A Wax Works Show
Author(s): James A. Ward
Source: *The Mathematics Teacher*, Vol. 34, No. 6 (OCTOBER 1941), pp. 266-268
Published by: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/27952548
Accessed: 24-06-2016 05:56 UTC

A Wax Works Show

By James A. Ward
Tennessee Polytechnic Institute, Cookeville, Tennessee

Characters:

A carnival barker
Two stage hands
Five boys dressed as wax figures of Newton, Einstein, Archimedes, and two local mathematicians.
One girl dressed as a wax figure.

Scene:

The inside of a wax works show at a second rate carnival.
The curtain rises to show the barker.

Barker:

Ladies and gentlemen: We are going to present tonight for your approval the greatest exposition on earth. One by one before your very eyes we will bring out a collection of the greatest mathematicians of ancient and modern times that have ever lived on the earth. We will not present their pictures to you, or even their mummified bodies to horrify you. But we will show you wax figures of them, so beautifully and artfully made that you may think they are the genuine people come to life again. But that is not all. These beautiful wax models have been marvelously mechanized by the most ingenious workman so that their limbs are movable and are controlled by intricate clockwork. When they are wound up you can see them performing in a manner wonderful to behold. Ladies and gentlemen, even more marvelous than that, some of them have been wired for sound and you can see them walking, gesticulating and even talking just as they did in real life. The effect is most illuminating, fascinating, colossal, gigantic, cataclysmic, and even the most educational of any performance ever before given. These marvelous wax figures have been one of the art treasures of all the ages preserved with the greatest of care. They have been shown to audiences far and wide. They have been presented before all the crown heads of Europe, and more recently before the bald heads of America.

We will now present our wax figures for your approval. The first is a superb model of a giant of the intellect, the great mathematician, Sir Isaac Newton. He it was who discovered the laws of gravitation and invented Calculus. Calculus is that great branch of mathematics that serves the following three purposes: 1. to help to find areas and volumes, 2. to find speeds without speedometers, and 3. to flunk college sophomores. This great gentleman claims that one day he was sitting under an apple tree (or maybe he was lying) when an apple fell on his head. Thereupon he discovered the law of gravity which reads as follows: Law 73,8291/4: "Article 1. Apples fall down, and not up. Article 2. If you sit under an apple tree long enough, an apple might hit you on the head."

Now some think that Newton's intellect had been strained by the invention of the calculus and that is why he had no better sense than sit under an apple tree. But the later researches show this to be false. Newton did not invent calculus until *after* he was hit, and that is why calculus is such a headache.

Boys, bring out Sir Isaac Newton. We will show him with a model of his famous apple.

(The stage hands now *drag* out Newton and stand him up. He is very stiff, so they bring out a large oil squirt gun and oil all his limbs thoroughly. Then an apple is placed in his hand and one of the stage hands winds him up. (This is accomplished by making a loud grinding noise behind him.) As soon as this is over Newton starts rapidly raising and lowering the apple very

stiffly. He starts out rapidly and soon runs down, making sure to stop in the middle of a motion upward.)

Barker:

That's O.K. boys. Put him back out of the way, and get the next figure.

(He is taken to the background.)

Barker:

The most notorious of all living mathematicians is Albert Einstein. We will present for your approval a wonderful wax figure of this gentleman that looks just like him. Mr. Einstein has invented the wonderful theory of relativity that is supposed to be extremely difficult to understand. But this figure has been wired for sound that you may hear him give his own explanation of the basis of his theory just as in real life. It is really marvelous how simple mathematics is when a great man explains it. Boys, bring out Einstein, and be careful his wig does not fall off. At our exhibition before the German Ambassador last week, someone swiped his wig as a souvenir and our new one hasn't come yet.

(Einstein is now brought out and oiled as was Newton, his mouth is also oiled.)

Barker:

I want you to notice how distinctly he enunciates. Wind him up boys. Now, Einstein, tell us your greatest mathematical discovery.

(Einstein begins in a high voice and speaks rapidly at first and runs down.)

Einstein:

One and one is two. One and one is two. One and one is two. One and one is two. One a-an-nd on-ne i-i-is-s———

Barker:

He has probably forgotten again. Take him to the rear, boys.

There have been no women mathematicians great in the sense that the men are great. They have their own way of achievement. However they have been tremendously important and useful, for we all know that any problem is made much clearer when we have to go with it a beautiful figure. Boys, bring out the figure.

(They bring out a girl in evening dress. She is oiled and wound. Her performance is to very stiffly turn around about once and a half.)

Barker:

This graceful figure illustrates Mae West's famous theorem: "A curved line is the loveliest distance between two points." Put her back with the others, boys.

We will next present a great living Mathematician, who knows a tremendous number of things: Mr. ———— ————. He gets all his extra knowledge from the students he teaches by giving them a quiz every day.

We want you to hear the cheery greeting he gives as he enters his class every morning before that quiz. Mr. ————

(When he is brought out oiled and wound he says the usual greeting of that professor.)

Barker:

The next wax figure we will bring is also a living character, one of the greatest in the country. He is the wisest and most learned of all our dummies. We want to show him in the characteristic pose that won for him the nick-name "Smiling Doc." Bring him out, boys, and make him smile. Ladies and Gentlemen, Dr. ————.

(His performance is to turn his head from side to side and smile. He gradually runs down.)

Barker:

Ladies and Gentlemen, the next great mathematician we are going to produce for you is that of Archimedes, the greatest mathematician of antiquity. He discovered more pure mathematics than did all his predecessors before him. One of his greatest achievements was to prove that a

ball is round. He was one of those scholarly gentlemen who are always thinking of great things. The idea for one of his most stupendous discoveries came to him one day while he was taking a bath. This so excited him that he jumped from the tub and ran down the street naked. . . . Pardon me ladies. Ran down the street nude shouting: "Eureka! Eureka! Eureka!", which is Greek for, "I have found it." The effect on the populace was tremendous. He thought he was wrapped in thought, but they knew better.

Archimedes has the best set of clockworks to make him perform of any of the models you have seen heretofore. More than that, he is wired for sound that you may hear his resounding "Eureka's." We wanted to present the bare facts of this scene as it happened with Archimedes wrapped in thought alone, but that has been censored. In our disappointment we turned to fig leaves, but unfortunately they are out of season. So the best we have been able to do is bathing trunks. Boys, bring out Ark.

(Archimedes' costume consists of bathing trunks and a false beard. Since dragging would be bad on his feet he is brought in feet first. His performance is to pretend to run very fast, but stand in one place and turn around slowly. In the middle of his performance he gives two loud falsetto *Eurekas*. Then is taken to the rear with the others.)

Barker:

Now, Ladies and gentlemen, in order that you may see what a convention of Mathematicians is like, I am going to have my assistants wind these up again in order that you may see them all performing at once. Go ahead, boys.

(They all are wound and perform simultaneously.)

CURTAIN

Note: The success of the show depends on the stiffness and mechanical actions of the wax figures. They keep the same facial expression throughout. The assistants can get many laughs by putting them in ridiculous positions after they have performed. A convenient "shelf" for the oil can is the stiff hand of one of the figures.

Pythagoras

By OLA ESKELSON, *Borger, Texas*

When several hundred years ago
The learned Pythagoras
Sat in his outdoor studio
Before his eager class;

He talked of angles, right and straight,
Diagonals and sides;
Gave council how to calculate
With formulas as guides,

An area or hypotenuse,
A volume or a base:
Geometry's eternal use
For every populace.