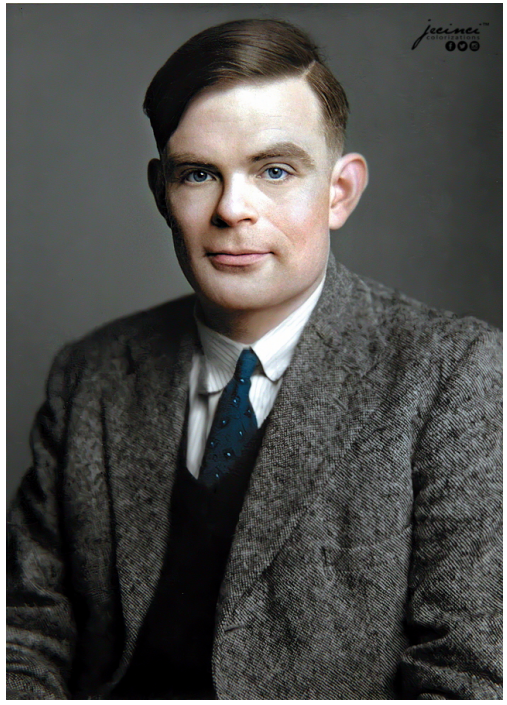
Myths About Alan Turing



Friday, November 21

Handouts:

Assignment 29

Preview of Coming Attractions

- Registration Check
  Add–Drop Period
- Update on Kryptos Auction (Cassius)
  12 Hours Ago
- Team Written Reports Due Today
- More Myths About Alan Turing
- Discussion of *New Yorker* Article
  Discussion of Updegrove's Novel
- *The Imitation Game*
  Artists React To Alan Turing's Life and Work
  Presentations of Term Projects

Myths About Alan Turing

Several myths circulate about the life and work of Alan Turing, often stemming from dramatic retellings and a desire for simplified narratives

These myths frequently obscure the nature and importance of his many real-life contributions and the circumstances of his death.

Myth: Alan Turing Invented The First Computer

Fact: Turing's 1936 paper, "On Computable Numbers," introduced the theoretical concept of a "Universal Machine" (now known as a universal Turing machine), which laid the foundation for the modern computer and its ability to run any program.

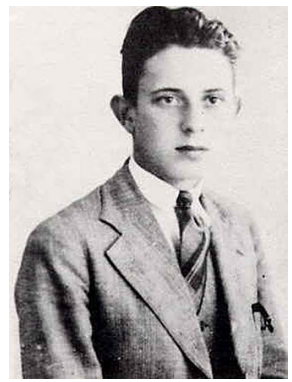
He later led efforts to build one of the first electronic computers, the ACE (Automatic Computing Engine), but other engineers and scientists, such as Tommy Flowers who developed the Colossus computer, were also instrumental in building early computational machines.

Myth: Turing Worked Alone To Break The Enigma Code

Fact: Turing was the leading figure at Bletchley Park, but the work was a collaborative effort involving thousands of people, including mathematicians like Gordon Welchman and engineers like Tommy Flowers.

The code-breaking machine known as the Bombe was itself based on the work of the Polish cryptographers Marian Rejewski, Jerzy Różycki, and Henryk Zygalski.

Marian Rejewski
1905 –1980



Jerzy Różycki
21909 – 1942

Henryk Zygalski
1908 – 1978

Myth: Winston Churchill Praised Turing's War Efforts Publicly

So just how important was he? Winston Churchill said that Turing made **the single biggest contribution** to Allied victory in the war against Nazi Germany and its Axis partners. Not *one of* the biggest, or really bloody huge, or damned near incalculable, but the single most estimable contribution of any person, period.

Myth: Winston Churchill Praised Turing's War Efforts Publicly

Fact: Alan Turing's work at Bletchley Park was highly classified for decades after the war.

There is no official record of Winston Churchill publicly stating that Turing "made the single biggest contribution to Allied victory." Churchill did, however, praise the Bletchley Park team's work as a whole.

Captain Jerry Roberts

You have to understand the measure of what Turing did. Early in the war, in 1939, he had broken the Enigma used by the Luftwaffe and the German army but he'd been unable to break the naval Enigma.

Captain Jerry Roberts:

In 1940/41 the German U-boats were sinking our food ships and our ships bringing in armaments left right and centre, and there was nothing to stop this until Turing managed to break naval Enigma, as used by the U-boats. We then knew where the U-boats were positioned in the Atlantic and our convoys could avoid them.

