FPCJ Press Briefing

Creativity of Japanese Researchers as Seen through the Ig Nobel Prize

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College of Science
Science Communication Office for Liberal Arts [SCOLA]
Specially Appointed Associate Professor / Science Communicator
Japan Improbable Research / Ig Nobel Prizes Director.
Kiyoshi FURUSAWA

Kiyoshi FURUSAWA



Specialism: Science Communication

 Design of experiential / interactive / dialogical Opportunity

Serious games, etc.

How to communicate Science, how to think about it

Other experience: High school science teacher / Indie music writer/ DJ / Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (Malawi, Africa) / National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation (Miraikan) / CoSTEP, Hokkaido University before assuming current position.



Agenda



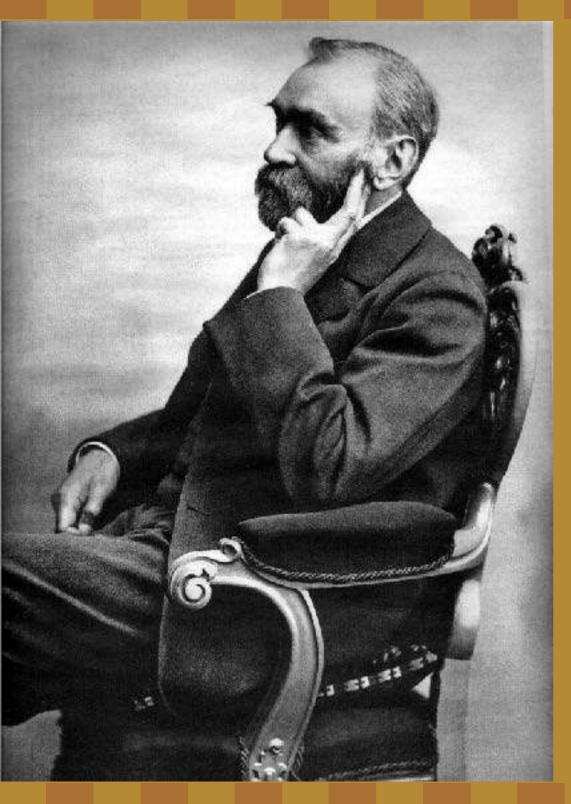
What is the Ig Nobel Prize?

The Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony?

Creativity of Japanese Researchers?

Conclusion & This Year's Ceremony?

What is Nobel Prize?

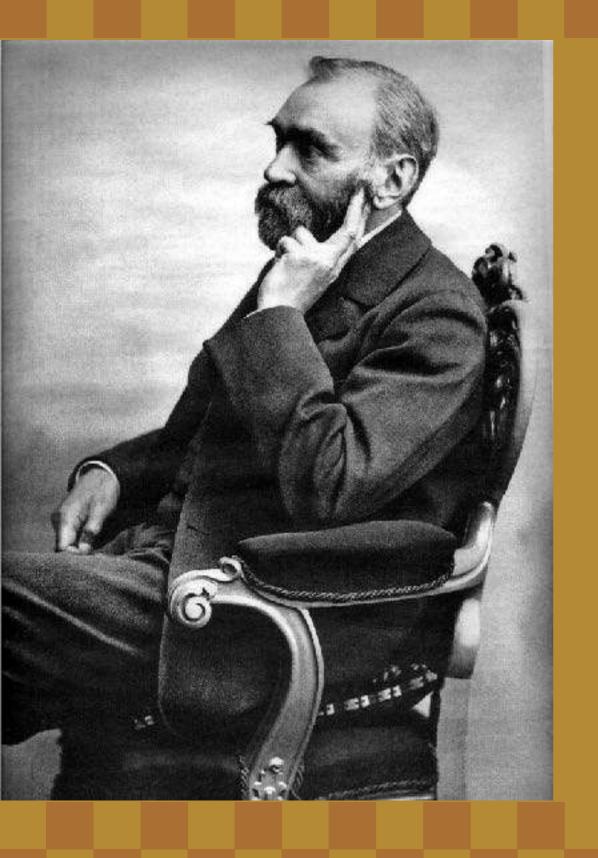


Nobel Prize (Since 1901年)

Alfred Nobel

The prize awarded to the person who has contributed most to humanity

What is Nobel Prize?



