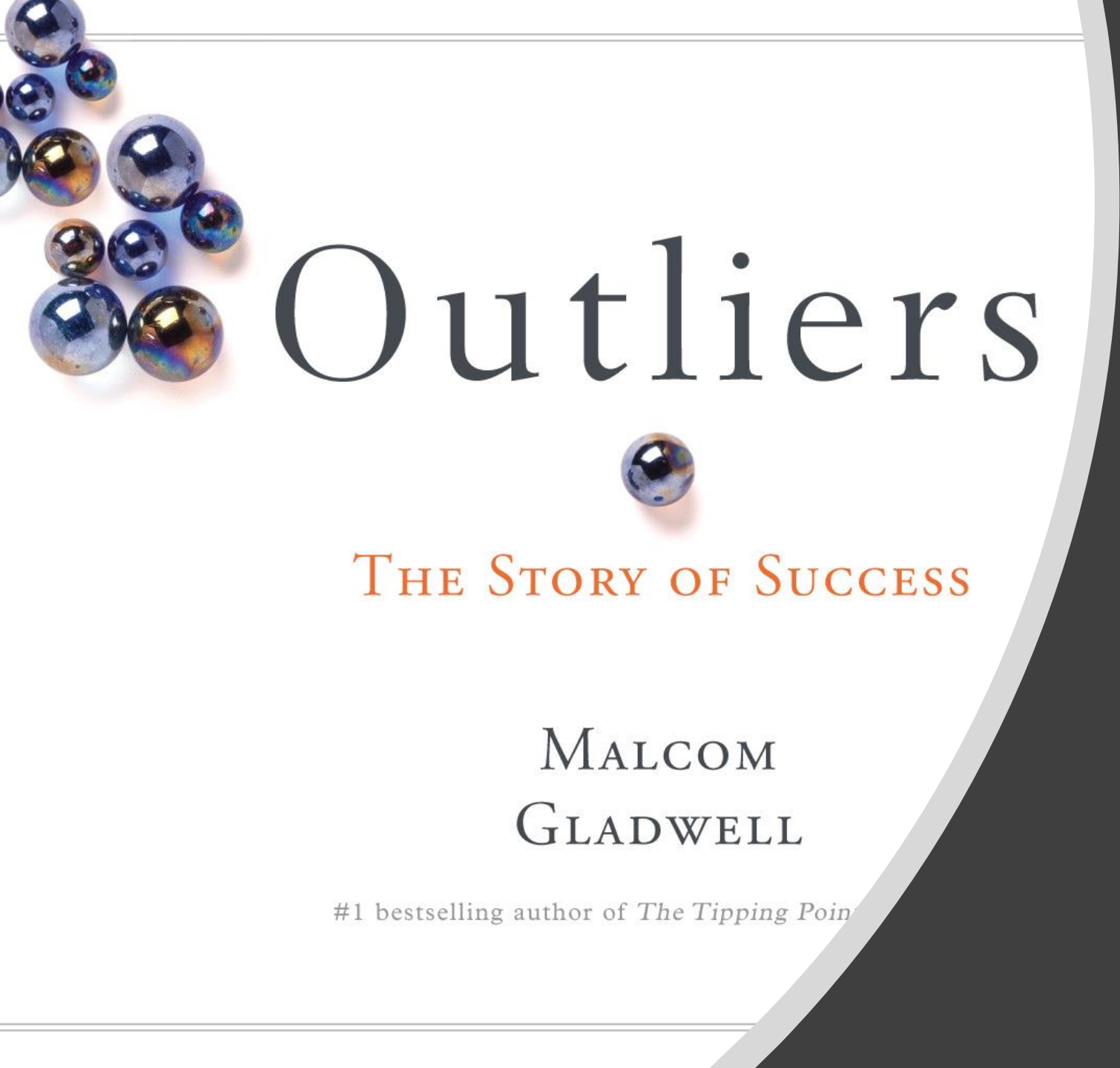


Malcolm Gladwell's Outliers

-A Review-

Quick Chat

What is the definition of success according to you?

