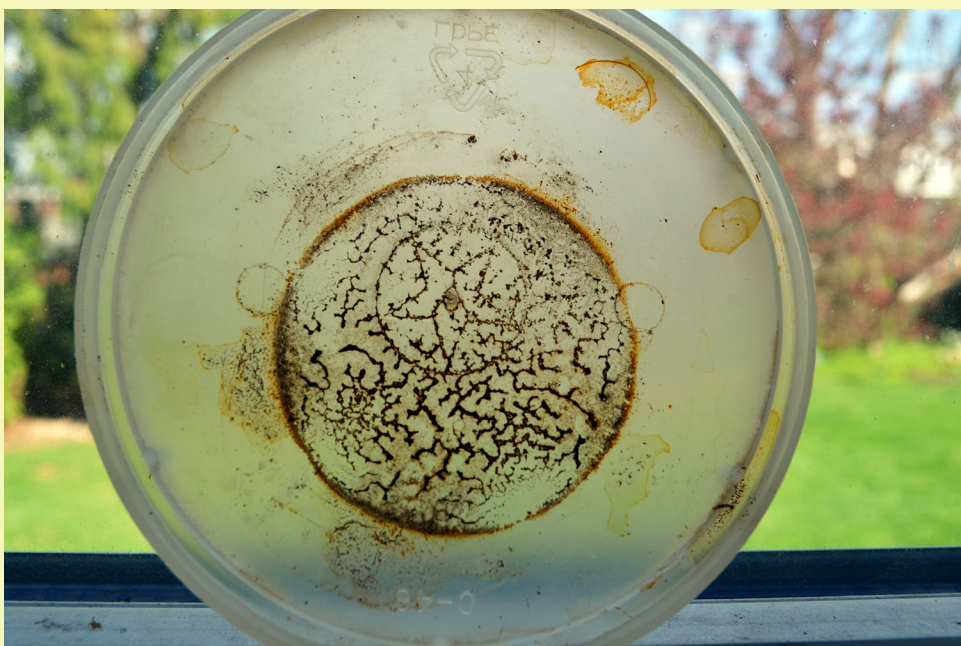


THE WITHERSPOON WITNESS

HONESTY & FEAR • SCARCITY & BUYING IN BULK • HOW TO PLAY PICTINARY

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This is the kind of thing I'll find in my kitchen after leaving my tea strainer on a Tupperware lid and think is gorgeous. This opinion has not been affected by the isolative aspects of the pandemic.

HONESTY & FEAR

I watched an excerpt from Neil Gaiman's MasterClass on storytelling—he says that good writing requires honesty. Once you write about the world you know, revealing your vulnerability and fear, wonder and ignorance, people will read this and like it. They'll relate.

I agree, yet I think that's not all. It's one thing to put yourself to paper once you know what you're saying, but another thing entirely to explore that self and know that what you're offering is true. This difficulty is laid bare on social media, newsfeeds feeding us our triumphs and quirks and criticisms of others but struggling to nourish us with self-honesty in naked form.

So here are three fears of mine—they were chillingly easy to think of. I fear I will die an unpeeled, post-rationalized person my younger self would be disappointed by. I fear I am addicted to something but I don't know what it is yet. I fear moments in which I feel helplessly mean.

SCARCITY & BUYING IN BULK

I cook on whims, so I find it critical to have in stock very many things, and much of them. I purchase nutritional yeast 27.5 pounds per pop, dark chocolate chips at 33 pounds, coconut oil in one-gallon buckets, peppermint flakes in 5-pound bags (that last one was a bit of an error in vision).

Reordering timetables should be relatively easy to calculate when you can look at an invoice and see that, in fact, it took three months to go through that bulk order of pitted dates. I need not worry after month one that the next time I want to make a smoothie (tonight), my cabinet will come up sans dates. But even 50% through a stock, I start to worry about running out.

I have been averse to not having access to flour at the grocery store for the past couple of months. My kitchen faced cutbacks on bread-baking and pancake-making—I used flour but once a week when it came time to feed my sourdough starter. I made it more than two months in this fashion—as of this past week, we are flush again. Chronically buying in bulk has inoculated me against recognizing real scarcity—I was operating with an entirely different baseline.

HOW TO PLAY PICTINARY

There are several iterations of Pictionary one can play during this quarantine. You can visit www.skribbl.io and compete to most quickly guess your friends' drawings of a kite or honey or an excavator or Charlie Chaplin. This is fun and funny. You can also set up your computer's camera in front of a whiteboard or pad of paper and draw the old-fashioned way, players receiving the clues from each other in private chat or shared on camera while other players look away or refill their bowls with fresh mixed berries or a raspberry reduction with cream on pancakes. This latter version is the version I play with my parents. It is also fun and funny.



Remains from games of Pictionary.

Some people assume they're not good at Pictionary because they're not good at rendering the three-dimensional world in two dimensions. But getting people to guess things you want them to guess is so much more often about symbolism and formulating points of reference. We systematize drawing an ear to indicate that something sounds like something that's easier to draw. We draw an ellipsis when someone hits on a synonym. We develop icons for each category that iterate, essentialized, throughout the session.

Wilder and wilder categories elevate the game's sense of creativity. Our categories have advanced from things with legs, things with layers, and things with legal repercussions to state fares, hare styles, and sell services (these last three were part of a clever set of punny categories courtesy of my mom, for which clues included the New Jersey Exit Tax, the White Rabbit's Bow Tie, and Freemium.)

And inside jokes make it special. You're not just playing a game, but building upon memories, developing a language. You can't have a bite of dad's pancakes through the screen, but you can share in the incredible magic in which, after you've incorrectly drawn the squiggle of half a saffron leaf, he correctly guesses exactly what it is.

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