

TASK 1
SCARED OF SPIDERS? ALSO SCARED OF ZOMBIES? WE HAVE SOME BAD NEWS

ANSWER BOX									
QUESTION	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
ANSWER	B	B	A	C	C	C	A	B	B

TEXT

An abandoned gunpowder storage shed pokes out from a small mound of earth in what's now a nature preserve in Northern Ireland. **It is the perfect place for a spider: semi-subterranean, cool and dark (0).** But in 2021, a crew working on a BBC nature program found more than an average arachnid lurking there. They spotted a dead spider with a lacy white fungus erupting from its body.

The fungus, scientists announced in a paper published last month in the journal *Fungal Systematics and Evolution*, is **a newly discovered species that spreads its spore by hijacking a spider and turning the unlucky arachnid into a zombie (1).** This evolutionary strategy has been made famous by the zombie ant fungus *Ophiocordyceps*, which inspired the video game and HBO show *The Last of Us*. This spider version is only distantly related to that fungus.

Volunteers at the Castle Espie Wetland Centre near Belfast were assisting the BBC filmmakers when they noticed the infected spider (2). Pictures of the specimen made their way to Harry Evans, an emeritus fellow at CAB International, a nonprofit organization focusing on agricultural and environmental research. "I posited that it was an unknown or unusual species and requested the specimen once the filming had finished," said Evans, an author of the paper.

When the BBC program aired, Tim Fogg, **a cave explorer, reached out to Evans to say that he had observed a similar fungus in Irish caves (3).** Each of the five infected spiders Fogg collected was engulfed by a tiny, tangled thicket of fungi.

João Araújo, an author of the paper and a curator of mycology at the Denmark Natural History Museum, said **he and his colleagues believe that when a spore lands on a spider, the fungus sprouts a root-like structure called a germ tube that drills into the arachnid's exoskeleton. Once inside, the fungus buds and multiplies, Araújo said, "taking over basically almost the entire body of the spider." (4)**

Like their counterpart at the Belfast preserve, the spiders observed by Fogg had crawled out in the open, near the cave entrances, before dying. **This positioning helps the fungus's parasitic agenda: catching air currents to spread its spores as efficiently as possible, Araújo said (5).**

Evans proposed naming the fungus *Gibellula attenboroughii*, in honor of naturalist and broadcaster Sir David Attenborough. **Attenborough has played an important role in the success of the BBC Studios Natural History Unit and thus indirectly helped lead to the new fungal species' discovery (6).**

Charissa de Bekker, a molecular ecologist at the Utrecht University in the Netherlands who was not involved with the study, said that she was inspired to study zombie fungi by Attenborough's *Planet Earth* series, and that naming this species after him was "a great tribute," especially because it revealed something important about arachnids and the world they inhabit.

"Spiders are very misunderstood creatures," de Bekker said. **"They're both predators and being predated upon, so they're key elements in food webs. Understanding what parasites they get and what infections they get might give us a better understanding of these ecosystems." (7)**

Araújo said it's important to learn "who these fungi are, which insects and arthropods they infect, how they evolve, where they come from." Zombie fungi could help control agricultural pests, **he said, and a chemical produced by a relative of *Ophiocordyceps* is already used in drugs to prevent organ rejection in transplant patients. "These are nature's chemists and the only source of novel antibiotics and other medicines for the future," Evans said (8).** "We must find ways of identifying these before more natural ecosystems disappear along with the fungi."

(Adapted from: [boston.com/news/national-news/2025/02/15/scared-of-spiders-also-scared-of-zombies-we-have-some-bad-news/](https://www.boston.com/news/national-news/2025/02/15/scared-of-spiders-also-scared-of-zombies-we-have-some-bad-news/), 15/02/2025, 602 words)

TASK 2
WOMEN, GIRLS AND TECHNOLOGY

ANSWER BOX

GAP	0	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
SENTENCE	J	B	E	L	C	K	F	H	A

DISTRACTORS: D, G, I

TEXT

When the first virtual reality headsets became available to the public, a problem quickly emerged that had previously gone unnoticed. **Women experienced significantly more dizziness than men when using them due to physiological differences related to balance and ear structure (0).** In a highly male-dominated tech industry, product development overlooked half the population. How could this happen?

The anecdote illustrates how companies risk missing out on business opportunities by failing to consider the diversity of their users. **But it also highlights a structural problem in the tech industry (9):** if design and development teams lack diversity, the solutions they create may fail to be inclusive and effective for the entire population.

For Liliana Arroyo, researcher at the Esade Institute for Social Innovation, the issue of female underrepresentation in the tech sector is critical. "When we talk about market solutions and research, the topics of interest are closely linked to who is asking the questions, their daily experiences, and the types of challenges they face," Arroyo explains.

According to the World Economic Forum, only 3 out of 10 people in STEM professions (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) are women. Girls Who Code, in a study with Accenture, found that 50% of women leave the tech sector by the age of 35. **Meanwhile, the Entelo Women in Tech Report revealed that only 10% of executive roles in the industry are held by women (10).**

As Arroyo points out, the lack of female representation in STEM creates a vicious cycle, as the absence of female role models perpetuates the gender gap. **"Women tend to see themselves more as users rather than creators of technology (11),** which limits their access and participation in these fields," she warns.