If that hadn't happened, it is entirely possible, even probable, that Britain would have been starved and would have lost the war. Without him, I, and many people are convinced that we would

have lost the war.

Myth: Alan Turing Was Socially Isolated And Had Asperger's Syndrome

Did Alan Turing have Asperger's syndrome?

Myth: Alan Turing Was Socially Isolated And Had Asperger's Syndrome

Fact: While dramatic portrayals, such as in the film *The Imitation Game*, have emphasized an awkward, solitary stereotype, those who knew him paint a more nuanced picture.

He was open about his sexuality and had a lively spirit despite the hardships he faced after his conviction.

Biographers suggest he may have simply been an eccentric individual, but the "Asperger's" diagnosis is a speculative modern interpretation.

Myth: Alan Turing's Death Was Definitively A Suicide

Fact: The official coroner's verdict was suicide by cyanide poisoning.

However, some people close to him, including his nephew Dermot Turing, and certain historians, have raised doubts, suggesting it could have been an accident.

Turing was dabbling in electronics and used cyanide for gold-plating spoons, and traces of the chemical were found on his hands.

The suicide narrative is often tied to the tragedy of his conviction and forced chemical castration, but the exact circumstances remain debated.

Myth: Alan Turing's Death Was Definitively A Suicide

Jack Copeland

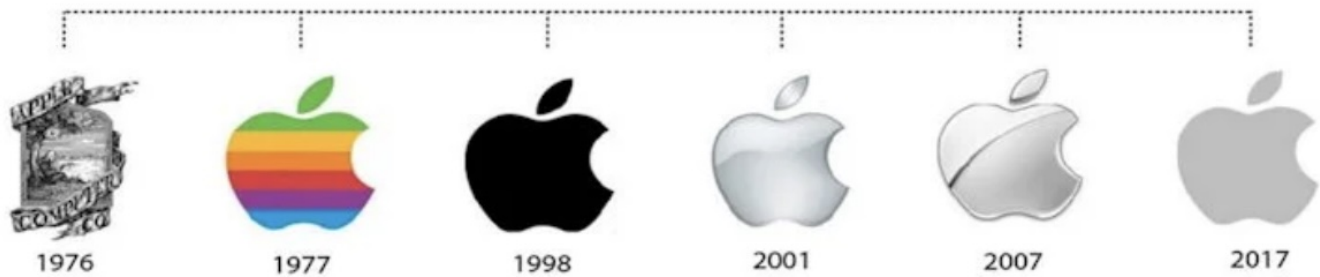
Inquest's suicide verdict 'not supportable'

Myth: The Apple Logo Is A Tribute To Alan Turing

Apple Logo

Myth: The Apple Logo Is A Tribute To Alan Turing

Fact: This popular myth suggests the bitten Apple logo is a reference to the cyanide-laced apple found near Turing's body after his death.
However, the logo's designer, Rob Janoff, has officially denied this, explaining the bite was for scale (to ensure it wasn't mistaken for a cherry) and a playful pun on the computer term "byte".

