

The Talented

by Lynne Smith

DYSLEXIC

Einstein, Picasso, W.B. Yeats, David Bailey, Walt Disney, John Lennon, Fred Astaire, Steven Spielberg, Tom Cruise, Will Smith, Roald Dahl, John F Kennedy, Richard Branson, Jack Horner (well-known paleontologist involved in a lot of films on dinosaurs) ...



What do all these famous people have in common? They are all dyslexic - or perhaps it was their dyslexic talents that made them famous!

What are the talents that dyslexics have in common? They include thinking mainly in pictures rather than in words; being very imaginative and creative; and intuitive. They usually prefer to solve problems by looking at the whole picture; rather than working in a logical step-by-step way. Dyslexic people often think extremely quickly and can 'see' things from lots of different perspectives (multi-dimensional - the ability to spin things around using your mind's eye or imagination and 'see' things from 'outside your head'). This is a real talent but the dyslexic needs to learn control; imagine using this talent when learning letters of the alphabet, number sequences, reading a page of print. This is why dyslexic people often make good architects, interior designers, engineers, etc.

In Richard Branson's autobiography he says that *'I always loved the play Peter Pan, and I've never wanted to grow up. I'm a bit of a maverick. I love people, I love challenge, I love taking on the establishment. I love turning things upside down and having fun while doing it. I love motivating people, I love to achieve the impossible. I don't waste a moment of my life. I judge people within seconds of meeting them, within 30 seconds.'* (Losing my virginity: How I've survived, Had Fun, and Made a Fortune Doing Business my Way by Richard Branson.)

Testing for dyslexia can all too often focus on the things that are difficult to dyslexic people (reading, spelling etc). Most definitions of dyslexia, of which there are many, focus on dyslexia as a problem - mainly with language processing. It is far too common for dyslexic children to go through school labelled as stupid, lazy, careless etc. They will develop all sorts of cunning tricks to avoid reading, writing and spelling and will begin to lack confidence because of always trying to hide these difficulties in case they might be 'found out' and ridiculed. Frustration can show itself at not being able to do the things that other

people can do so easily and at having lots of brilliant ideas but not being able to express them adequately to others, whether verbally or in writing. These fears can carry on into adult life - in work situations, further studying and training, and in relationships.

Reading and writing can be very problematic to a strong visual thinker.

Dyslexia is a different way of learning and seeing the world. People with dyslexia begin developing their unique visualisation abilities subconsciously from very early on in life, as young as 3 months old. At first they use it when dealing with things they don't understand, being a way of 'cheating' on their natural stages of development. Parents of dyslexic children will say that they do things differently and at different stages to other children. Later on they will use it when dealing with two dimensional objects that they don't understand, like reading. In much the same way that a dyslexic person has to work hard to learn to read, a language-based person may have to work hard to be able to visualise in 3-D.

Reading and writing can be very problematic to a strong visual thinker. A lot of words in our language have no visual images attached to them; these are the

majority of the key words taught in schools. For example 'and', 'but', 'because', 'though', 'the', 'their', 'there' will be far more difficult for someone with dyslexia to understand than 'dog', 'elephant' and 'telephone'.

'My spelling's a problem, particularly with words where I have no vision of them. Like if someone says the word 'other' to me, it has no visual side at all. I would have no concept about what it actually began with. I've learned the word and I do know how to spell 'other' now, but I have lots of other things to remind me how to spell 'other', rather than knowing how to put 'other' together. It has no picture to it.' (A quote from a man in his 30's in 'The Dyslexic Adult in a Non-Dyslexic World' by Ellen Morgan and Cynthia Klein.)

A phonetic approach or 'sounding out' words will usually cause problems to a person who learns visually. Breaking down words into their parts will also be difficult for people who think holistically. Often dyslexic people have trouble listening. It is much easier to learn by doing. If memory is a problem it is far easier to remember when we have done something rather than read about or be told how to do it. You could read how to ride a bike in a book and know what to do. When you get on the bike and start riding it you would fall straight off - you learn mainly by experience.

Dyslexia is a different way of learning and seeing things. Language (reading, writing, spelling, maths) can be taught using a visual approach.

'It was like a TV channel that had the plug pulled. It went black inside my head. I couldn't visualise and concentrate on phonics or remember a spelling rule at the same time - it's a different way of thinking. Even if learning phonics raises your reading age it takes away what may be the most important thing in your ability to achieve in life. It's like a duck; you can clip its wings and it may be able to waddle around on land, but it will never be able to fly. Only when I let go of what I'd been taught and connected my vision to language could I begin to express myself in language.'

(*'The Dyslexic Adult in a non-Dyslexic World'*.)

'Really, I like being dyslexic. It makes me feel that I'm special in a way that nobody else is.'

(*'The Dyslexic Adult in a non-Dyslexic World'*.)

Books

'The Gift of Dyslexia'

by Ron Davis

'In the Mind's Eye'

by Thomas West

'Upside-Down Brilliance:
The Visual-Spatial Learner'

by Linda Kreger Silverman

'The Dyslexic Adult in a
Non-Dyslexic World'

by Ellen Morgan and Cynthia
Klein

On the web:

www.dyslexia.com