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My Life in the Family Tree

I possess a really weird name, although the responsibility for my possession of this appellation should in no way, shape, or form fall upon me. It's not precisely the responsibility of Mom and Dad either, although they did conspire to bestow the name upon me. In actuality, the culpability for this grievous error should be accepted by my relatives. Nearly every last one of them is berserk about researching our ancestors, and all of them keep records and photographs of ancient relatives, along with dozens of elaborately framed “family trees” in their homes. Our family adores holding elaborate reunions and discoursing at length about who married whom and had which kids. Some of the names I recognize and some I don’t, but we are a very large family scattered throughout numerous states around the country. Everyone’s very big on communication, always emailing pictures and current news, especially the ones who don’t live here in our town.

I distinctly recall this phenomenon from when I was quite young, although at that time, I didn’t quite comprehend what all the fuss was about, and I considered it quite confusing. For example, I thought some of our family lived in trees, or to be perfectly precise, I thought they lived in tree houses, which seemed like a really cool concept to me. As a result, I was always studying the trees at my relatives’ houses, although, as far as I could see, every single one of their houses was constructed on the ground, exactly like ours. Consequently, I couldn’t understand why they were always talking about family trees when as far as I could tell, no one lived in such a dwelling.

Finally, I took it upon myself to ask one of my cousins, who was attending a university at the time and in possession of great intelligence, so I was certain he would know which of our relatives lived in tree houses. Although he naturally received a great deal of pleasure from laughing at my request, he subsequently explained what a “family tree” actually is, likening it to a species of chart wherein the names of all relatives in a family are listed. He pointed out that the chart commences with two relatives and branches out like a tree, adding relatives for each generation, which is why it is called a family tree.

I began this by explaining that I have a truly weird name, all because of this mania my family has about relatives. They peruse these trees and charts every time someone is expecting a baby, and you never saw such a commotion made over what name should be chosen. The worst part is they only like names utilized in prior generations, so the poor baby is stuck with someone else’s name. It’s what they did with me and what they did with my sister and brother who were born before I was; it’s their obsession.

My sister and brother were exceedingly more fortunate than I in the matter of naming, with my sister being named Scarlett Joanna; she’s called Joanna. My brother received the appellation Albert Elmer, and he’s called Albert. Joanna’s name fulfilled an obligation to both a great-aunt and a grandmother, and my brother was named for a pair of great-grandfathers. My sister, of course, would very much rather be named Ashley or Brittany, names both of which all females today seem to bear. I tell her she’d be just like everyone else. “That’s the point!” she tells me. My brother says the name Elmer conjures
up images of glue. Neither name, in my humble opinion, is nearly so disastrous as the names with which I am stuck.

This is my argument on the matter. No matter how you scrutinize my first name, you cannot discern whether I am a male or female. Teachers cannot pronounce any of my names, people burst into laughter upon hearing them, and all three names possess an elevated degree of difficulty in the realm of spelling. How would you feel if your name were Derry Shermetta Schwendimier?

1. This story is mostly about:
   A. Someone who enjoys studying about ancestors.
   B. Someone who doesn’t like her name.
   C. Someone whose relatives all live nearby.
   D. Someone who keeps in touch with family members.

2. Which detail tells you about a family tree?
   A. It’s a place where family members live.
   B. It’s a place where the names of babies, friends, and family members are listed.
   C. It’s a place where the names of relatives are listed.
   D. none of the above

3. What happened when the narrator asked a cousin to explain the term “family tree”?
   A. The cousin called it a chart with names on it.
   B. The cousin said it is a species of tree.
   C. The cousin did not know what it meant.
   D. The cousin scowlingly answered the narrator’s question.

4. How are your ancestors and current-day relatives alike?
   A. They are all dead.
   B. They are all living.
   C. They are all related to you.
   D. none of the above

5. Scarlett Joanna hates her name because:
   A. It’s too much like other girls’ names.
   B. It’s too difficult to spell.
   C. It’s too different from other girls’ names.
   D. She likes the names “Brittany” and “Ashley” better.
6. Which of the following reflects the narrator’s feelings about naming babies after old people and deceased relatives?
   A. Everyone should name their babies after relatives.
   B. Babies should have their own, individual names.
   C. The narrator doesn’t care one way or the other about it.
   D. The narrator thinks that babies should have names that are popular during the time period when they are born.

