

## Hour 8: The Thing Explainer!

Those of you who are fans of xkcd's Randall Munroe may be aware of his book *Thing Explainer: Complicated Stuff in Simple Words*, in which he describes a variety of things using only the thousand simplest words in the English language. We liked the idea so much that we've decided to Thing-Explain a whole bunch of things his book didn't get to. Since we've broken them down into little words, surely you'll be able to correctly identify the assorted stuff we've translated below.

### *Section I. Quotations*

The questions below have taken famous quotes whose language is just a little too highfalutin for the average person and made them more accessible. They are taken from a wide variety of sources: songs, literature, history, movies—anywhere, really. From our Thing-Explained version of the quote, either give us the original quote or (if that's too unwieldy) just name its source.

1. The people who make laws cannot make a law making any god-following special or stopping other god-followings; or one stopping free talking and news-writing; or one ending the right of people to hang out without fighting or to write to the people who run things when they're not happy about something that's happened to them.
2. If your line of leaves and sticks is moving around, don't get worried. It's just the lady who runs one of the months cleaning things out for spring.
3. I am a person who believes in the old book. Doesn't a person like that have eyes? Doesn't a person like that have hands, body parts, a size, senses, friends, feelings? Isn't he fed with the same food, hurt by the same pointy things, sick with the same colds everyone else gets, made better with the same stuff that makes everyone else better, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a person who believes in the new book? If you cut us, don't we let out our body's red water? If you move your fingers quickly over our skin, don't we laugh? If you give us bad stuff to drink, don't we die? If you wrong us, won't we want to get you back?
4. A tree with hard wood that makes a good smell when you smoke animal parts with it, a made-up word that sounds like that tree, a place where boats go when they are not moving, the small animal that a cat would like to eat ran up the machine that says what time it is.
5. What is the biggest thing going wrong with you, guy who can't feel anything in his balls?

6. Yes, though I walk through the low place in the dark under death, I will fear no bad stuff: for you are with me; your stick and your other stick make me feel better. You set up a table in front of me in front of people who are not my friends: you put stuff that you can pour that would sit on top of water on my head; my cup has too much stuff in it. It is for sure that nice things and not being mean will follow me all the days of my life: and I will live in the house of the big guy in the sky forever.

7. A food that has little yellow and green ground foods put together that you eat when it's fall is feeling a lot of pain!

8. I'm very good at the numbers classes you take your first year in college. I know the right names for all kinds of animals. In matters of green-leaf things, animals, and rocks, I am the best kind of person who runs wars today.

9. If you are looking for money in return for letting someone go, I can tell you I don't have money. But what I do have is a set of very singled-out stuff I can do, stuff I learned to do over a very long working time, stuff that make me a bad dream for people like you.

10. With good feelings about themselves rise the people who run our land with big hills,  
With their forest dresses that are like dresses the people who run things would have, to the sky,  
Where a nice mother lives with her chosen group of people who make music together,  
And the river that does not want to fight things moves like a river does gently by.

11. It was the time when you would start to make dinner, and the animals that were sort of flat and liked to do things and were sort of like a short but not thin animal that is in the biggest family in the order of animals with hair that eat other animals and sort of like an animal that does not have hair but has four legs and blood that is cold and sort of like a thing that you use to open a bottle of wine did go around and around and make holes in things in the grass that is around a thing that can tell the time with a shadow; all sad and not strong were the thin birds that looked like things you could use to clean up wet things if they were alive, and the green animals that were like animals that can be turned into food that people who believe in old books are not supposed to eat and that were also lost or maybe just sad did a thing that was like a yell and like a noise you could make if you put your lips together and blew and also like the noise you make when you have a cold that makes people wish good things for you after you do it.

12. The laid-back guy out west continues on like before.

13. The spinning path of a big rock is a not-quite-round circle with a star at one of the two points in the middle.

14. Person from old-time boot-country plays! Person from old-time boot-country plays! Will you do the dance with hand snaps?

15. We won't get less strong or fail. We are going to fight in a country that has a tall pointed metal thing that is very well known in its biggest city, we are going to fight on the seas and the bigger seas, we are going to fight with growing feeling like we are good at things and growing power in the air, we are going to keep people we don't like from doing bad things to our place that has water all around it, whatever the thing we have to pay may be, we are going to fight on the places with sand next to water, we are going to fight on the places where flying machines come down, we are going to fight in the fields and in the streets, we are going to fight in the hills; we are never going to give up.

16. This thing with wheels that you drive runs itself. It runs by a plan. It moves on water. Why, it's a big hit of sky-bright that's been rubbed with stuff that makes it slip less!

