

Our Trip to the Gregor Mendel Exhibit

By Jack Wooldridge

I really enjoyed our trip to the Gregor Mendel Exhibit. I thought the exhibit was very well done and presented the information in a clear way with explanations and interactive effects. But I am getting ahead of myself.

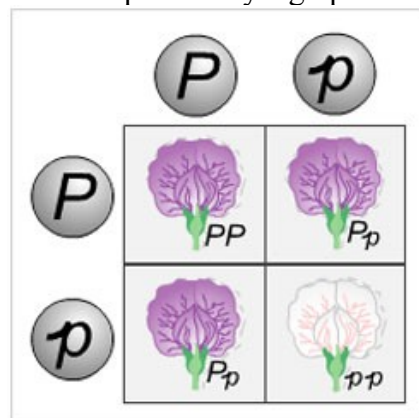
When we reached the Academy of Natural Sciences from where we had parked (no easy feat, due to the abundance of crossings and crossing lights which don't stay green for a very long time), we went in, paid the money, got a pass, and went up to the Gregor Mendel Exhibit. When we first entered the exhibit, one thing I noticed was the abundance of things to read. There were a lot of signs in this exhibit, some quite wordy (which was fine with me). There were also less interactive effects than in other exhibits I have been to there (also no problem with me), but what they did use they used very well.

An overview of the exhibit: Gregor Mendel, the father of modern genetics, was born into a poor family in what is now the Czech Republic, but was able to get to school (and do very well in it), and managed to get a position as a friar in the Augustinian Abbey of St Thomas. He did many experiments on genetics in the garden of the abbey, of which his abbot supported heartily. He used peas to study hereditary traits passed on from parent to child. The whole first part of the exhibit is about him and his experiments.

Here is what Gregor Mendel did and what he found out.

1. He bred a yellow pea plant with a green pea plant.
2. The child produced a pod with a yellow peas. However, the peas each had one green pea gene and one yellow pea gene. This was because the green gene is recessive (stays in the the background if a yellow gene is around) and the yellow gene is dominant.
3. Then he bred one of the children with another child. What do you think happened?
A) The plant produced only yellow peas. B) The plant produced only green peas. C) The plant produced one green pea for every three yellow peas.

The answer is C! Why? This can be best explained by a graphic.



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The large P (or pea!) is the yellow gene, while the small p is the green gene. As each plant had one green gene and one yellow gene, this is how it would work out: Where the two yellow genes mixed, you get a yellow pea. The two places where green and yellow genes mixed, you got a yellow pea. But where the two greens mixed, you got a green pea!

Of course, after this, things got more complicated. Patterns began to emerge in the ways genes mixed together. Then Mendel decided to take it to the next level, and compare other traits as well as color,

such as smooth yellow peas versus bumpy green ones, and so on.

But let us move on to the next part of the exhibit. This part was all about how the science of genetics evolved after Mendel, and how things in Russia actually went downhill, and Gregor Mendel's name was forbidden from being spoken except in criticism on pain of death. But there are happier bits too, like a video on how one scientist get his shark DNA from shark to computer. I won't give too much away, but this is a very interesting part, and at the very end we learn that the science of genetics is far from over, and there are many new things to be learned.

I thought the Gregor Mendel Exhibit was a very good exhibit, and has certainly given me a better grounding in Gregor Mendel's work and the science of genetics.