

Random Sample

Better Networking Through Chemistry on Fakebook

If you asked hydrogen what its job is, what would it say? According to hydrogen's "Fakebook" profile, its job is to be "rocket-ship fuel." Furthermore, its relationship status is "bonded." And carbon, nitrogen, and oxygen are its friends.

Fakebook (<http://classtools.net/fb/home/page>) is a Facebook-look-alike Web site created in January 2011 by Russel Tarr, a teacher at the International School of Toulouse, France. The Web site is rapidly becoming a popular teaching tool for science, history, and other school subjects, with a quarter of a million hits per week, Tarr says. In December alone, 14 Hydrogen profiles appeared on the site. "Kids love Facebook, and you always have to latch on to what they're enthused about and channel it into the classroom," he says.

Each of the students in Forest Grove, Oregon, teacher Tammy Johnson's biology class wrote a profile for a different cell organelle—and then Johnson had them post on one another's walls as a way to think about how the cell parts interact. "It puts it into a context that they're more familiar with," Johnson says.

Students in Lee Ferguson's Advanced Placement (AP) biology class in Allen, Texas, meanwhile, made profiles for animals. Gerald the giraffe, for example, notes that he sleeps only 20 minutes a night—"sort of like

The screenshot shows a 'fakebook' interface. At the top, there's a 'fakebook' logo, a 'Tweet 0' button, and a 'Like' button. A disclaimer states: 'Disclaimer: This tool is for educational purposes. It is NOT affiliated with Facebook or any other social networking site.' The main profile is for 'Plant Cell Wall', which has a bio: 'Birthday whenever the first plant was formed. Job Bouncer (I keep everything out of my cell club) I protect my organelles Hobby Chill 24/7 party till the roof comes down.' Below the bio is a 'Friends [add]' list with items like Ribosomes, Chlorophyll, Nucleus, Plant, Sun, and Chloroplast. The 'Add Post' section shows three posts: one from 'Plant' about a rough night, one from 'Plant Cell Wall' about keeping organelles in order, and one from 'Animal Cell Membrane' about being rigid and stubborn.

an AP student." Writing on Gerald's wall, an acacia tree complains about being eaten. "I'm really stressed," the tree writes. "I've just got a lot of things eating at me right now."

Other Fakebook friends run to the geometric. The rectangle laments that its birthday is "disputed" because it doesn't know if it was invented or discovered. It also notes, ruefully, that it "can be a bit square sometimes."

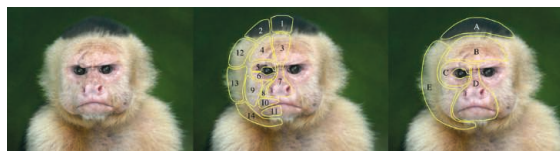
>>NEWSMAKERS

tural biologist Venki Ramakrishnan of the MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology in Cambridge, who shared the 2009 Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine for discovering the structure of the ribosome. Queen Elizabeth II will also be knighting American-born climate researcher Robert Watson, who formerly headed the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and now serves as scientific advisor for the U.K. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, as well as several clinical researchers and a mathematician. Royal Society of Chemistry President David Phillips and two other scientific researchers are receiving a different honor, Commander of the Order of the British Empire. The knighting ceremonies will take place later this year.

FINDINGS

More Than Just a Pretty Face

Monkeys can tell a lot about their neighbors from their colorful facial patterns. In South America, the faces of these tree-swingers



come in all shapes and colors. Some differences give the animals an edge in their environment: Brown fur is better than white for camouflage, for instance. But many monkeys sport complicated, multicolored patterns that might not suit those sneaky needs. To get to the bottom of these appearances, researchers created facial recognition software to map out the faces of 129 species of

New World monkeys (above) and rated them by the complexity of their color patterns. Monkeys who live in smaller groups or alone tended to have more complex color patterns than those who live in larger groups. Monkeys with many colors, such as the spider monkey, may need to be more conspicuous to quickly recognize others from the same species, the researchers hypothesize this week in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, as such encounters may be few and far between. <http://scim.ag/MonkeyFace>

BY THE NUMBERS

15% Improvement in cars' average gas mileage from 1980 to 2006. Although average fuel efficiency increased by 60% in that time, bigger and more powerful cars account for the disparity, according to a report in *American Economic Review*.

54% Percentage of clinical trials that were still unpublished 30 months after they ended, according to a survey of 635 trials described last week in the *British Medical Journal*.

16% Increase in toxic chemicals released into the environment from 2009 to 2010, reversing a previous downward trend since 2006, according to a 5 January report by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.