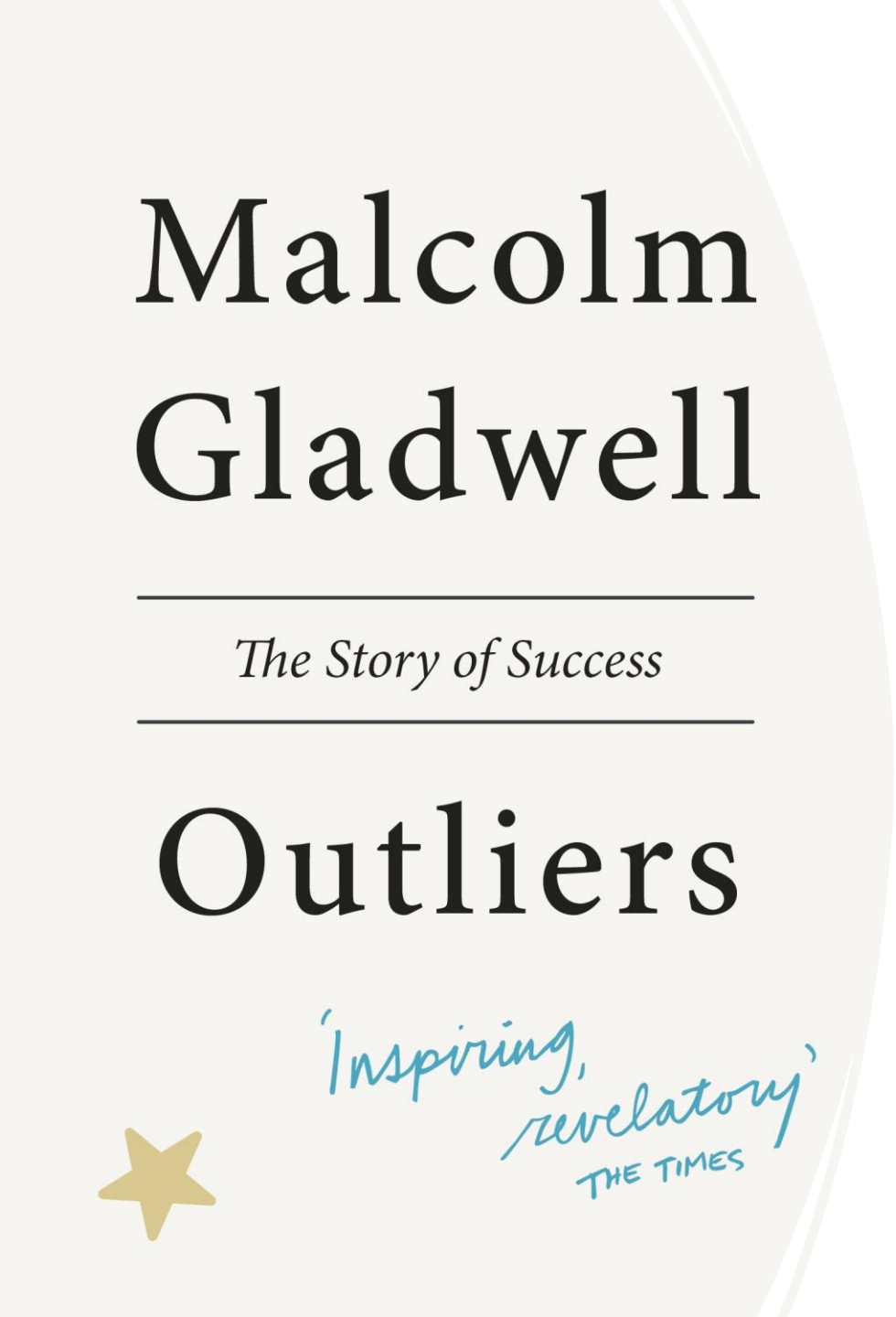
What do you think are the factors that would lead to success?

What’s in store for us today?

- About the author
- Brief Introduction about the book
- Key Learnings
- Video
- Q&A

Malcolm Gladwell

- Appearing on the Time Magazine's 100 most influential people, Malcolm Gladwell is a Canadian journalist based in New York.
- In addition to being a bestselling author of four books, Gladwell is also a speaker and has been on job as a staff writer for The New Yorker since 1996.
- **The Tipping Point: How Little Things Make a Big Difference (2000), Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking (2005), Outliers: The Story of Success (2008), and What the Dog Saw: And Other Adventures (2009)**
- His works deal with research in the areas of psychology, social psychology and sociology. On June 30, 2011, Gladwell was appointed to the Order of Canada.



