters

If a group of concerned parents gets its way, high school physics students may soon be required to learn about alternative explanations of gravity. The parents say that a one-sided focus on Newton's so-called universal law of gravitation is unfair to students who don't believe in gravity. If they prevail, physics teachers may be forced to read a statement acknowledging that our understanding of gravity is just a theory.

Is Einstein's 'theory of relativism' next?

By Cole Walters, education correspondent

DOVER, PA—It is a staple of high-school physics classes: the story of Isaac Newton's encounter with a certain apple. As scientific wisdom would have it, Sir Isaac was sitting beneath a tree one afternoon when the offending apple dropped down upon his head, leading him to coin an explanation of one of the universe's greatest mysteries: why do things fall out of the sky?

Called the universal theory of gravity, Newton's so-called law is taught to physics students everyday. But a growing movement of parents wants to change that. They say that Isaac Newton's theory of acceleration and velocity is just that—a theory—and that forcing students to accept a Newtonian view of the natural world is unfair to those who don't believe in gravity.

An accelerating movement

This small Pennsylvania town south of Harrisburg is at the center of the movement to force high school physics teachers to introduce alternative explanations of the force of gravitation. But parents here reject the claim that they're trying to ban teachers from mentioning gravity, or the increasingly controversial Sir Isaac Newton. Rather, they say, their goal is to supplement the existing physics curriculum.

"It's just not fair to the young men and women who attend physics classes in Dover that they learn about one theory over and over," says curriculum improvement advocate Lorraine Dittie. "What we'd like to see is a more a balanced presentation."

Just a theory

If parents and advocates for change like Dittie get their way, physics teachers may be required to read a statement to their classes as early as next fall, acknowledging that Newton's explanation of gravity is a theory, not a law as it has often been described in the past. "If it's a law, that means that there are penalties for breaking it," explains Dittie. "Newton obviously

came up with one theory of how gravity works, but there are others as well."

God's will

One such theory holds that Isaac Newton was chosen by God, who signaled his interest in the British physicist and mathematician by dropping an apple on his head. While students would still be exposed to Newton's ideas, they would largely bypass his influential work on physics, *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, focusing instead upon his deeply-held religious beliefs and his later work in which he attempted to date the events depicted in the bible.

Physicists gravitate to secularism

But not everybody is happy about the new plan. Dover Senior High School physics teacher and golf coach Lou DeGregorio says that he's already got enough to teach, and that adding new explanations of gravity may force him to cut other subject areas from his curriculum, including force and equilibrium, static electricity or simple harmonic motion.

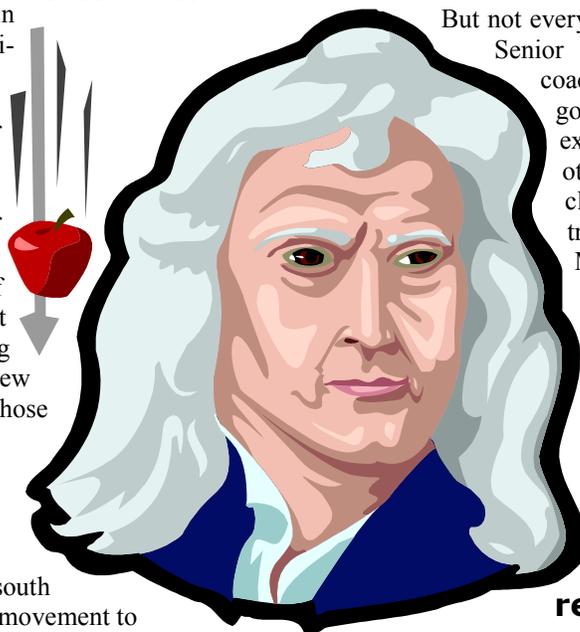
Mr. DeGregorio also questions why the parents have chosen to single out Newton's law of gravity for their efforts, noting that the 17th century mathematical formulation has largely been replaced by Albert Einstein's theory of relativity. "I don't want to say that these people are idiots but they obviously don't know a whole hell of a lot about physics."

Next up: the theory of relativism

For her part, Mrs. Dittie says that she's all too familiar with Einstein's theory—and that her curriculum improvement group is already contemplating launching a charge against the German physicist.

"At least he acknowledged that all he'd come up with was a theory," says Dittie. "But the last thing we need to expose our kids to is a theory of relativism. They're already being told that there's no right or wrong. If you want to learn about Einstein, fine. I just don't want my tax dollars going to pay for it."

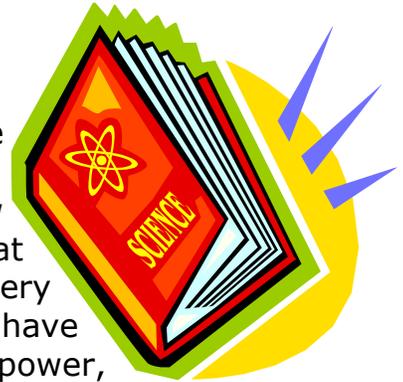
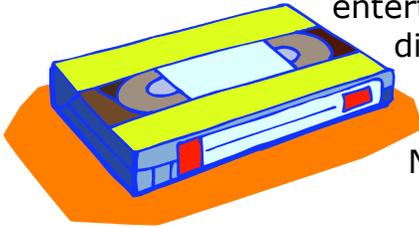
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Our Next Meeting

Eyes of Nye

You might be familiar with "Bill Nye the Science Guy", a science show targeted at pre-teens. Well, Bill Nye has a new show on PBS now called "The Eyes of Nye", targeted more at adults, but still with a humorous and very entertaining slant. Recent episodes have discussed human cloning, nuclear power, pseudoscience, and addiction. We'll watch a few episodes and discuss them. ("The Eyes of Nye" airs on Tuesdays at 9:00 pm on WILL.)

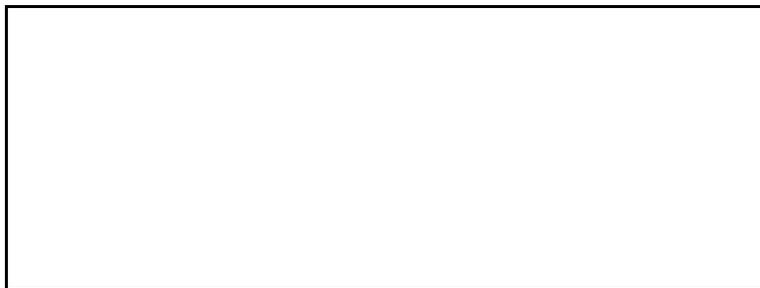


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