

# The Disappearing Spoon



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SAM KEAN

Sam Kean was born in Sioux Falls, South Dakota and is very proud of his hometown. Kean earned a bachelor's degree in English and physics at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities and a master's degree in literary science at Catholic University of America. *The Disappearing Spoon* is his first book, and it was both a critical and commercial success. It became a bestseller and was nominated by the Royal Society as one of the top 30 science books of 2009. Kean's other books, similarly focused on making science accessible to a general audience, often by using entertaining and unexpected stories from the history of science. Along with Kean's four books, he writes for magazines such as *The Atlantic* and *The New York Times Magazine*. He also regularly appears on the radio and gives guest lectures across the world. He lives in Washington, D.C.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Many historical events are covered in the novel, beginning with what is arguably the very first historical event—the Big Bang. Kean traces the history of the universe, along with our galaxy and solar system, detailing how Earth and the other planets were formed. He also provides an account of the speculation around the discovery of the periodic table. Jumping ahead in time, Kean mentions stories from Ancient Greece, such as the Spartans' largely unsuccessful attempt to use chemical weapons against the Athenians. He also considers how Plato's theory of the forms relates to the contemporary scientific understanding of the elements. The majority of the book, however, focuses on the period between the Age of the Enlightenment and the present—particularly from the 19th century onwards, as this is when the periodic table was devised. Key historical events that the book covers within this period include the Australian goldrush, the discovery of DNA, and the Manhattan Project, in which the first nuclear bomb was developed.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Only one year after the publication of *The Disappearing Spoon*, another popular science book focusing on the periodic table of elements was also published. This one, Hugh Aldersey-Williams's *Periodic: Table of Cultural History of the Elements, from Aeneas to Zine*, also provides information about the elements through equally unexpected facts and historical vignettes. Other popular science books about the periodic table include Tim Jones's *Demanded: How the Periodic Table Can Explain*

*Everything* and James M. Russell's *Elementary: The Periodic Table Explained*. Looking more broadly, many other books cover science and its history for a lay audience. These include Richard Peto's *The Age of Wonder*, which chronicles the boom of scientific research in the 18th and 19th centuries; Carl Sagan's *Cosmos: A Personal Voyage*, which accompanied the famous TV series of the same name; and Richard Rhodes's *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, which focuses on some of the nuclear material that appears in *The Disappearing Spoon*.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Disappearing Spoon, And Other True Tales of Madness, Love, and the History of the World from the Periodic Table of the Elements*
- **Where Written:** Washington, D.C.
- **When Published:** 2010
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Nonfiction; Pop Science
- **Setting:** The book spans the history of the universe from the Big Bang to the present; many of its stories take place from the 19th century onward, after the periodic table was invented.
- **Point of View:** Third Person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Changing Minds.** In interviews, Kean has stated that he was aware that many readers probably have an automatically unfavorable view of the periodic table, imagining it to be boring. He hopes that *The Disappearing Spoon* will convince them otherwise.

**Failed Experiment.** Although *The Disappearing Spoon* received generally positive reviews, the review featured in *The New York Times* proclaimed that the book doesn't "really unpack how the periodic table works."



## PLOT SUMMARY

In the introduction, Kean recalls how he was fascinated by the mercury inside thermometers as a child. Discovering mercury was an element prompted his interest in [the periodic table](#). In *The Disappearing Spoon*, Kean hopes to tell stories about the ways in which the periodic table interacts with human culture. Most people are familiar with the table, but they might be intimidated or unimpressed by it. Kean explains basic features of the table, such as the fact that every element is necessary—if a