Intro to the book

- The story of Success
- 10,000 hours concept and how one can incorporate it to master any skill
- Influence of culture in shaping one's success
- Case-studies that enhance our understanding of the drivers of success

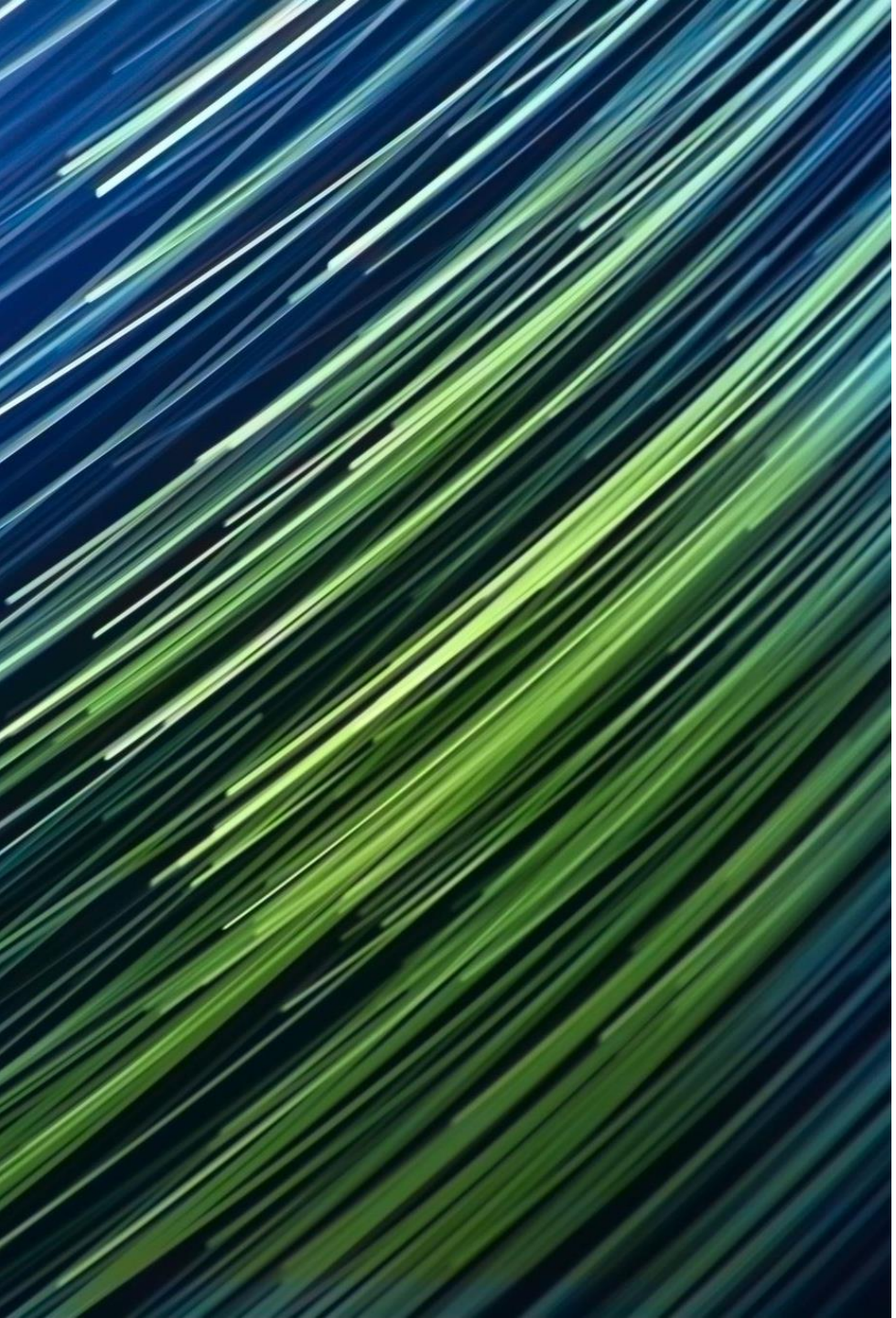
Key Learnings

What does Bill Gates' story hold in common with the Beatles'?
Why are so many professional hockey players born between January and March?