7. What can you conclude from the passage about the narrator’s family?
   A. It’s a large family, and the members try to keep in touch.
   B. It’s a small family, and most of them get along.
   C. It’s a large, localized family.
   D. It’s a large, boisterous family.

8. The narrator’s family enjoys “discoursing at length about who married whom . . .” What does discoursing mean?
   A. writing long papers
   B. having long conversations
   C. playing guessing games
   D. all of the above

9. A plot conflict generally involves a clash of actions, ideas, desires, or wills. What kind of conflict exists in this story?
   A. physical conflict
   B. conflict with nature
   C. emotional conflict
   D. There is no plot conflict for this passage.

10. Which is the BEST summary of this passage?
    A. It’s nice to have an unusual name.
    B. How you spell your name is important.
    C. Everyone should be named after someone in the family.
    D. none of the above

11. The narrator’s cousin said a “. . . chart commences with two relatives and branches out like a tree, adding relatives . . .” What type of a comparison is this?
    A. a metaphor
    B. a simile
    C. an analogy
    D. none of the above
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12. What is another good title for this passage?
   A. Why Babies Should Pick Their Own Names
   B. Why Families Should Not Have Reunions
   C. How I Got My Crazy Name
   D. Why My Brother and Sister Hate Their Names

13. Which detail tells you which names the narrator’s relatives like best?
   A. They only like names that belong to dead people.
   B. They only like names that have been used before.
   C. They only like names that are hard to pronounce.
   D. none of the above

14. What happens when teachers announce the narrator’s names in class?
   A. Everyone misspells the narrator’s name.
   B. No ones knows if the narrator is a male or female.
   C. The teachers mispronounce the narrator’s names.
   D. none of the above

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Read the following selection. Then answer questions 15 through 28.

The Red Planet

Do you possess a yearning to journey to Mars? It might not be outside the realm of possibility that you or an acquaintance will become an astronaut and receive the opportunity to fly there. Given the possibility that such a thing could occur, here are some details you would certainly need to know before you land on the surface of the planet Mars.

For starters, you would most definitely find it necessary to know in precisely which direction your journey will take you. In this case, that would be away from, rather than toward, the sun in our solar system. As you may recall, Earth is the third “rock” from the sun, and Mars is the fourth. According to certain conjecture, this probably means that on either the Fahrenheit or the Celsius scale, Mars absorbs, and therefore radiates, less heat than Earth.

Each of the named planets received its individual nomenclature for one or more of a variety of mostly legitimate reasons. So, from whence did the name Mars emanate? The source for Mars’ name was the Roman Empire’s god of war, based upon the fiery, blood-red color the planet radiates in the night sky. Unlike Earth, Mars possesses two moons,
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each of which is small and not truly round-shaped, and both of which might possibly be asteroids the planet captured in its force of gravity and now holds captive in their orbits.

The atmosphere on Mars is exceedingly thin and consists of 95 percent carbon dioxide, with only a trace of water and oxygen, meaning it most certainly cannot sustain life as we know it here on Earth without assistance from some species of breathing apparatus. The atmosphere also contains methane, an unstable gas deemed non-breathable for humankind. The planet itself is quite small, with no surface water present and a total surface area only one-fourth the size of Earth’s surface area.

The topography of Mars contains many unusual features, among which are polar ice caps containing frozen water and carbon dioxide. From the number of impact craters, it would appear that Mars has been hit by numerous asteroids and meteors. There is also an incredibly large configuration of canyons called Valles Marineris, which translates to the “scar of Mars,” and is thought to be the largest in our solar system. In addition, there are several large volcanoes to be found on the surface of the planet.

The level of captivation Mars holds for the human race is exorbitant. This is mirrored in the number of books, like The Angry Red Planet, and films like War of the Worlds, as well as radio and television dramas, not to mention amusement park rides such as Mission to Mars. The word Mars creeps into our vocabulary at many levels, not the least of which are references to people who are considered far from the know or perhaps lacking in common sense. “Where did you come from, Mars?”

