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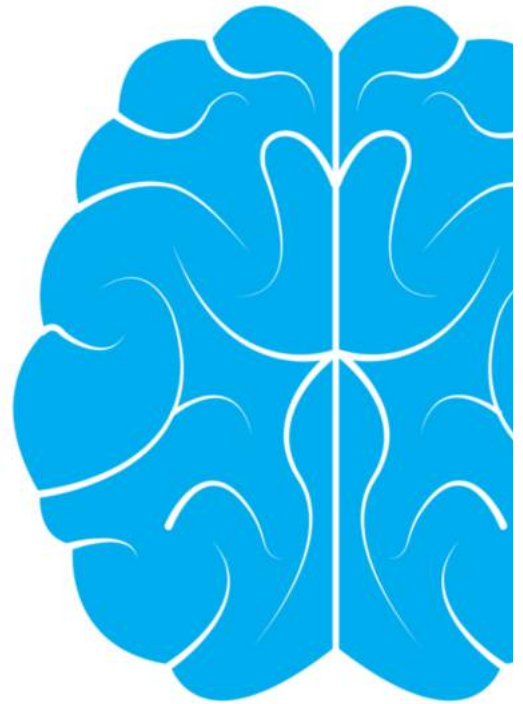
## Imagination Notes

Post 4/17

# TOK NOTES

WOKs: Language, Sense Perception, Emotion,  
Reason, Imagination, Faith, Intuition and  
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AOKs: Arts, Ethics, History, Human Sciences,  
Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Mathematics,  
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## Imagination Quotes

- "You can't depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus." (Mark Twain)
- "The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge but imagination." (Albert Einstein)
- "To imagine is everything, to know is nothing at all." (Anatole France)
- "No amount of skilful invention can replace the essential element of imagination." (Edward Hopper)
- "Imagination grows by exercise, and contrary to common belief, is more powerful in the mature than in the young." (W. Somerset Maugham)
- "The imagination is man's power over nature." (Wallace Stevens)
- "Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass." (Anton Chekhov)
- Reason is the natural order of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning." (C.S. Lewis)

# Imagination Definitions

- "The faculty or action of forming new ideas, or images or concepts of external objects not present to the senses." (Oxford English Dictionary).
- "Imagination is the ability to form a mental image of something that is not perceived through the five senses." (Sasson).

Little is known about how imagination actually works.

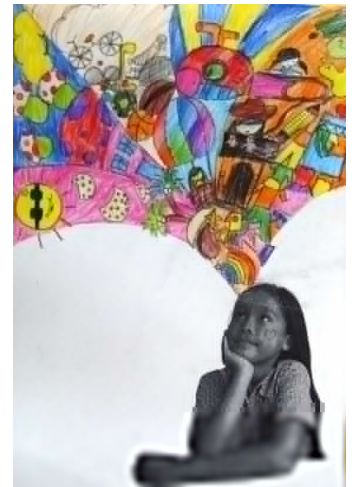
Many cultures (and the billionaire-CEO of Tesla [Elon Musk](#)) have wondered whether reality itself is an illusion or a simulation.

However, scientists can use fMRI's to explore where there is activity in the brain when people imagine moving a shape around for example (see [this example](#) from Dartmouth University). But very little is understood about how these mental processes actually work.



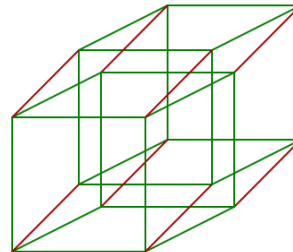
## The insights of imagination

- Imagination **helps us solve novel problems**. Einstein used thought experiments to perform experiments he couldn't do in reality. (For example, he wondered whether a clock would seem to move normally if he were observing it while travelling at riding a light speed.) Our brains are great at imagining different scenarios, giving us knowledge of things we haven't yet experienced. As Einstein put it imagination is "...the preview for life's coming attractions."
- Similar to the previous point, our imagination helps us **to appreciate different realities presented to us in the arts**. For example, when reading a novel imagination helps us explore how we would feel or act in these situations. "Individuals who frequently read fiction seem to be better able to understand other people, empathize with them, and see the world from their perspective" (Mar and Oatley).
- Imagination helps in the **processing of the day's information**, making meaningful connections. This shows us during dreaming, but also during daydreaming (or mind wandering). Einstein said, "When I examine myself and my methods of thought, I come close to the conclusion that the gift of fantasy has meant more to me than my talent for absorbing positive knowledge" (Fries).
- Imagination **helps artists with their creations**, which facilitates the production of knowledge through art. And it helps architects [design spaces](#) which combine old realities with new insights, to help people live and think in new ways.



## Weaknesses of imagination

- Imagination can be **limited by insufficient knowledge**. Psychologist Loran Nordgren confirmed that people typically underestimate how painful it feels to be bullied or socially excluded (Nordgren). In the same study, middle school teachers were found to suggest harsher punishment for bullies if they themselves had experienced social exclusion in their own lives (Nordgren). These insights suggest that our ability to imagine someone else's experience and emotions are limited by our own experiences. Similarly it might be impossible to imagine four-spacial dimensions.
- But having **too much knowledge** can also constrain imagination. For example, it's hard to imagine how others might feel because we are so used to how we feel. Similarly, it's hard to imagine the realities of subatomic physics because we're so familiar with Newtonian physics.
- **Imagination can alter memories** in a way that is not conducive to reliable knowledge. The famous example of eye-witness testimonies. "Images made by functional magnetic resonance imaging technology show that remembering and imagining sends blood to identical parts of the brain" (Long).
- **Some things seem impossible to imagine**. I might be impossible to imagine not existing, because this would be a paradox and our brain can't determine how that would work.
- Also, **our ability to understand the limits of our imagination is limited by our imaginations**. Maybe if we had stronger imaginations we could easily imagine all kinds of limits to our imaginations. (But then again, this too could be a paradox. Maybe we are inherently unable to grasp more than just a few limits of our imagination. Someone with a weak imagination can only imagine a few limits of their imagination. Whereas someone with a stronger imagination could imagine many more limits of an imagination, but this person (with a stronger imagination) wouldn't have most of those limits.)



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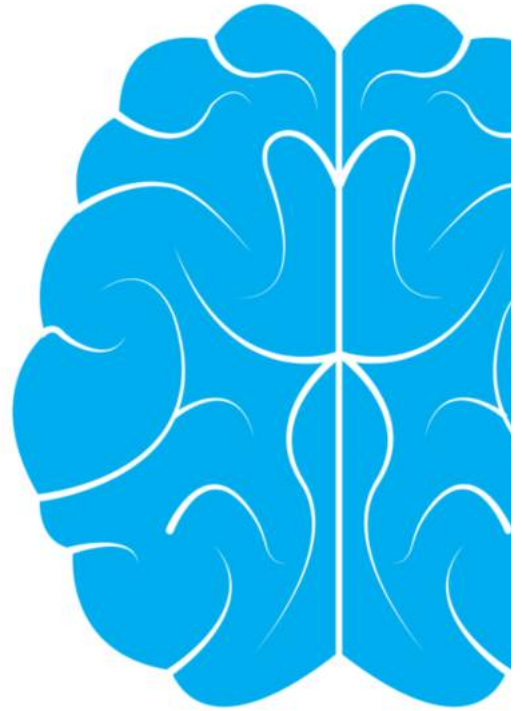
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