Why do Asians tend to excel in math?

In his examination of success stories, Malcolm Gladwell maintains that the way we understand the accomplishments of exceptional individuals often overlooks factors critical to their achievements.

Applying a seemingly peculiar metric, Gladwell aims to debunk the popular narratives that assume success is due primarily to one's individual talent and tenacity. The broader contexts of unique opportunities and advantages better explain the success of these remarkable individuals, or outliers.



1. We need to rethink how we understand the path to greatness.

In the late 1800s, a group of peasants from Roseto Valfortore, Italy came to the United States and settled in a small town in Pennsylvania. After the initial group came, the Rosetans immigrated in droves, all settling in the same Pennsylvanian town that they called Roseto. It became a thriving township, complete with parish, schools, parks, convent, shops and factories.

A physician named Steward Wolf, intrigued by reports of unusually good heart health in the town, wanted to study the matter further. Wolf found that death rates from heart attacks in Roseto were about half of the United States' average. Heart attacks and heart disease in men under fifty-five were almost unheard of. At that time—the 1950s—heart disease was the most common cause of death among men under sixty-five; so these findings were staggering.

What accounted for the town's phenomenal heart health? Wolf and his colleague Bruhn ruled out diet, exercise, genetics, and geography as explanations, and eventually concluded that it was the culture:

The friendliness among neighbors, the stable, inter-generational family unit, the Catholic religion as a homogenizer and an egalitarian atmosphere in which women were respected and the poor were cared for

The new theory that a community's ethos has a profound impact on health eventually held.

Just as Wolf started a paradigm shift in the field of health, the aim of this book is to catalyze a shift in our thinking about the topic of success.

2. Arbitrary cut-off dates for sports and schools put some children at a disadvantage.

There is something very flawed about how we understand outliers.

An examination of a variety of success stories in different fields will show that the answer to the question, “What is successful person X like?” is a far less illuminating than “Where is successful person X from?”

While the rags-to-riches, pull-yourself-up-by-your-own-bootstraps sagas pluck the heartstrings, they are overly individualistic and fail to provide crucial context.

Hockey is a perfect example.

Psychologist Roger Barnsley stumbled upon a strange phenomenon in the mid-1980s:

He discovered that an overwhelming number of professional hockey players have birthdays in January, February, and March. He investigated other professional teams and even younger elite leagues and found the same pattern.

Barnsley realized that this was because the cutoff date for determining age groupings in Canadian hockey is January 1.

This matters because a five-year-old born January 2 has more time to mature physically than a five-year-old born November 2.

Those eleven months are critical, especially at an early age, where development is so rapid. Scouts select the stronger, physically mature kids and direct them to more competitive channels, where their skills are developed at an even faster rate.

This is called “accumulative advantage.” Because of an arbitrary cut-off date, many kids have a significant obstacle to overcome, while others enjoy a distinct advantage.

This has been the pattern in athletics, more generally, and in education, too. Researchers found that when they tested fourth graders across the globe, the oldest students scored considerably higher than their younger classmates on the TIMSS (Trends in International Math and Science Study). Another study identified a similar trend among United States college students.

Sociologist Robert Merton refers to this pattern as the Matthew Effect, a reference to the Gospel of Matthew 25:29: “For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.” In athletics and education, the outliers were not born as such; they just got a head start.

3. No one became an expert without working at their skill for at least 10,000 hours.

- Bill Joy is known today as a computer programmer extraordinaire, a Silicon Valley legend. He changed his major to computer science when he saw University of Michigan's state-of-the-art Computer Center, a prototype developed just a few years before he enrolled in 1971.
- Joy spent day and night at the center programming. He went on to graduate studies at Berkeley, where he stunned his professors during his oral with his ability to develop and recite a complex programming algorithm on the spot.
- He rewrote computer languages for UNIX and Java, codes that are still used to this day. Through hard work and determination, Joy achieved monumental success in the field of computer programming. The end.