This question may well be viable in another hundred years or so, when we have colonized the Red Planet, and its citizens journey to Earth on vacation or even on business trips. It’s a question that may well be asked of your own grandchildren, if you sign up to be among the astronauts who could be heading there soon!

15. What is this passage primarily about?
   A. space travel in our solar system
   B. the planet Mars
   C. moons that orbit Mars
   D. our fascination with the Red Planet

16. What is the Valles Marineris?
   A. a large valley found on Mars
   B. an active volcano found on Mars
   C. a configuration of canyons found on Mars
   D. a famous book about Mars

17. According to the passage, what happens after a rocket blasts off for Mars?
   A. It turns toward the sun.
   B. It turns away from the sun.
   C. It orbits Venus.
   D. A lot of people watch the launch on television.
18. How are the Earth and Mars alike?
   A. They both have more than one moon.
   B. They both orbit the sun.
   C. They are about the same size.
   D. They both have one moon.

19. Why was Mars so named?
   A. It was named after a candy bar.
   B. It was named after the Greek god of war.
   C. It was named because of its position in the solar system.
   D. none of the above

20. You can tell from the story that:
   A. as it is now, Mars is perfect for humans
   B. as it is now, Mars is good for skiing
   C. as it is now, Mars is far too hot for humans
   D. none of the above

21. What conclusion can you draw about humans’ attitudes toward Mars?
   A. They find it scary.
   B. They find it captivating.
   C. They don’t care about it one way or the other.
   D. none of the above

22. Based on its use in the passage, what does topography mean?
   A. mountain ranges
   B. oceans and seas
   C. overall landscape
   D. all of the above

23. Why did the author write this passage?
   A. to amuse
   B. to inform
   C. to persuade
   D. both A and B
24. Which of the following BEST summarizes this passage?
   A. Mars is an interesting planet.
   B. Mars will never be a human destination.
   C. Mars is a warlike planet.
   D. There may have been life on Mars in the past.

25. Where would you find the MOST information about Mars?
   A. in an encyclopedia
   B. in an almanac
   C. in a thesaurus
   D. in a chemistry textbook

26. What size is Mars when compared to Earth?
   A. Mars is larger and has much more water.
   B. Mars is about the same size and is dry.
   C. Mars is a lot smaller.
   D. none of the above

27. What causes the moons of Mars to stay in their orbits?
   A. They collided with Mars and bounced into orbit.
   B. They were captured by the gravity of Mars.
   C. Mars orbits around its moons.
   D. They were captured by the inertia of Mars.

28. What do you suppose caused the polar ice caps seen on Mars?
   A. The blizzards created them.
   B. There was water on the planet at some time.
   C. Other locations on Mars are too hot for them.
   D. none of the above
Read the following selection. Then answer questions 29 through 44.

All About Allergies

We all hear and use the word "allergy" on nearly a daily basis. It appears in advertising and commercials and arises in conversations with acquaintances and friends, but do you know the basis for the word or the definition of an allergy? The word allergy comes from two Greek words, "allos" and "ergon," the first of which means "other" and the second of which means "reaction." Dr. Baron Clemens von Pirquet, a Viennese pediatrician, first used the term in 1906.

Doctors had long been aware that many people displayed hypersensitive reactions, but it never occurred to anyone that such reactions might be to such everyday things as dust, pollen, fur, and so forth. Where allergies are concerned, it is exactly such hypersensitivities that cause people's immune systems to react to substances that usually do not affect them in that way. In other words, allergy symptoms appear when a person reacts in a sensitized manner to ordinary substances that create little or no reaction in most other people, and nearly anyone can be allergic to almost anything.

These symptoms generally appear in one of two forms, which are local or systemic. Local symptoms can affect one or more areas such as the nose, eyes, throat, or skin and such reactions can take many forms and can appear in varying degrees. For example, some people might exhibit a mild allergic reaction to being in a dusty area, displaying coughing or sneezing when dust is stirred up. Another form of a local allergic reaction would be having eyes turn red and tear up or developing an itchy rash on the skin.

Millions of people suffer annually from what is known as "hay fever." This is a common local allergy that causes sniffles and sneezing, teary eyes, and sometimes a sore throat but generally nothing worse. The pollens causing hay fever, however, can also trigger a systemic reaction, also known as anaphylaxis. In some people, this reaction can be fatal. For these people, even a small amount of pollen or dust, a minor insect bite, or a brush-by encounter with poison oak can cause such a reaction. Their airways swell shut and cut off their breathing, sending them into a coma and eventually killing them if they don't receive timely medical assistance.