6 Categories

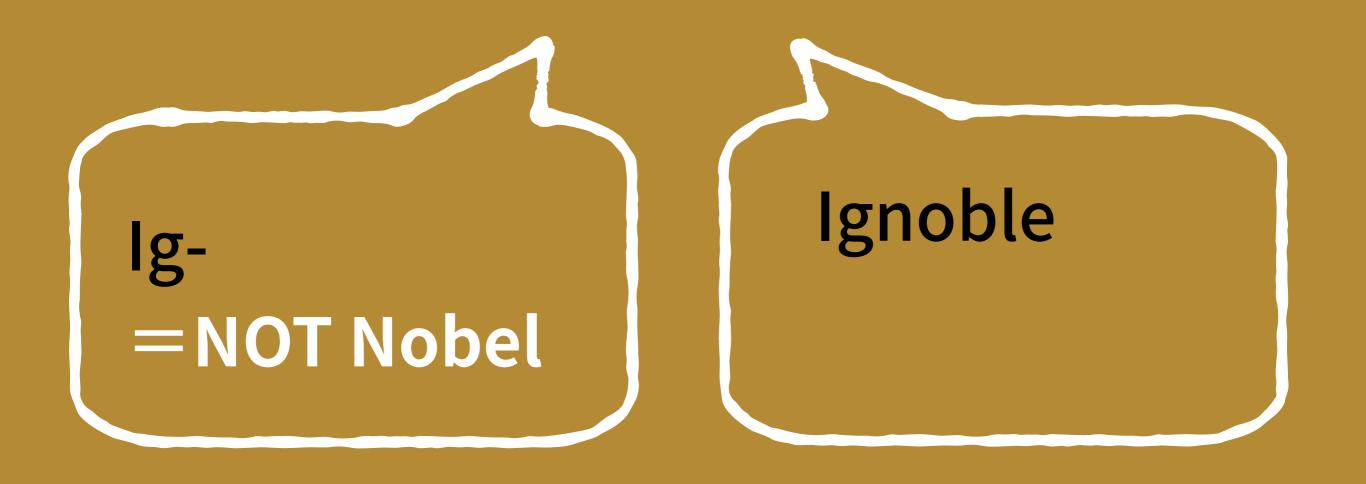
Physiology or Medicine
Physics / Chemistry
Peace / Literature
Economic Sciences

Only living persons

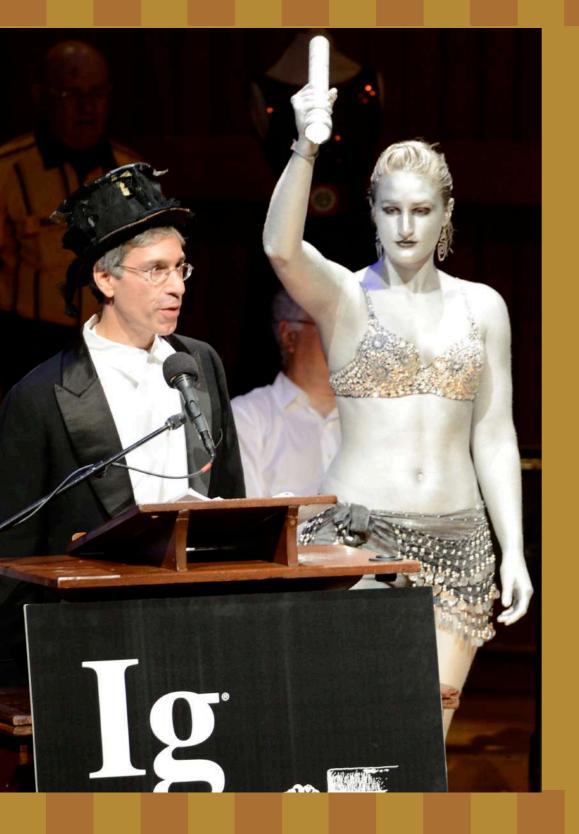
Prize money: 11 million Swedish kronor (approx. 150 million JPY)

What is Ig Nobel Prize?

