

dog off the lead in a park. If you let the creative part of your brain go run around for a while (the dog), without being restricted by the more rigorous conscious thought (the lead), it will come back with lots of interesting ideas (in this analogy: sticks, balls and dead birds).

Monsieur Poincaré, our French mathematician friend, believed that the products of unconscious thought often do not enter the conscious mind right away, but pop up in there later unexpectedly.

We've all experienced the feeling that there's *something there*, some interesting idea or solution that we can't quite put into words yet. In fact,⁷ there's a two-step process going on. In the first, unconscious thought goes to work looking for creative solutions by exploring the dark and dusty nooks and crannies, and in the second, the solutions are transferred across to conscious thought.

The task often used in research on creativity is known as the Remote Association Test (RAT) because it tasks people with finding remote associations between things. This fits nicely with the Frenchman's description of creativity. In one form of RAT, for instance, people are given three words and they need to come up with a fourth that fits with each of them. Ready to try one? Cheese – Ocean – Sky.

Quickly ... quickly ...

The answer is *blue*. As in *blue cheese*, *blue ocean* and *blue sky*. Here are a few more to play around with. The answers are at the end of the chapter (see page 102), but the last few are pretty tricky so don't be surprised if you don't get them all.

⁷'The Merits of Unconscious Thought in Creativity', Cheh-Bo Zhong, Ap Dijksterhuis and Adam Galinsky, *Psychological Science*, 2008.

Light – Birthday – Stick

Cross – Rain – Tie

Boot – Summer – Ground

Manners – Round – Tennis

Health – Taker – Less

Off – Trumpet – Atomic

Carpet – Alert – Ink

Test – Runner – Map

Man – Glue – Star

Here are the trickier ones ...

Stick – Maker – Point

Foot – Collection – Out

Line – Fruit – Drunk

Mate – Shoes – Total

Land – Hand – House

Bump – Throat – Sum

Problems like these can be solved in one of two ways: either by trial and error, an analytical process whereby we consciously go through word combinations to see if one of them fits (for the last one in the list you might have started with 'Off' to make 'Castoff' and tried it with the other two words before realising that wouldn't work), or solve the problem through insight. **There's an 'A-ha!' moment when the answer arrives from your subconscious. That's the creative bit at work.**

And it's funny, but that 'A-ha!' feeling is how people almost always describe it (unless you're Greek, in which case 'Eureka' is the more usual cry). So when researchers want to find out if someone got the answer through analysis or insight, they ask them to say whether or not they got that 'A-ha!' feeling when they found the solution, and their answer tells the researchers which method of problem-solving was used.