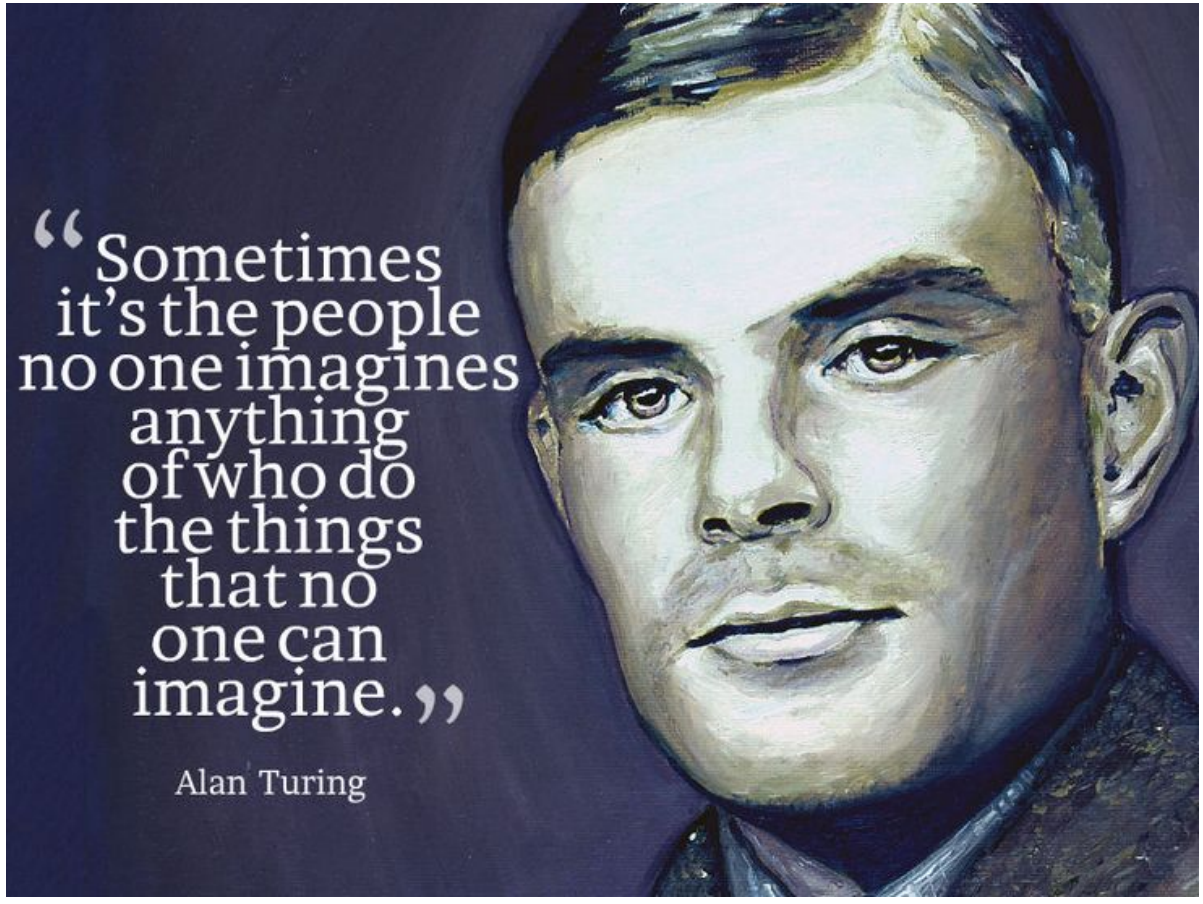


Apple Logo History

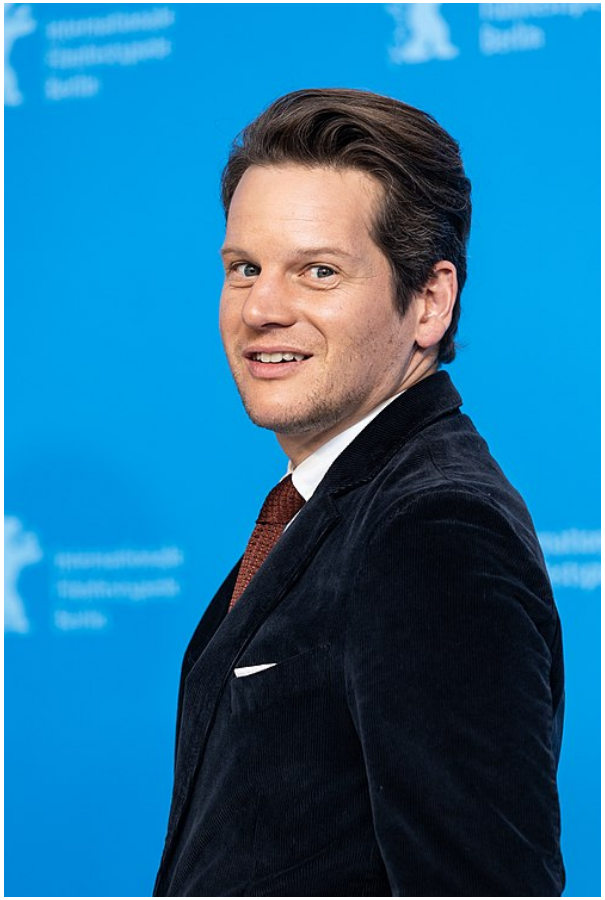
Alan Turing's Most Famous Quote

"Sometimes it is the people no one can imagine anything of who do the things no one can imagine."

Turing Quotes


“Sometimes it’s the people no one imagines anything of who do the things that no one can imagine.”
Alan Turing

Fact; The Author of This Quote is:



Graham Moore
(born October 18, 1981)
Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay
The Imitation Game

HAPPY
Thanksgiving