What can be done to close the gap between girls and boys? Arroyo points to two key elements. One is fostering what she calls "zero-kilometer" role model. **"In 90% of cases, women who become engineers do so because they have a role model (12)** within their family or immediate environment," she explains. Instead of focusing on highly famous figures in the sector, "we need policies that bring role models closer to your neighborhood."

The second element is dismantling prevailing narratives, which are closely tied to self-perception and the impostor syndrome that particularly affects women. "When we talk about female tech role models, we often present them as heroines, making it seem unattainable. **Women should be able to aspire to be 'regular' or even 'mediocre' technologists (13)** without having to perform heroic acts," Arroyo suggests.

Furthermore, the gender gap in worldviews is widening. "Women are far more aware of diversity and the need to live in inclusive societies and relationships," Arroyo warns. **She also highlights the urgent need for positive male role models for young people (14).** "Traditional and regressive masculinities, often linked to far-right values, are gaining influence," she points out.

Despite these challenges, Arroyo delivers a clear message: **The fight for gender equity in the tech sector is a collective effort (15)** that must include both public policies and individual initiatives. And against the overwhelming presence of male figures in the media, she highlights the role models found in our neighborhoods, cities, and universities. "To the women already working in technology, I say: **Be ambassadors of your work and your profession." (16)**

(Adapted from: dobetter.esade.edu/en/women-girls-technology, 537 words)

TASK 3
HUGE DIAMOND NECKLACE

ANSWER BOX										
QUESTION	0	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
SECTION	E	B	C	A	E	A	D	C	B	D

TEXT

- A. A diamond necklace that has been worn at two British coronations and is thought to contain stones from the infamous necklace at the heart of a Marie Antoinette scandal, **sold for over 4.2 million Swiss francs (\$4.8 million) at an auction in Geneva, Switzerland on Wednesday (19).** **Weighing approximately 300 carats, the 18th-century piece was likely created a decade before the French Revolution (21).** A touring exhibition ahead of the auction marked the first time it was seen in public in 50 years, according to Sotheby's, which handled the sale.
- B. **Despite the exact origins of the necklace not being recorded, the auction house believes the antique piece could only have been made for royalty or a high-ranking aristocrat (24).** In the early 20th century, it belonged to the Marquesses of Anglesey, a leading aristocratic family in the UK with close ties to the British royal family, Sotheby's said. Marjorie Paget, marchioness of Anglesey, wore the necklace to the coronation of King George VI in 1937. Her daughter-in-law then wore the same jewel to the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953, according to a press release published ahead of the sale. After the family parted with the diamond piece in the 1960s, **it was exhibited in the American Museum of Natural History before being acquired by a private collector (17).**
- C. "This rare and important diamond jewel is a sublime survivor from the opulent court life of the Georgian era, defined by its unrivalled pomp and splendour; it is arguably one of the most magnificent and intact Georgian jewels in private hands," said Andres White Correal, chairman of Sotheby's jewellery Europe and Middle East and head of noble jewels, in the release. **"When compared to other surviving Imperial and Royal jewels from the same period, this necklace stands head and shoulders above these examples (18); it is a fortune in diamonds, and also a masterclass in exquisite design, workmanship and technical innovation for the period," (23)** he added. Each diamond weighs between one and one-and-a-half carats, according to Sotheby's. The piece consists of three rows of diamonds that trail on either side into a diamond tassel. Each diamond is of an old mine brilliant cut and weighs between one and one-and-a-half carats, according to Sotheby's, which said the diamonds were likely sourced from India's legendary Golconda mines, where the Hope Diamond was discovered.
- D. Jewels from that time period were often known for their luxury and versatility, **with one piece having the potential to be worn as a necklace or as an ornament sewn into a piece of clothing, according to the release (22).** This particular piece can be worn around the neck with the tassels hanging down on either side, or with the piece tied in a simple knot (25).
- E. Some of the diamonds from the necklace may have come from the piece at the heart of the "Affair of the Diamond Necklace" scandal, according to the auction house. The glittering 1785 scandal at the court of Louis XVI involved a cardinal who was looking to regain the favour of Marie-Antoinette, the last Queen of France, **who was tricked into acquiring a necklace on behalf of someone pretending to be the Queen (20).** However, the deceit came to light when the jewellers, who never received the first instalment for the necklace, applied for the money directly from the Queen, who never received the necklace. The necklace, in the hands of a trickster, had in the meantime actually been broken up and sold in London. **The scandal tarnished the reputation of Marie Antoinette, who was unjustly accused of having an immoral relationship with a cardinal and discredited the French monarchy (0)** ahead of the French Revolution, in which the Queen ultimately met her demise.

(Adapted from: edition.cnn.com/2024/09/24/style/huge-diamond-necklace-sothebys-intl-scli/index.html, 24/09/2024, 495words)