It fails to mention the advantages and opportunities and historical moments that serendipitously—but also critically—came together to catalyze such success.

Achievement is talent plus preparation. Researchers are coming to the conclusion that preparation is the more essential of the two.

A study of violinists at the Academy of Music in Berlin found a wide discrepancy in time devoted to practice over the lifetime of the musicians.

The academy’s best violinists averaged 10,000 hours of practice; the good musicians, 8,000; for mediocre violinists, 4,000. For musicians, chess masters, and professional athletes, the number that researchers have landed on as the threshold for expertise is 10,000 hours, a colossal amount of time.

- The 10,000-Hour Rule makes sense of Bill Joy's success. On top of being a math whiz and a kid with an insatiable appetite for learning, he also put in the hours. In an interview, Joy made a quick mental calculation of the hours he'd spent programming. By his own reckoning—which we can consider fairly reliable—he was in the ballpark of 10,000 hours.
- This theory also makes sense of the trajectories of world-renowned rock stars and a genius business tycoon. The Beatles got their start playing eight hours a day, seven days a week at a strip club in Hamburg, Germany. During the early 1960s, the four young Liverpudlians had played an estimated (and unheard of) 1,200 shows—and their career as a group was just beginning!
- Bill Gates had his own Hamburg experience when his elite private school's Mother's Club used rummage sale funds to buy a computer terminal for the school during his eighth grade year. He programmed at the school, tested company software in exchange for programming time, and looked for any opportunity to practice, day or night.

- What really distinguishes these individuals is not their remarkable talent and grit, but the tremendous opportunities. Why does a list of the top seventy-five wealthiest people of all time contain Americans all born within a nine-year time frame (1831-40)? It was at this time that Wall Street began and industrial manufacturing took off, and these nine Americans identified opportunities within those developments that led to gigantic financial gains.
- So how old you are at a critical time and place in history makes a big difference. This is true in the computer science realm. Ideally, you wanted to be twenty or twenty-one, or born between 1954-55: old enough to join the personal computer revolution that began in 1975, but young enough to avoid getting stuck with IBM making outmoded mainframes. Outlandish? It seems more plausible when we see the birth years of the technology gurus:
- Bill Gates: October, 1955
- Paul Allen: January, 1953
- Steve Ballmer, March, 1956
- Steve Jobs: February, 1955
- Eric Schmidt: April, 1955
- Bill Joy: November, 1954

4. Genius is not everything—emotional and practical intelligence are also critical to success.

The man who invented the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) test was Lewis Terman, a professor of psychology at Stanford.

His area of expertise was quantifying intelligence. In the early 1920s, he decided to dedicate his life to the study of singularly gifted kids.

After a thorough vetting process through several rounds of tests given to elementary students in California, Terman selected a group of 1,470 children who had done brilliantly on the tests.

The average IQ among the children was 140, and some had IQs as high as 200. He affectionately referred to these children as the “Termites,” and he dedicated his life to tracking their progress and life events.

- IQ matters, clearly, but only up to a point. An IQ of 100 is average and above 145 is considered genius, but an adult with an IQ of 180 is not more or less like to win a Nobel Prize than another adult with an IQ of 140. It is similar to basketball:
- The difference between five feet and six feet is much more significant than between seven feet and eight feet.
- After you are, say, six foot, six inches, you are “tall enough.” Similarly, beyond 120, there is not a significant measurable advantage that a higher IQ score brings.
- People with IQs of 125, 135, and 165 are all “smart enough.” A look at the universities that Nobel Laureates attended will show this to be the case—they did not all attend Ivy Leagues, but they went to schools that were “good enough.”

Another limitation of the IQ metric is its failure to consider the more creative, imaginative dimensions of human intelligence.

In contrast to convergence tests like IQ and Raven's Progressive Matrices, which test one's ability to "converge" on the correct answer, divergence tests draw out the subjective, creative mental processes.