17. It is a really big huge making-you-have-strong-feelings event. We don't worry about the small things that people don't care about, which may be called not needed facts with no use in a way that would make you have strong feelings. The event you're playing in right now uses something you know but are not able to think of from the past.

18. To the idea of a number larger than any number and farther past that!

19. A person who is one of many that asks questions of all the people in the country to get information once tried to check how good I am at things. I ate the part of him that cleans out the red water like stuff inside people with some round green food that grows in the ground and a nice drink made from aged sweet food from a part of the country shaped like a boot.

20. When one thing acts on a second thing with a push or pull in a direction, the second thing at the same time acts on the first thing with a push or pull in a direction that is the same in size and exactly not the same in direction.

## *Section II. Wikipedia paragraphs Thing-Explained*

There's already a Simple Wikipedia, but we think even that needs to be taken down a notch. The following passages are Thing-Explained versions of the opening sentences of selected Wikipedia articles. Try to guess what article the original paragraphs were taken from.

21. [This thing] is the study of really simple sounding problems about things such as what is real, knowing things, things some nice people have, reason, mind, and language. The word was probably first used by some really old guy who has something to do with those shapes with three sides. Some ways of doing [this thing] are questioning, talking about it with other people, telling them they are wrong, and explaining your ideas in an order that makes a lot of sense. Some questions asked when studying [this thing] are: Is it possible to know anything and to prove it? What is most real? However, people who study [this thing] might also ask questions that actually have to do with our lives such as: Is there a best way to live? Is it better to be nice or mean (if you can get away with it)? Can people really decide things about how they live?

22. [This thing] is a body part that lady animals who feed the young from their chest, big running birds, and a small number of other animals have. In humans, you can see the small round part of it near the front meeting of the small lips, above the opening of the path you make water from. It's not like the hanging bits (the man part most like it), because it usually does not have the opening of the path you make water from and so is not used for making water. While few animals make water through [this thing], the spotted laughing cat, which has an especially well-grown [one of these], makes water, has sex, and lets out its babies through it. Some other animals who feed their young through the chest, such as small crazy-eyed jumping guys with rings on their back-end stick and human-order members whose long arms and legs make them look like eight-leg creatures, also have well-grown [these].

23. [This thing] is a wet thing that doesn't go with water on stuff you make bags from by the under-water-country picture-maker who came after the wave of people who painted just what they saw, Funny Movie Guy Who Wins a Case in the South from a Small Town in the Under-Water-Country. Painted in month six about a hundred twenty-five years ago, it shows the view from the east-facing window of his quiet-place room in a small town in the sex-and-wine country, just before the sun came up, also with a village that he makes look better than it really looks. It has been in the long-time owning of the Place that Shows Art That Is Not Old But Is Also Not Really New Anymore in our country's biggest city for three-hundred-over-four years, gotten through the will of a lady from that city who bought lots of pictures.

24. The Things That People Do To Find Out Who Is The Best, [this thing], usually known simply as [this thing], is the oldest thing that people do to find out which of the people is the best at hitting a round yellow-green thing in the world, and is considered by a lot of people to be the one that people care about the most. It has been held at the All-Country-That-Used-To-Own-Our-Country Group Of People With A Shared Interest, in [this thing], Biggest City In That Country since 1877. [This thing] is one of the four big important things to find out who is best at hitting the yellow-green thing, the others being the one in a country where they tell people who visit to be afraid of bears that fall out of trees on your head, the one in a country just a little bit south of the country this thing is in, and the one in our country.

25. [This person] (born on day number four of month number six, 1975) is a person from this country who pretends to be other people, a person who makes movies, and a person who goes around trying to get people to do good things for other people. [This person] was in a movie for the first time as a child next to her father, [this person's father], in a movie that had a name that means trying to go away (1982). She starred in the liked-by-people-who-say-whether-they-like-a-movie-as-their-job movies that are about a person who is real and that were on television that you have to pay for A Guy From The South Who Really Did Not Like Black People (1997) and A Girl Person Who Was Paid To Look Good In Pictures (1998), and won a gold man for Best Girl Person Who Pretends To Be Other People But Does Not Have As Big A Part for her job in the serious movie Girl Who Did Not Get To Finish What She Was Saying (1999).