No one knows why some people have allergies and others don't, but there are several tests that can determine a person's allergic reaction, as well as the degree of that reaction. One of these is the skin test, in which small amounts of allergens suspected to be causing a reaction are scratched or injected into the skin. It takes about 30 minutes to determine if the subject being tested will have an allergic reaction, which can range from a reddening of the skin to a severe case of hives, depending upon the subject's sensitivity. Unfortunately, some people don't react within the normal time frame and can have a delayed and possibly severe reaction long after leaving the doctor's office.

When a person is found to be reactive to an allergen, there are basically two forms of treatment. The easiest and most obvious treatment consists of limiting or ending that person's exposure to the allergen. This can range from removing pets from the home to wearing a mask out of doors, but when such a solution is not possible to obtain, there are several therapies available. One of these is immunotherapy, which consists of injecting the sufferer with gradually increasing amounts of the allergen to reduce or eliminate the
hypo sensitiv ity. Another is chemother apy, which utilizes chemical medications, such as ant histamines taken by mouth and adrenalin given by injection.

29. What would be another good title for this passage?
   A. How to Cure Allergies
   B. The Types and Causes of Allergies
   C. Allergy Testing
   D. Allergy Medicine Works

30. What actually causes allergic reactions?
   A. dust and pollen
   B. the reaction of your immune system
   C. fur and wasp stings
   D. none of the above

31. What happens after you react to an allergen?
   A. You might display a local reaction.
   B. You have to see a doctor.
   C. You have to take medication.
   D. all of the above

32. How is a local reaction different from a systemic reaction?
   A. A systemic reaction is never fatal; a local reaction is always fatal.
   B. A local reaction is never fatal; a systemic reaction is always fatal.
   C. Neither type of reaction can be fatal.
   D. none of the above

33. What causes hypersensitivities in some people but not in others?
   A. their surroundings
   B. their blood type
   C. no one knows
   D. their family medical history

34. What can you infer about pollen from this passage?
   A. It is used in cross-pollination.
   B. It mostly causes anaphylactic reactions.
   C. It is the cause of a number of deaths annually.
   D. none of the above
35. What can you conclude about allergies from this passage?
   A. There are only a few types and degrees of allergies.
   B. Allergy medicines cost a lot of money.
   C. Almost anything can cause an allergic reaction in someone.
   D. all of the above

36. From its use in this passage, what is the meaning of chemotherapy?
   A. medical therapy that utilizes radiation
   B. medical therapy that utilizes chemicals
   C. medical therapy that utilizes allergy testing
   D. none of the above

37. The purpose of the first paragraph is to:
   A. explain that the Greeks discovered allergies
   B. explain that “allergy” is a Viennese word
   C. explain where the term “allergy” originated
   D. none of the above

38. The BEST summary of the last paragraph is:
   A. There are no real treatments for allergies.
   B. Avoidance is a good treatment available for allergies.
   C. Chemotherapy is a good treatment available for allergies.
   D. none of the above

39. Where would be the BEST place to look for information on allergies?
   A. in the index of a medical book
   B. on a web site about sore throats
   C. in an almanac
   D. none of the above

40. What conclusion can you draw about the potential effect of immunotherapy?
   A. It does not work.
   B. It works in a slow but sure manner.
   C. It works quickly.
   D. none of the above
41. The passage mentions "hypersensitive reactions." Which word best describes hypersensitive as it is used in this passage?
   A. querulous
   B. surly
   C. supersensitive
   D. all of the above

42. What is the author's purpose for writing this passage?
   A. to draw sympathy for allergy suffers
   B. to educate people about allergies
   C. to diagnose allergies
   D. none of the above

43. What is the BEST summary of this passage?
   A. Allergies strike only a few, select people.
   B. Everyone everywhere has allergies.
   C. Allergies can strike anyone at anytime.
   D. none of the above

44. Where would be the BEST place to look for a word to use in the place of "allergen"?
   A. an encyclopedia
   B. an atlas
   C. a thesaurus
   D. none of the above