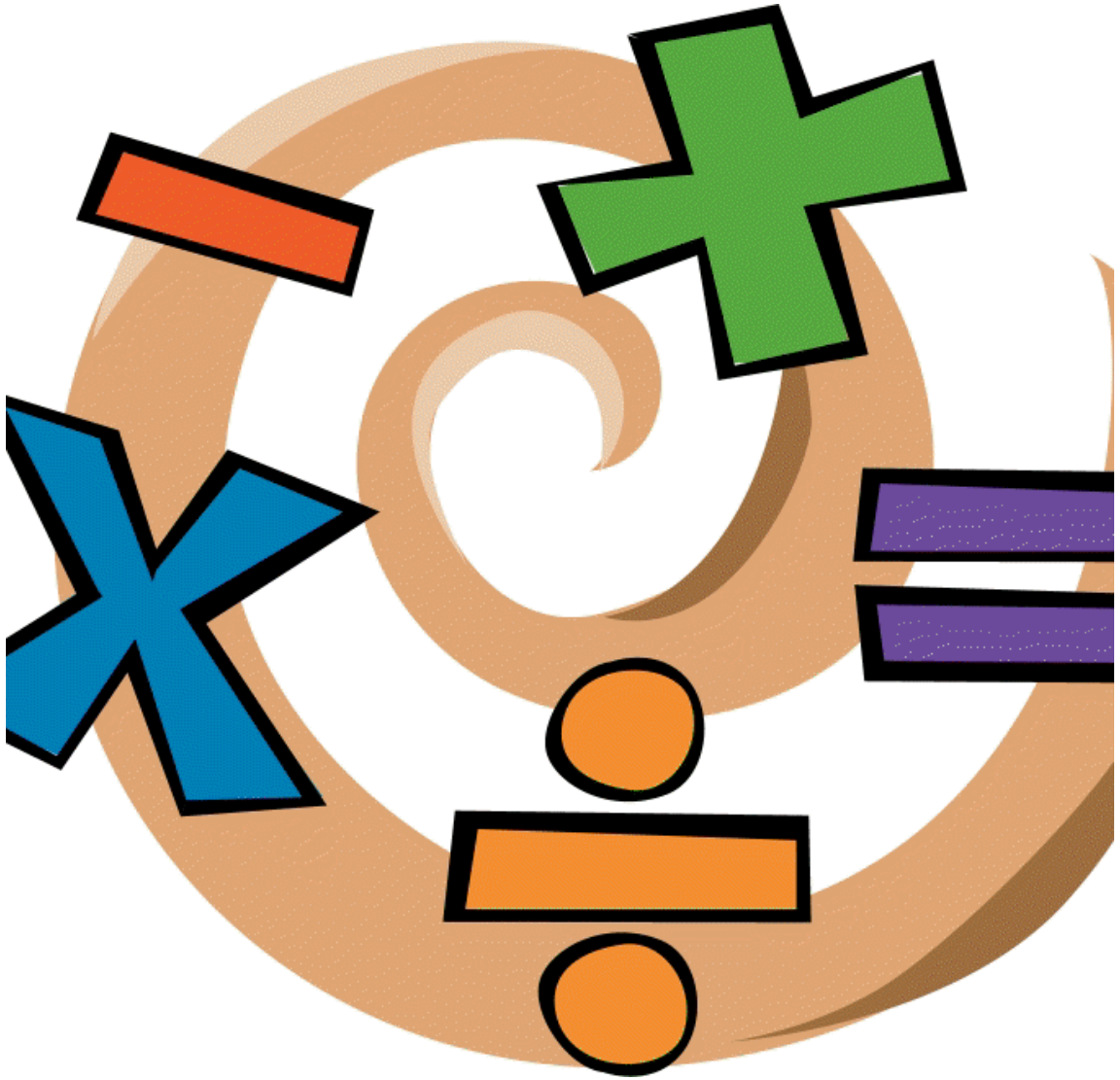
Not just objective intelligence, but creativity and the ability to think beyond common categories are qualities needed to create the kind of groundbreaking, pioneering work that warrant a Nobel Prize.