# The Disappearing Spoon Study Guide

**Pembroke Notes**



## **The Disappearing Spoon Study Guide:**

**The Disappearing Spoon Study Guide** Pembroke Notes,2013-10 How to Use This Book This book is to be used along side the bestselling book The Disappearing Spoon by Sam Kean for anyone who wants to learn about the periodic table in an engaging and unique way For students The study questions are in order and follow Sam Kean s narrative Answer the questions as you read the book The answers are in the back section For teachers This is an easy and interesting resource to help your students learn about the periodic table Never has it been put in a way that transforms a normally dry subject into a page turner This is a step by step guide to help students learn about the elements Use your own unique teaching style to supplement the Pembroke Notes with engaging activities and experiments With the new Common Core standards and a push to increased rigor I have added a Writing Workshop section at the end of my book to help you with writing assignments For homeschools Your high school student will love the easy guide to help him her in her reading of The Disappearing Spoon Parents be prepared for active discussions with your teenager while you read along with him her A Writing Workshop is supplied at the end of the book as a guide Have fun When not teaching or working on district curriculum in Alaska Peggy and her husband Bill armed with fishing poles make their home in Pittsburg Missouri [The Art of Teaching Science](#) Vaile Dawson,Jennifer Donovan,2020-07-16 The Art of Teaching Science has proven itself to be one of the most popular introductory texts for Australian pre service and in service teachers providing guidance on engaging students and helping develop scientifically literate citizens Beginning with an examination of the nature of science constructivist and socio cultural views of teaching and learning and contemporary science curricula in Australian schools the expert authors go on to explore effective teaching and learning strategies approaches to assessment and provide advice on the use of ICT in the classroom Fully revised and updated this edition also reflects the introduction of the AITSL professional standards for teachers and integrates them throughout the text New chapters explore a range of teaching strategies including explicit instruction active learning and problem based learning the effective integration of STEM in schools approaches to differentiation in science education and contemporary uses of ICT to improve student learning Those new to this text will find it is deliberately written in user friendly language Each chapter stands alone but collectively they form a coherent picture of the art in the sense of creative craft and science as in possessing the knowledge understanding and skills required to effectively teach secondary school science Helping each new generation of school science teachers as they begin their careers is crucial to education This is the updated third edition of this valuable textbook It contains a wonderful range of inspirational chapters All science teachers not only those at the start of the profession would benefit from it in Australia and beyond Michael J Reiss Professor of Science Education University College London **The Violinist's Thumb** Sam Kean,2012-07-17 From New York Times bestselling author Sam Kean comes incredible stories of science history language and music as told by our own DNA In The Disappearing Spoon bestselling author Sam Kean unlocked the mysteries of the periodic table In The Violinist s Thumb he

explores the wonders of the magical building block of life DNA There are genes to explain crazy cat ladies why other people have no fingerprints and why some people survive nuclear bombs Genes illuminate everything from JFK's bronze skin it wasn't a tan to Einstein's genius They prove that Neanderthals and humans bred thousands of years more recently than any of us would feel comfortable thinking They can even allow some people because of the exceptional flexibility of their thumbs and fingers to become truly singular violinists Kean's vibrant storytelling once again makes science entertaining explaining human history and whimsy while showing how DNA will influence our species future

**The Periodic Table** Eric R. Scerri, 2020 The Periodic Table Its Story and Its Significance traces the evolution and development of the periodic table from Mendeleev's 1869 first published table and onto the modern understanding provided by modern physics

The Tale of the Dueling Neurosurgeons Sam Kean, 2014-05-06 The author of the bestseller The Disappearing Spoon reveals the secret inner workings of the brain through strange but true stories Early studies of the human brain used a simple method wait for misfortune to strike strokes seizures infectious diseases horrendous accidents and see how victims coped In many cases their survival was miraculous if puzzling Observers were amazed by the transformations that took place when different parts of the brain were destroyed altering victims personalities Parents suddenly couldn't recognize their own children Pillars of the community became pathological liars Some people couldn't speak but could still sing In The Tale of the Dueling Neurosurgeons Sam Kean travels through time with stories of neurological curiosities phantom limbs Siamese twin brains viruses that eat patients memories blind people who see through their tongues He weaves these narratives together with prose that makes the pages fly by to create a story of discovery that reaches back to the 1500s and the high profile jousting accident that inspired this book's title With the lucid masterful explanations and razor sharp wit his fans have come to expect Kean explores the brain's secret passageways and recounts the forgotten tales of the ordinary people whose struggles resilience and deep humanity made neuroscience possible

**Forensic Psychiatry** John Gunn, Pamela Taylor, 2014-01-06 Highly Commended BMA Medical Book Awards 2014 Comprehensive and erudite Forensic Psychiatry Clinical Legal and Ethical Issues Second Edition is a practical guide to the psychiatry of offenders victims and survivors of crime This landmark publication has been completely updated but retains all the features that made the first edition such a well established text It integrates the clinical legal and ethical aspects of forensic psychiatry with contributions from internationally regarded experts from a range of clinical professions The Second Edition features updates to all current chapters and several new chapters that explore The genetics of antisocial behavior Disorders of brain structure and function that relate to crime Offenders with intellectual disabilities Older people and the criminal justice system Deviant and mentally ill staff Although the book focuses on jurisdictions in the UK a substantial comparative chapter written by an international group from all five continents explores the different philosophies legal principles and style of services elsewhere This book is an essential reference for specialists and postgraduate trainees in forensic psychiatry but also for general psychiatrists and clinical and

forensic psychologists It is also an invaluable resource for other forensic mental health professionals including nurses social workers occupational therapists probation service staff police attorneys criminologists and sociologists     **Subject Guide to Books in Print** ,1993     **The Publishers' Trade List Annual** ,1985     **Books in Print** ,1977     Books in Print Supplement ,1985     **Books Out-of-print** ,1986     *Subject Guide to Children's Books In Print*, 1996 R R Bowker Publishing,1996     Journal of the American Medical Association ,1900     *Dairy Record* ,1913     **English Mechanic and Mirror of Science** ,1878     *Illinois Travel Guide* ,2001     **Prairie Farmer** ,1884     **American Book Publishing Record** ,2002     **Forest and Stream** ,1929     *The Cumulative Book Index* ,1961

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