Ig Nobel



What is Ig Nobel Prize?



Marc Abrahams

Humorous science journal 「Annal of Improbable Research」
Chief Editor

Began in 1991; 35th in 2025

What is Ig Nobel Prize?



Ten categories

However, the categories are set depending on the awarded research.

Not limited to living persons

Prize money... NONE

As Prizes...





- A certificate resembling copy paper, signed by Nobel laureates
- A toy-like trophy
- Bonus: a 10-trillion Zimbabwean dollar note (now invalid)

By the way, travel and accommodation costs are paid by the winners. Even so, many winners gather for the ceremony.

Award Criteria

achievements that first make people LAUGH, and then make them THINK

2009 Ig Nobel PUBLIC HEALTH PRIZE

for inventing a brassiere that, in an emergency, can be quickly converted into a pair of protective face masks, one for the brassiere wearer and one to be given to some needy bystander.

Elena N. Bodnar et al.



2009 Ig Nobel MATHEMATICS PRIZE

for giving people a simple, everyday way to cope with a wide range of numbers — from very small to very big — by having his bank print bank notes with denominations ranging from one cent (\$.01) to one hundred trillion dollars (\$100,000,000,000,000).

Gideon Gono

governor of Zimbabwe's Reserve Bank





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What is the Ig Nobel Prize?

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Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony

- Held every September in the United States
 - Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Harvard University, and Boston University...
- An academic festival enjoyed by the whole community
 - Many Nobel laureates attend
- Signature features include
 - Each year has a theme; this year's theme is "Digestion"
 - Science Opera
 - 24/7 Lectures
 - Welcome/Goodbye speeches, Paper Airplane Deluge
 - Time Keeper: Miss Sweetie Poo (Winners speak for 60 seconds)