- In a related study, Terman examined the records of 730 of his Termites and divided them into three groups: the success stories, the average, and the unsatisfactory—or Group A, B, and C, respectively.
- He found that the most significant factor that separated the As from the Cs was family background.
- The vast majority of students from Group A were from stable, middle or upper class families with educated parents, whereas many from Group C had parents who were poor and did not make it to eighth grade.
- This powerfully showed that even brilliant individuals have a difficult time achieving success if they are bereft of the web of opportunities and advantages that a stable, educated family background brings.
- For the aforementioned reasons, it is clear that Terman was mistaken in his understanding of the factors that lead to success. He overemphasized the objective, intellectual dimension of human existence when he gathered his Termites.
- Most of his Termites went on to live fairly conventional lives, earning decent incomes and holding respectable posts, but there were no Nobel Prize winners with earth-shattering ideas as he had hoped. Terman himself concluded that the link between intellect and achievement is not nearly as strong as he had supposed.

5. Cultures that reinforce the value of hard work produce better students.

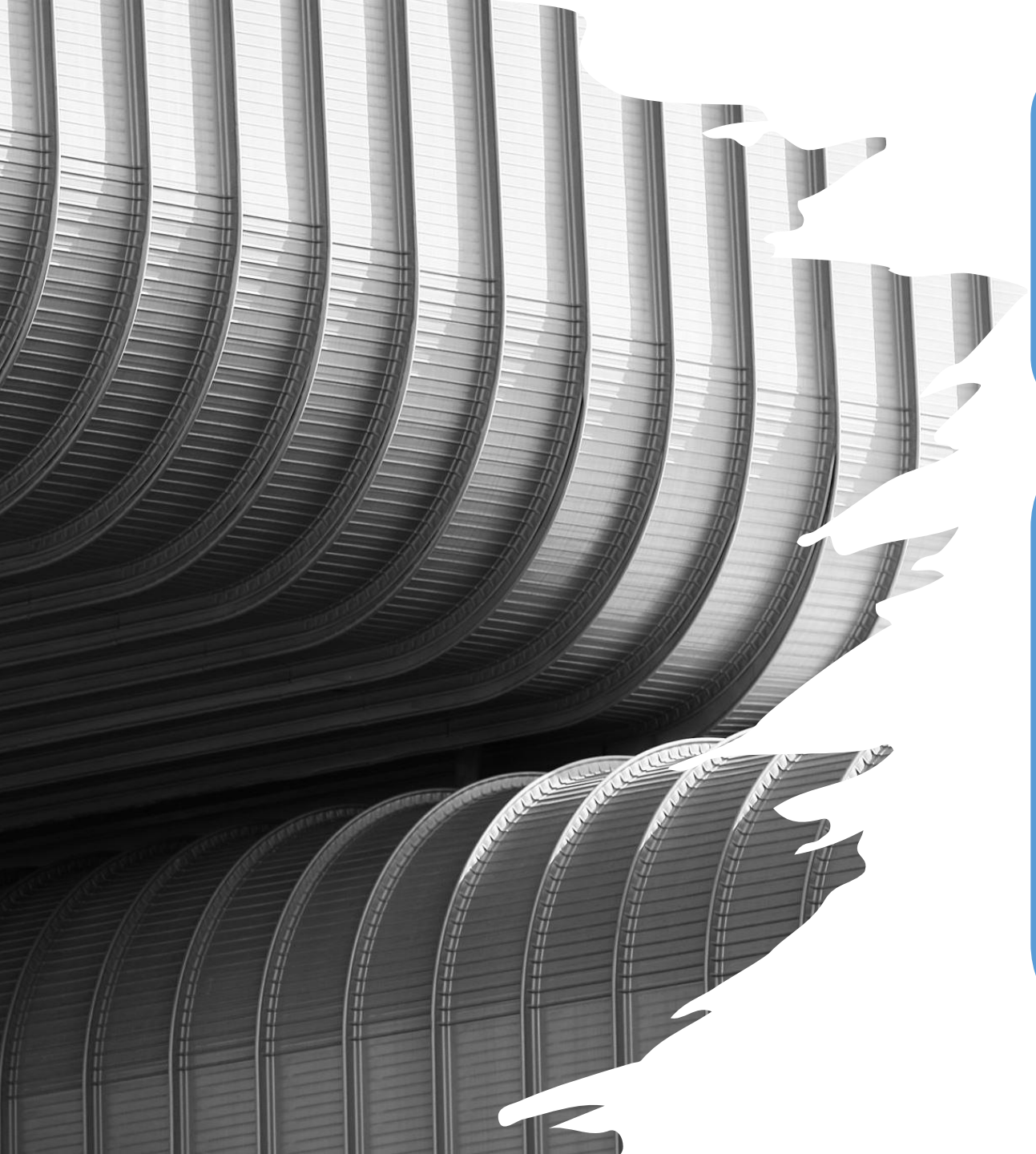
- Farming in the West is “mechanically oriented,” meaning bigger, more efficient machines yield better results. Asian agriculture, by contrast, is “skill oriented.” Given the limitations in land and capital for most Asians, long hours spent cultivating small plots as skillfully and efficiently as possible are the key to large harvests.
- As with the Eastern European Jewish immigrants in New York working in the garment industry, Asian rice farmers are engaged in an occupation that meets the commonly accepted criteria for meaningful work:
- 1) the connection between hard work and reward is strong, 2) it is more than sufficiently complex, and 3) it is autonomous.
- If we compare the folk proverbs of Russia and China, we find that the Russian peasants tended toward a passive, pessimistic fatalism, whereas the Chinese idioms were affirmations of the blood, sweat, and tears required for success.
- For example, “No one who can rise before dawn three hundred sixty days a year fails to make his family rich.” Hard work as critical to success is deeply ingrained in the Chinese psyche. The cultural patterns developed through attention to precision and unrelenting diligence in the rice paddies serves Asians well in many realms of life, but particularly in mathematics.

