

# SYNESTHESIA

## FAST FACTS:

- synesthesia is the “cross-wiring” of the senses; for example, seeing blue when hearing a D, or tasting peaches when hearing the name Gloria. it could occur between any two or more senses in a wide variety of contexts.
- no one really knows how many people have synesthesia; it might be as many as 1 in 23 people- it’s probably due to the fact that many with synesthesia do not realize that not everyone perceives the world the way they do
- if you think this is just imagination, think again- they’ve done fMRI scans
- sure this is super cool, but it can also be a burden: imagine if you couldn’t listen to a piece of music as an entire line, only as points of color, or, if the colors of your numbers didn’t add up (i.e. 5 (yellow) + 2 (blue) = 7 (orange), not 8 (green))
  - synesthetes might have problems with reading or math
- synesthetic children are often ridiculed and forced to conceal their synesthesia, because no one around them knows it’s a legitimate condition
- generally, all synesthetes have different “powers”, if you will (or a combination), but even when they have the same one (color:key signature, for example), personal associations rarely line up
- there is also evidence for common associations (for example, the letter “A” with the color red) amongst synesthetic and non-synesthetic people (including pre-literate toddlers); this has lead researchers to wonder if there is a universal, underlying set of associations common to a culture, or even the entire human race (see graphic, bottom of next page)

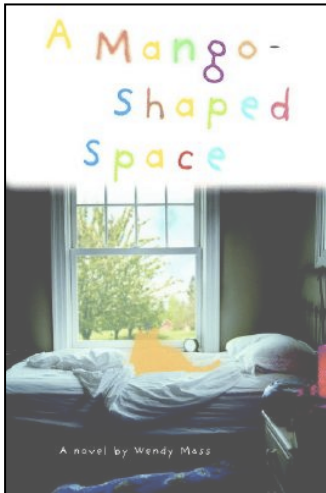
## COOL STORIES: (yes, subjects are generally referred to by initial)

- D.: female, art educator, sees a specific color for each pitch (also has absolute pitch), synesthesia was more consistent/reliable than her AP over time
- E.S.: female, musician, experiences specific tastes in relation to musical intervals (ie a major seventh is sour); interestingly, her tastes remain true through inversion- for example, both a minor seventh and a major second taste bitter
- S.: male, experiences very detailed multisensory sensations; ringing bell = small, round object rolling, feeling of roughness, tasting salt water, and seeing white
- M.: female, sees numbers as having personalities, and has vivid visions with sounds, as well as some tastes and smells
- C.L.: female, has colors for letters, numbers, days of the week, and somewhat for music; though she does not have perfect pitch, she has colors for only the white keys
- R.: male, experiences specific pitches in response to different levels of pain/pressure and temperatures

# SYNESTHESIA

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

the alphabet as seen by one synesthete



← the one that started it all... this excellent young person's novel by Wendy Mass first alerted me to, and interested me in, synesthesia. it is poignant and informative.

accessible articles on the topic:

<http://www.lurj.org/article.php/vol2n1/synesthesia.xml>

<http://www.apa.org/monitor/mar01/synesthesia.aspx>

personal forum on synesthesia:

<http://www.maitespace.com/interests/synesth/synesthesia.htm>

the American Synesthesia Association:

<http://synesthesia.info/>

important books on synesthesia:

(note: yup, the Brit's spell it "synaesthesia" - be sure to check both spellings if you're researching it)

*Synaesthesia: The Strangest Thing*, John Harrison

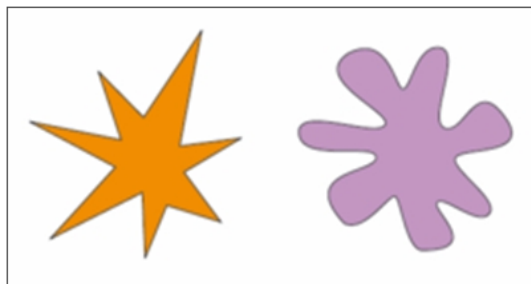
*Synesthesia: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, Simon Baron-Cohen and John Harrison

*Synesthesia: A Union of the Senses*, Richard Cytowic

YouTube:

set of 5 segments of a BBC video: here's the first one-

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrkyurkPhlY>



→ across cultures, ages, and languages, the vast majority of human beings identified the left shape as "kiki" and the right as "bobau" (or slight variations). crazy! this (and similar studies) suggests to some researchers that there might be a set of universal, subconscious synesthetic associations amongst the entire species.