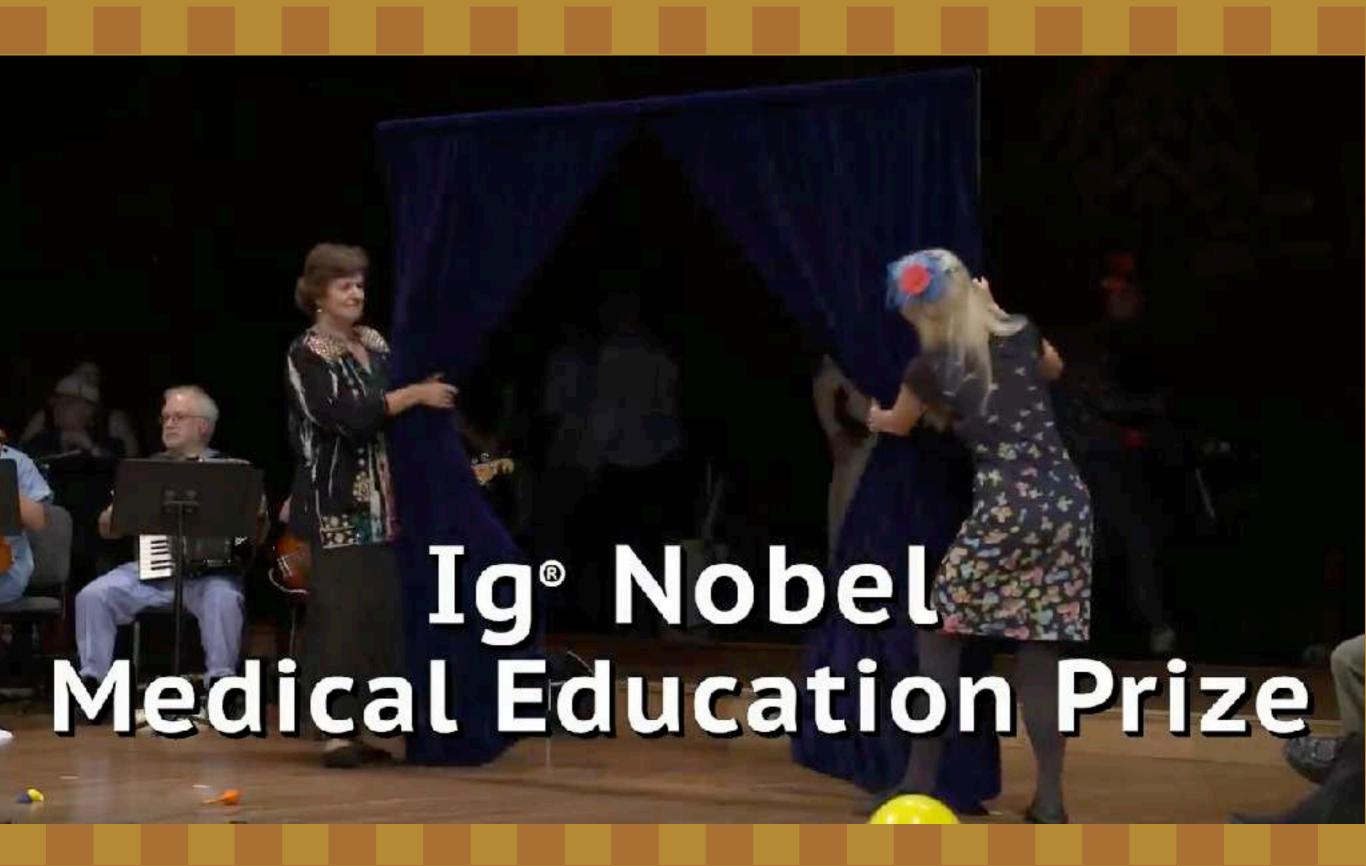
Paper Airplane Deluge



Welcome Welcome Speech



Winners speech and Miss Sweetie Poo



2018 Ig Nobel MEDICAL EDUCATION PRIZE

for the medical report "Colonoscopy in the Sitting Position: Lessons Learned From Self-Colonoscopy."

Akira Horiuchi

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Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony

- More than just entertainment
 - Until 2022: "Ig Informal Lectures" (5-min presentations)
 - Since 2023: "Ig Nobel Face-to-Face" (dialogues)



Nobel laureates and Ig Nobel winners conversations

Also held in Japan as an official spin-off event.