26. [This thing], sometimes called a land-inside-water group or land-inside-water metal thing with round parts that join, is a metal thing with round parts that join, group of things close together, or large group of a thing of pieces of land with water around them. The word [this thing] comes from the language that people who liked gods that lived on a big hill spoke for "person who gets to tell other people what to do" and "sea," through the language spoken by another group of people who gave those gods different names. In that second language, maybe following a thing people in the past did, the [this thing] was the right name for the sea that is around that first country and, later, how it was used changed to mean the pieces of land with water around them in that sea (since the sea is something people might find special for its large number of pieces of land).

27. [This Thing] is a part of the whole-country Thing Like A Chest group of people within a larger group of people who run things in this country that worries about how people go places. It was made by an act of the group of people that are one third of the people who run things in this country (but with a lot more people than are in the other two thirds) on Month When Small People Dress Up Funny And Make Other People Give Them Food 15, 1966, and began doing things on Month When People Play Mean Jokes On Their Friends 1, 1967. Its reason for being is to "Serve this country by making sure a fast, safe, doing things in the best way with the least work, able to be used by all kinds of people, and easy to get to or use going places system that meets our very important interests as a country and makes better the how good your life is of the people of this country, today and into the future."

28. [This thing] is one kind of thing we use to give power to things we don't want to put in a wall in which really tiny bits of the smallest metal move from the one metal plate to another metal plate when you use [this thing] and go back again when you put [this thing] back in the wall so you can use it again later. [This thing] uses layers of the smallest metal as one metal plate. [This thing] is made up of the two metal plates and the stuff in between that lets the power carriers move from one plate to the other.

29. [This thing] is a family of things we use to make sounds that people like to listen to in which you blow air into the thing to make the sounds. [This thing] does not make its sound by making a tiny piece of grass move, but makes its sound from air moving across an opening. [These things] are the first things we use to make sounds that people like to listen to. Some of [These Things] were found over three hundred hundred years ago.

30. [This thing] is a space which keeps heat inside used for heating, and drying things although it is mostly used for making food. Special kinds of this thing used to make things we use to store other things and for making things out of metal.

### *Section III. Plain Old Thing-Explaining*

Finally, here's some regular Things Explained. Tell us what we're describing in the simplest possible terms.

31. It is a machine that goes along the ground with wheels, and you stand on the machine. Do not be like the guy who made money from the machine and let the machine take him over a place where the land goes down very quickly, though.

32. It is an animal that lives in a land where water turns around the other way when it goes into a hole. It keeps its babies in a pocket on its front. After it eats, the food comes out its other end as a shape that has six sides and each side has four edges.

33. It is a food made of white water that comes from an animal that is large and kind of stupid that likes to eat grass and that we like to eat. You take the white water and you sort of let it go bad, which makes it become thicker than it was when it was white water. There are many kinds of this food, but this kind comes from a country that is shaped like a tall shoe. It is hard (other kinds of this food can be hard or soft) and lots of people like to turn it into little tiny pieces and then put those little tiny pieces on top of another food from that country like a tall shoe that is made up of lots of little things made from something kind of yellow that grows in fields (and the little things can come in lots and lots of different shapes) with another sort of stuff like water on top of the little things, and sometimes that water is red and sometimes it is white and sometimes it is green.

34. Sometimes called the one more than third state of things. It is made up of air like stuff that is broken into pieces because it is so hot. It can be seen in the bright and loud that comes from the sky down to the ground when it rains, in some long thin lights.

35. A food from the country below ours made of flat food that use to be hot that is often bent, filled with many things such as animal parts with stuff we add to food to make it better, baby foods that grow in the ground and give people air in their behind, ground leaves, and red watery food balls.

36. This thing is a thing that you use to show a pause in a written thought. You only use it after the next to last thing in a group of things, and you only use it if you have at least three things in your group.

37. This thing is the coldest that a thing could be, at which the pieces that make up stuff move as slow as possible. It is nothing on the how-hot-things-are numbers that are named after the first guy from the country ours use to belong to to be named to the house of people with power over others.

38. This thing is a team that plays a game in a country wide group of teams. The game they play is with a not quite round ball where one more than ten people on a side try to move the ball to the end of a field by carrying it or throwing and catching it. They were formed in the year 1919 by a man whose name is still on the place they play. They play in the third largest city in a state known for the food made of white water that comes from an animal that is large and kind of stupid that likes to eat grass and that we like to eat.

39. This thing is a place on a television where you see television shows that was made by the people who control what goes on the television as a service to the people in this country. It is well known for showing what goes on with the people who make choices about what happens in our country.

40. This thing is a drink made from aged food from one of the first foods grown with a plan by people. It is made in the country that started the game where you hit a ball with a stick into a hole a long way away. This thing must be aged in a hard wood box for at least three years.