



Misconceptions You Learned in School - mental_floss on YouTube (Ep.1)

Misconceptions

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Hi, I'm Elliott and this is Mental Floss on YouTube. Today I'm going to talk about some misconceptions that you may have learned in school.

(Intro)

Misconception number 1, there were thirteen original colonies. Call up Mrs. Pumpnickel and demand a refund, OK, because Delaware was the first state to ratify the constitution, but it was never its own colony. The area was disputed between the province of Pennsylvania and Maryland until 1776. It did get its own assembly in the early 1700s, but it was still owned and governed by Pennsylvania.

Misconception number 2, Thomas Edison invented the light bulb. Many inventors contributed to what would eventually become the light bulb, including Humphry Davy, Joseph Swan and Charles Stearn. But Edison did create an incandescent light bulb that would stay lit for multiple hours. He then patented it, and successfully marketed it, which is why a lot of people give him credit for the invention. But why are we giving him credit when we could be giving a man named Humphry Davy credit?

Misconception number 3, toilet water flushes differently in different hemispheres because of the Coriolis effect. The direction of water going down a drain is not different in Northern and Southern hemispheres. In fact the direction is primarily affected by the shape of the toilet or the sink and this has nothing to do with the Coriolis effect, which described how objects that move on a rotating surface, like the Earth, deflect a bit in one direction. This applies to larger things like air and currents, but not things that are as minuscule as toilets.

Misconception number 4, thousands panicked when they heard *The War of the Worlds* on the radio. Documentaries and textbooks sometimes report that millions were listening to Orson Welles performing a radio version of H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*. The truth is, we don't know. Many sources and studies disagree on this. On the night the radio program aired in 1938, a study showed that only 2% of 5000 households were even listening, and many of those listening knew that it was just a radio play. Still, hysteria was reported in many newspapers, and Orson Welles did apologize the next day. Around 300 people sent letters of complaint. Egg on their face, am I right?

Misconception number 5, diamonds are made from coal. Most diamonds have actually been on Earth for *much* longer than coal has. That's pretty much all I need to say to prove that this isn't true. Most diamonds are actually formed around 100 miles below ground out of carbon. Then, many years later, they magically appear in mall jewelry stores, all over the country.

Misconception number 6, Christopher Columbus believed that the Earth was flat. Actually Columbus knew that the earth was round, and he didn't prove that it was either. The fact that the earth was round was pretty much common knowledge in Europe for at least 200 years before he set sail. This myth came from the biography *A History of the Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* by Washington Irving. Irving essentially made it up to make his story more interesting. More like lie-ography, am I right?

Misconception number 7, George Washington chopped down his father's cherry tree. This story also came from a biography. It was first seen in the fifth edition of *The Life of Washington* by Parson Weems, which was published 7 years after Washington died. In the book, Washington actually removes the bark from the tree, which evolved into the story that we know today. Unfortunately, Weems' book is not considered a very good or credible source. Even at the time it was written, a reviewer called it "eighty pages of

as entertaining and edifying matter as can be found in the annals of fanaticism and absurdity." That's one snarky colonial critic. I like him.

Misconception number 8, "Irregardless" is not a word. Sorry guys, but this is, uh, kind of how words and definitions are made. People say them enough, and then they get put in the dictionary. So, irregardless can be found in the dictionary, along with words like selfie, and hashtag, because we're just going down. According to Merriam-Webster: "Irregardless originated in dialectal American speech in the early 20th century." Its fairly widespread use in speech called it to the attention of usage commentators as early as 1927.

Misconception number 9, you're born with all the brain cells that you'll ever have. You may have learned this in school because it was the belief for a very long time, and yes, most of a person's brain cells get formed even before they're born, but some are created during infancy as well, and scientists now know that we create around 1400 new brain cells a day. So the next time someone tells you to not do something because it "kills brain cells", tell them, "It's okay, I'll grow some more." They'll be like "What?"

Misconception number 10, sunflowers follow the sun. Sunflower buds do this, but not actual sunflowers. According to the National Sunflower Association, "Once the flower opens into the radiance of yellow petals, it faces east. No one knows why. However, it is likely a defensive response. Facing south or west could result in sun-scalding of seeds during very hot days." In other news, there's a National Sunflower Association. Which begs the question: Why is there a National Sunflower Association?

Thanks for watching Misconceptions on Mental Floss on YouTube, which is made with the help of all of these super-nice people. If you have a topic for an upcoming Misconceptions episode that you would like to see, leave it in the comments and I will see you next week. Goodbye!