Agenda



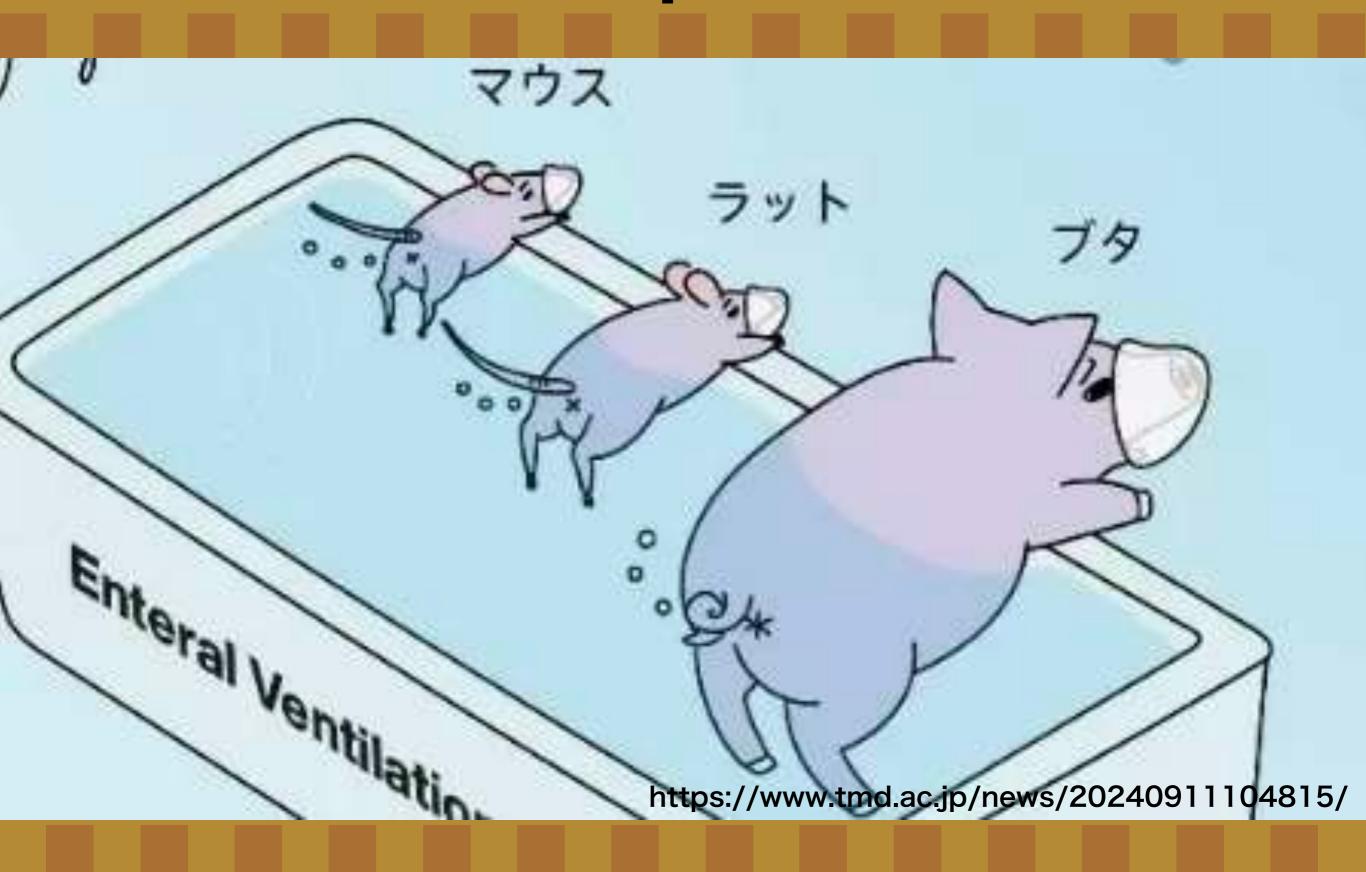
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Last Year's Japanese Winner



2024 Ig Nobel PHYSIOLOGY PRIZE

for discovering that many mammals are capable of breathing through their anus.

