

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

# The Nature vs. Nurture Debate

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*Are people the way that they are because of their genes (nature), or because of how they were brought up (nurture)? If two people are brought up in the same home environment, will they be the same? For years, scientists have been debating the answer to this question. As you read the article, take notes on the details the author uses to provide evidence for both sides of the debate.*

## Background

The nature versus nurture debate is about which part of a person is more important—their inherited qualities, which includes genes, or their personal experiences and the way they were brought up. For years, scientists have tried to find out what causes people to have different personalities, behaviors, and characteristics.



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## Scientific Approach

The nature versus nurture debate poses a very complicated scientific question: how do scientists figure out which one plays a greater role in the development of a person? Many scientists study twins that have separated at birth to answer this research question. Scientists use twins because they have identical genes, so it makes it easier to observe the effect of a person’s environment. Do you think twins raised in different homes will grow up to have the same personalities?

## The Nurture Side

The view that humans acquire all or almost all of their behavioral traits from “nurture” was termed *tabula rasa*, Latin for “blank slate,” by philosopher John Locke. This idea proposes that humans develop only from environmental influences. One example of a person’s trait that is completely determined by their environment is native language. Studies show that children, regardless of where they’re born, can learn any language with equal facility.[1]

The term “nurture” has historically been defined as the care given to children by the parents, with the mother playing an important role. Now, this term is regarded by some as the environmental (non-genetic) factor of a person’s environment. This new definition of “nurture” has been expanded to include, not just a person’s family upbringing, but also everything else they experience in daily life including advertisements, media, education, peer influences, and home environments.

## The Nature Side

Some scientists have concluded that a person's nature—meaning the traits they got from their parents—have more power in determining a person's identity than how they are nurtured, or raised. Inherited traits are traits that are developed before birth.

Some genetic traits are highly heritable,[2] such as eye color. Some disorders or diseases are also heritable. However, environments are still influential in how that disease affects a person's life; for example, people who are born with a disease may live a long time depending on how they are cared for. There are also some non-genetic factors that are highly heritable. For example, a wealth and social status are two non-genetic factors that are generally passed down from family.

## Conclusions

Some people criticize the whole concept of "nature versus nurture." They claim that it is an overly simple way to think about a person's identity. Perhaps the answer is not as simple. *Are there other factors beyond genes and environment that make us who we are?*

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## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. Summarize the nature vs. nurture debate in your own words, citing evidence from the text in your response.

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2. PART A: What does the word “heritable” most closely mean as it is used in paragraph 6?
- A. Able to be avoided or dodged
  - B. Able to be inherited or passed down
  - C. Having a profound, significant effect
  - D. Related to science (specifically, biology)
3. PART B: Which phrase from the paragraph provides the best support for the answer to Part A?
- A. “such as eye color”
  - B. “environments are still influential in how that disease affects a person’s life
  - C. “depending on how they are cared for”
  - D. “generally passed down from family”
4. Which of the following statements best describes how the concept of “nurture” has changed in recent years?
- A. It used to include only inherited traits, but now also includes social status and wealth.
  - B. It has moved beyond studying only how the mother raises a child to a more inclusive concept of child-rearing, including the father, siblings, grandparents, and non-nuclear families.
  - C. It has expanded to include all environmental influences in a person’s life, not just one’s upbringing.
  - D. It acknowledges the presence of nature in terms of genetic traits, thus invalidating the previous concept of complete “tabula rasa.”

5. How do the questions included in the sections “Scientific Approach” and “Conclusions” contribute to the author’s use of rhetoric?
- A. These questions provoke discussion about the debate, which highlights the underlying purpose of the article.
  - B. These questions allow the author to take an objective point of view.
  - C. These questions allow the author to remain impartial and not take either side in the debate.
  - D. These questions persuade the reader away from taking one clear side in the debate, as exemplified in the text’s conclusion.

## Discussion Questions

***Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.***

1. What are potential ethical concerns in studying this question? Are there any?
2. Is there one side that has more compelling evidence? Explain your answer.
3. What makes you who you are: your genes, your upbringing, your experiences, your decisions, or something else? Explain your answer using evidence from this text, your own experience, and other art or literature to answer this question.
4. In the context of this article, how much can people control their fate? How much is predetermined by their genes? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.