

# A LINE ON LIFE

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## Hidden Assumptions \*

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Most of us are not aware that we make many assumptions, when we evaluate our world. All of us have a **frame of reference** with which we view the world. It is determined by the sum of all our experiences. Greatly influenced by our gender, age, occupation, race, nationality, ethnic group and other factors, it "*frames*" the things we perceive. Our frame of reference – like a window frame – may allow us to perceive some things more clearly. However, it can also keep things hidden from us, even the answers to apparently simple questions. Before going on, answer the following questions.

1. Whose face appears on the penny?
2. What is the minimum voting age in a national election?
3. On what month, day and year will the next century begin?
4. Is the earth closer to the sun during the winter or during the summer?
5. Who hit more home runs in a career than any other professional baseball player?
6. Who stole the greatest number of bases in a single season in professional baseball?

To the first question, most people will say, "*Abraham Lincoln*." However, it depends on the era and the country minting the coin. Coin collectors can tell you that the United States used to have Indian-head pennies. Other countries have other heads. For example, Canada has the Queen of England on the penny.

To the second question, most will answer "*18*" as the minimum voting age in the United States. However, the youngest seems to be in Canada, where military personnel can vote in a national election at 16.

To the third question, most assume that we are talking about our Western calendar. Most of us do not even think about the Jewish calendar, the Chinese calendar or others. Even considering our calendar, you still probably got the answer wrong. It is "*January 1, 2001*."

Our current calendar had no provision for the year called "*zero*." With the count starting at "*one*," the end of the first decade was the end of the year 10, and the second decade ended with the end of the year 20. Thus each decade – and therefore each century and millennium – ends at a year with a "*zero*" and begins with a year ending with a "*one*." So, on January 1, 2000, only 1999 years will have passed since the beginning of our current calendar. To start a new century and the third millennium, we need to wait until January 1, 2001. (Five years from now, you can see how wise the media are – if you can remember this.)

The answer to question four depends on our hemisphere. To us in the Northern Hemisphere, the sun is closest during their summer. Is this confusing to you? The warmth of our seasons is determined by the tilt of the earth in relation to the sun – rather than our changing distance to the sun.

Although you may not know the name of the "*home-run champion*" in question five – after reading the previous four answers – you might guess that the player is not an American. The person is Sadduharo Oh of Japan, who hit over 800 career homers.

However, you are unlikely to guess who holds the record for stolen bases in question six. Here your hidden assumption does not relate to nationality but to gender. In 1946, in the Women's Professional Baseball League, Sophie Kurys of the Racine Belles stole 202 bases.

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**Of course, our friends will agree with us.  
Isn't that why we picked them as friends in the first place?**

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No, these are not "*trick*" questions. The "*trick*" relates to **hidden assumptions** in your frame of reference. Many of us think our perceptions are the correct way – if not the only way – of viewing the world. As long as our friends share similar perceptions, our frame of reference is reinforced. Of course, most of us pick our friends, because they share our values and view of the world.

With our changing times, we are more likely to come into contact with people who have different views of the world. We can isolate ourselves by maintaining a limited, ethnocentric, chauvinistic frame of reference. On the other hand, we can resolve to expand our horizons by becoming familiar with other ways of viewing the world – other frames of reference. Things might not seem as sure or certain, but the certainly will be much more interesting and exciting.

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\* Adapted from Bernard C. Beins' "How Assumptions Shape Perspectives: A Teaching Demonstration," presented at the American Psychological Association Convention in Los Angeles on August 13, 1994.