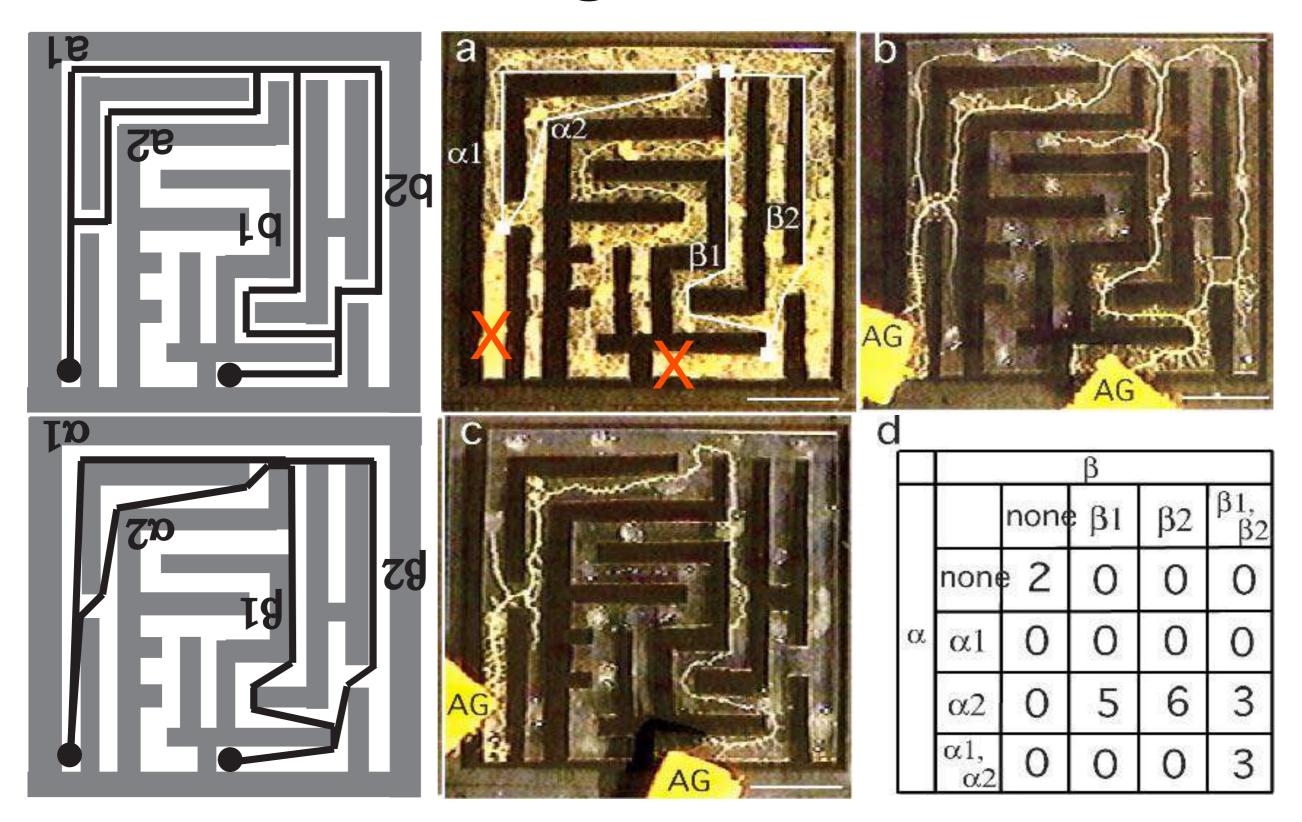
Ryo Okabe Takanori Takebe et al.

Japan's Track Record

- The number of awards is among the world's top
 - After the US, the UK and Japan are tied
 - Around 30 awards to date
 - Awarded for 18 consecutive years (2007–2024)



Amazing in a maze



2008 COGNITIVE SCIENCE PRIZE for discovering that slime molds can solve puzzles.

Toshiyuki Nakagaki et al.

2008 COGNITIVE SCIENCE PRIZE for discovering that slime molds can solve puzzles.

2010 TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PRIZE

for using slime mold to determine the optimal routes for railroad tracks.

Toshiyuki Nakagaki et al.



2014 Ig Nobel PHYSICS PRIZE

for measuring the amount of friction between a shoe and a banana skin, and between a banana skin and the floor, when a person steps on a banana skin that's on the floor.

Kiyoshi Mabuchi et al.

Japan's Track Record

- The number of awards is among the world's top
 - After the US, the UK and Japan are tied
 - Around 30 awards to date
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- Some award-winning research has been developed into practical applications
 - Smile Ball, Electric Salt Spoon, etc.



江戸村のとくぞう - 投稿者自身による作品, CC 表示-継承 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=57648469による

2011 Ig Nobel CHEMISTRY PRIZE for determining the ideal density of airborne wasabi (pungent horseradish) to awaken sleeping people in case of a fire or other emergency, and for applying this knowledge to invent the wasabi alarm.

