

# Give me Mendel

Shuyu

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**UBC entrance essay: Which scientist - from the past or present - would be most helpful if both of you were stranded on a deserted island?**

Give me Gregor Mendel.

Now you might be confused as to why I'd choose an old monk, faded into obscurity. After all, he's nothing more than a Dwight Schrute-look alike (if you've seen "The Office") who only received fame posthumously after his work in genetics went unnoticed for 35 years.

You might ask why I didn't choose Albert Einstein, who could help me bend space-time and tunnel back to civilization. Or maybe Max Planck, whose bald head might be just shiny enough to act as a signal mirror that I could use to flash light at potential rescuers. Or even better, Daniel Bernoulli, who apart from having a catchy last name would be undeniably useful if my rainwater-collecting tank developed a uniform hole at the bottom and I needed to calculate the drain rate, or if I somehow found an F-15EX fighter jet in the wild and wanted to calculate the lift force on its airfoils (sounds feasible enough to me). Oh! And we can't forget Eugene Redmond, whose multiple charges of sexual battery might just give me enough battery to charge my dead phone and call home...

But let's be realistic... I'm stranded on a deserted island and no amount of wordplay is going to get me off. The best thing I can do is choose a scientist who will slowly and steadily help me build shelter, find reliable sources of food and water, and perhaps eventually construct some signalling device or raft in the hopes of rescue. Mendel is the master of working on mind-numbingly repetitive tasks. Over many, many years, he perfected the art of patiently cross-breeding and studying plants and animals. That is definitely the guy I want devotedly weaving my hammock or cleaning the scales of the fish I catch.

Of course, that's not the only advantage to Mendel. Based on his Wikipedia biography and picture, Mendel seems like a pretty chill guy. Dur-

ing his lifetime, he barely promoted his work within the scientific community and happily kept to himself within his monastery, content to conduct slow experiments without any flashy results. These traits point towards a humble figure who had a genuine interest in understanding more about the natural world around us and our place in it. I'd be honoured to share an island with him, and I aspire to have that same dedication to science.

Furthermore, despite his oddities (such as referring to his aggressive bee colony as his "dearest little animals"), Mendel's background in philosophy, physics, and mathematics would make for an interesting conversation partner. His mild demeanour would keep me from getting too annoyed and throwing a coconut at the head of my only living companion (as would inevitably be the case if I chose Richard Feynman, whose uncanny ability to pick locks might quickly get vexing).

Finally, Mendel was born in a rural setting at a time where crucial modern technologies like microwaves, snowboards, semiconductor chips, and (most importantly) waffle makers didn't exist, and can hopefully teach me a thing or two about surviving in such a world.

Worst case, even if all else fails, at least I know that I'll have peas to eat... after all, Gregor Mendel has certainly perfected the art of growing *Pisum sativum*!