- The average American high school student will spend about two minutes on a difficult problem before giving up on it. According to Berkley professor of mathematics Alan Schoenfeld, it is through persistence that one achieves breakthrough moments in learning math. Attitude is far more critical than aptitude.
- We see this doggedness—and lack thereof—in the results of the TIMSS (Trends in International Math and Science Study) questionnaire.
- University of Pennsylvania professor Erling Boe found that he could accurately predict a country's success based on how completely they filled out the grueling preliminary 120-item questionnaire.
- While many students around the world leave twenty or more questions unanswered, it should not surprise that Asians tend to fill out the surveys completely.
- Those countries with cultural legacies of single-minded determination, animated by sayings about rising before dawn everyday—*those* are cultures that are willing to complete exhausting surveys. They are also the same that excel in mathematics.



6. Sometimes cultural legacies have to be set aside for a higher good.

- KIPP Academy began as an educational experiment in the mid-1990s. It is a middle school in the heart of one of the poorest areas of New York, the South Bronx. In just a decade, it became one of the most coveted programs in New York. Good teachers and robust curriculum do not adequately explain the school's success.
- The attention KIPP has paid to the failing cultural convention of long summer vacations better explains their success.
- This failed cultural legacy has its origins in the nineteenth century, when American public schools were little more than a smattering of overcrowded buildings in cities and rural schoolhouses that remained empty during planting and harvest seasons.
- Reformers envisioned a more comprehensive system.
- One aspect that the reformers were adamant about was a period of rest to ensure the students would not receive too much schooling. From this philosophy came the long summer vacations with which we are familiar today.
- This approach was shaped by wheat and cornfields that must lie fallow every so often, a philosophy much less likely to originate in Asia's rice paddy fields, where diligent work and constant attention are needed.



Long summer vacations has been often overlooked in discussions of the achievement gap that separates low class students from middle and upper class students.

When we consider that cumulative achievement is pretty even across the social classes (that is, the gains made over the course of the school year) and that reading score gains are significantly higher among upper class than lower class students by the end of summer each year, we can conclude that the summer is the season of unlearning what was learned.

Compare the United States' 180 days of school to South Korea's 220 days or Japan's 243 days.

Three-month vacations would be unthinkable for cultures that view rising before dawn every day as key to success.

‘Marita is one such student who has agreed to submit to the rigors of the program. Only twelve years old, KIPP’s schedule and homework has her up well before the crack of dawn and in bed by eleven or midnight. But with students achieving math scores comparable to New York’s elite prep schools and 80% of KIPP graduates attending colleges—a proportion unheard of in inner-city public schools—it is worth it.’

- Outliers: The Story of Success - Malcolm Gladwell Animated Book Review - YouTube


Q & A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