Makoto Imai et al.



臭気発生装置



わさびスプレー缶



火災報知器

2013 Ig Nobel

for discovering that the biochemical process by which onions make people cry is even more complicated than scientists previously realized.

Shinsuke Imai et al.



https://housefoods-group.com/tsunagu/vegetables/smileball/about/index.html

2023 Ig Nobel NUTRITION PRIZE

for experiments to determine how electrified chopsticks and drinking straws can change the taste of food.

Homei Miyashita Hiromi Nakamura



https://electricsalt.shop.kirin.co.jp/Page/products

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- Some award-winning research has been developed into practical applications
 - Smile Ball, Electric Salt Spoon, etc.
- **Creativity of Japanese Researchers**
 - Originality of the question (perspective)
 - Originality of the method
 - The Culture

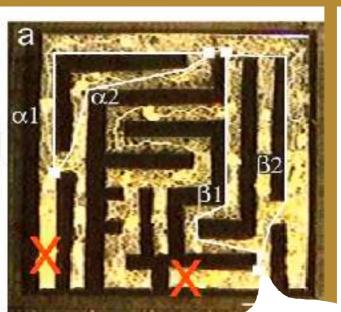
Creativity of Japanese Researchers

Originality of the question (perspective)











The very idea or perspective of attempting to "research" it is original.

The ability to actually do it, to make it happen

That's a novel approach!

Creativity of Japanese Researchers



- Perhaps there is a culture that, even if it may sometimes reject eccentric ideas or behavior, however, also admires them and takes pride in such people.
- Perhaps there is a culture that can continue to foster niche cultures.



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Conclusion & This Year's Ceremony?

- What sets the Nobel and Ig Nobel Prizes apart?
 - The meaning of making people laugh, then think, "without meaning to"
 - Few researchers aim specifically for the Ig Nobel Prize
 - The importance of curiosity common to both prizes

2000 Ig Nobel PHYSICS PRIZE

for using magnets to levitate a frog.

Andre Geimet al.

2000 Ig Nobel PHYSICS PRIZE

for using magnets to levitate a frog.

2010 Nobel PHYSICS PRIZE

for groundbreaking experiments regarding the two-dimensional material graphene

Andre Geim et al.

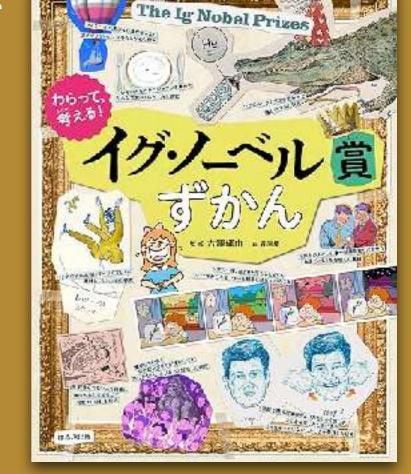
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 - Shift from "Not good!" to "Silly... or is it?"
 - Now often seen as "unexpectedly brilliant" or "unexpectedly useful"

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 - Shift from "Not good!" to "Silly... or is it?"
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- **Embracing wonder and humor**
 - New perspectives: there are different ways of thinking and different kinds of people

Announcements

- 2025 Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony -Live webcast
 - Sep .18th, 6pm (Sep. 19th, 7am JST)
 - Niconico Live (with translated subtitles)
 - →https://live.nicovideo.jp/watch/lv348433668
 - →https://youtu.be/B4zfy63MOfI
 - Improbable Research official YouTube
 - →https://www.youtube.com/live/P8fhpgn3t88
- Upcoming: Ig Nobel Face-to-Face 2025 in Japan
 - Dialogue between Ig Nobel and Nobel laureates
 - Official spin-off event



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Laugh and think! The Ig Nobel Prize Encyclopedia (Holp Publishing, 2024)

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