From the Editor

Cat's In the Cradle

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“Dad, what is science?”

“Science? Well, science is the search for the truth. It’s all about trying to understand what surrounds us in our world.”

“Can I be a scientist?”

“Of course you can. In some ways, you already are: when you look out at the world, ask questions, and seek answers.”

“Science sounds fun. Let’s make up some good questions right now!”

“Well, it’s not so simple. First you have to observe. When you see something you think is strange, then you can ask questions like: why is this strange, or how did this become strange.”

“Like when we saw that platypus at the zoo?”

“Exactly.”

“So no making things up in science?”

“Right. Unless—”

“Unless what?”

“Well, say you observe something interesting, like that platypus. But maybe the next step in answering your question—say, how the platypus got its bill—is a little beyond your reach; you don’t have enough information at the moment. But you *know* that your idea on how this occurred is correct. Even if you can’t prove your idea, you can say that it’s highly possible.”

“Possible?”

“Yes. When we know something is going to happen, we can say that there is a strong probability it will occur.”

“But, is that correct?”

“Of course it’s correct. Sometimes, things are implied even if they are not known. It’s okay to assume in some instances.”

“So, science can assume.”

“Sure. But, you need to realize that scientific inquiry can be tough; proving your idea can take a long time. Still, you need to make sure you get your ideas out to the scientific community as quickly as possible.”

“So, science is quick.”

“There will always be someone else doing the same work as you, so you also have to find a special angle to make your results stand out.”

“So, science stands out.”

“Of course, you’ll need money to do your research, and that comes through grants. Grants today are impossible to get: NIH is only putting out \$31 billion each year. So, you might have to say you have done an experiment when you haven’t yet, or you might not do an experiment when you already know the result in order to get funding...you know, a little fibbing to get those much-needed dollars.”

“So, science can fib.”

“And sometimes, you might have to fight with your colleagues for proper attribution in an article: for example, to make sure you are the lead author. Proper credit is important.”

“So, science has fights.”

“Don’t forget, you must publish your findings in only the highest-profile journals with the best impact factors, so that your work is seen and cited.”

“So, science is high-profile.”

“But always claim that doesn’t matter. Say that you ‘believe in open access’ but keep publishing in the high-impact journals, of course. And be sure to disparage the impact factor as statistically inaccurate—that sounds popular and hip.”

“So, science is popularity.”

“And finally, when all is said and done and your career is well launched, make sure you stand on the shoulders of everyone who helped you better understand that world around you. After all, you are the one who spent years suffering for your love of science.”

“So, science is suffering.”

“You’ve got it. Any questions?”

“Dad—what happened to the truth?”

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