UNLOCKING THE SECRETS OF MEMORY

The most recent book by popular science writer Debra Filmore, *Making Memories*, is a must read for anyone who has ever forgotten where they left their cellphone. The book presents the latest research into how memory works – and why it can't always be trusted. In addition, the author provides numerous examples that help clarify both the scientific research and the implications of the findings for real life.

The opening chapter introduces the concept of "super memory" — the ability to accurately recall anything from long lists of numbers to hundreds of historical facts. Filmore describes several studies of people with this rare skill, conducted to gain a better understanding of the mechanisms of memory. The conclusion: those who appear to have "super memory" start out with the same natural abilities as the rest of us; what helps them accomplish their amazing feats is their mastery of various memory techniques. Some of the methods, writes Filmore, go back over 2000 years to ancient Greece - an indication of the value that was once placed on improving one's memory. Sadly, she adds, with so many digital devices now available, not many people today are willing to devote the time and effort required to do that.

Another chapter deals with recent research that has found out how easily our memories can be manipulated. In a study conducted at Stanford University, for example, a group of people were shown a video of a car crash. Over the next few weeks, they were given incorrect information about the crash that totally contradicted what they had seen. When asked later to describe the crash, they gave the false information, insisting it was true. As Filmore points out, such findings are bad news for the justice system, since they call into question the reliability of eye-witness testimony in the courtroom.

One might assume that not all memories can be manipulated so easily. After all, remembering the details of a crime we witnessed only briefly is not the same as recalling biographical details about our own lives. Surely we get *those* right, don't we? But in the same chapter Filmore presents research showing that

we often take other people's descriptions of events in our lives and turn them into our own recollections. Some scientists claim this tendency could be used to help people troubled by traumatic memories. In fact, they believe ways will soon be found to replace such memories with happier ones.

As she does in all her books, Filmore not only provides a wealth of information but also expresses her views on related ethical issues. For example, she shares her profound doubts about allowing psychologists to play with a patient's memories, even if a beneficial outcome could be guaranteed. The book is therefore worth reading both for its fascinating insights into the complexities of memory, and for the thought-provoking issues that it raises.

QUESTIONS

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1. What do we learn from lines 1-6 about *Making Memories?*

i) What the reviewer thinks of the book.

ii) Why Filmore chose to write about memory.

iii) Why it is more popular than Filmore's other books.

iv) How it has affected readers' lives.

2. COMPLETE THE SENTENCE.

From lines 7-10, we learn why researchers

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3.What can we understand from lines 7-17 about "super memory" ?

i) It was discovered through research.

ii) It is a rare ability people are born with.

iii) It is the result of practice.

iv) It is not well understood.

4. COMPLETE THE SENTENCE.

In lines 15-17, Filmore explains why most people no longer_____

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5. In lines 4-6, the reviewer refers to the implications of research findings for real life. Give ONE of the implications. Base your answer on lines 18-25. COMPLETE THE SENTENCE.

One implication is that we cannot

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6. What can we understand from lines 26-33 about events in our own lives?

i) We need help in remembering the details.

ii) We don't accept other people's accounts of them.

iii) We believe that we remember them accurately.

iv) We remember mainly the traumatic events.

7. In line 37, the reviewer refers to "a beneficial outcome" of playing with a patient's memories. What would a beneficial outcome be?

Base your answer on another paragraph.

COMPLETE THE SENTENCE.

The patient

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8. What do we learn from lines 34-39?

i) Why memory is so complex.

ii) Why Filmore writes about ethical issues.

iii) Why we need to know more about memory.

iv) Why Filmore's book is thought-provoking.