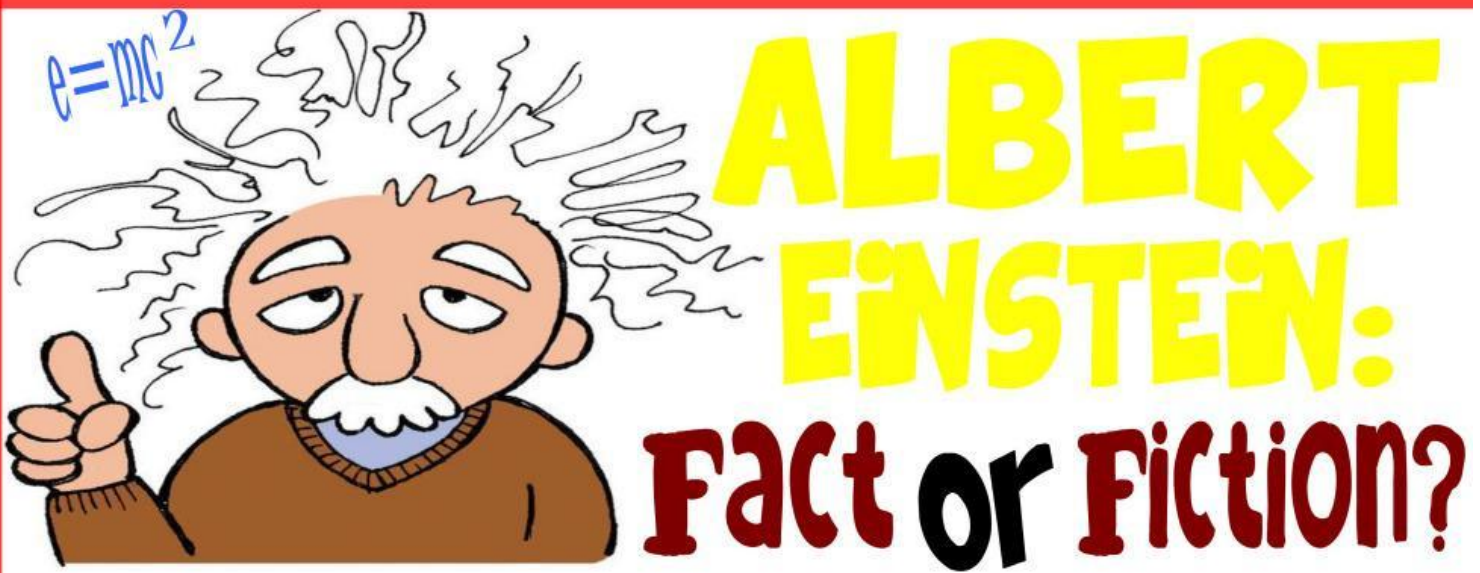




Was Albert Einstein really a poor student, did he almost become the president of Israel and what, if anything, did he have to do with the development of the atomic bomb? Separate Einstein myth from reality and explore some of the most startling chapters from the life story of the 20th century's preeminent intellectual.

Is it true that Einstein helped invent the atomic bomb?

No. In 1939, when he learned that scientists in Berlin had figured out how to split a uranium atom, Einstein wrote a letter to President Roosevelt urging him to do whatever it took to make sure American scientists were the first to build an atomic bomb. (He was a committed pacifist, but the prospect of nuclear weapons in the hands of the Nazis was so terrifying, he later wrote that "I did not see any [other] way out.") However, because of his left-wing political beliefs, the U.S. Army denied Einstein the security clearances he needed to be a part of the Manhattan Project, and so his role in the development of this deadly technology was an indirect one.

Is it true that many American officials believed that Einstein was a Soviet spy?

Yes. Because of his controversial political beliefs-his support for socialism, civil rights, and nuclear disarmament, for example-many anti-Communist crusaders believed that Einstein was a dangerous subversive. Some, like FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, even thought he was a spy. For 22 years, Hoover's agents tapped Einstein's phones, opened his mail, rifled through his trash and even bugged his secretary's nephew's house, all to prove that he was more radical (as his 1,500-page FBI dossier noted) than "even Stalin himself."

Did Einstein really almost become the president of Israel?

Yes. In 1952, Israel's first president, Chaim Weizmann, asked his friend Albert Einstein ("the greatest Jew alive," Weizmann said) if he would be willing to lead the young nation. Though the Israelis assured him that "complete facility and freedom to pursue your great scientific work would be afforded by a government and people who are fully conscious of the supreme significance of your labors," Einstein turned down the offer. For one thing, though he was very sympathetic to Israel, he was never an ardent Zionist-he believed in "friendly and fruitful" cooperation between Jews and Arabs-and for another, he worried that he lacked the interpersonal skills to be a world leader. Still, Einstein added, "my relationship to the Jewish people has become my strongest human bond, ever since I became fully aware of our precarious situation among the nations of the world," and he was "deeply moved" by Weizmann's offer.

Is it true that Einstein was a lousy student?

In some ways, yes. When he was very young, Einstein's parents worried that he had a learning disability because he was very slow to learn to talk. (He also avoided other children and had extraordinary temper tantrums.) When he started school, he did very well-he was a creative and persistent problem-solver-but he hated the rote, disciplined style of the teachers at his Munich school, and he dropped out when he was 15. Then, when he took the entrance examination for a polytechnic school in Zurich, he flunked. (He passed the math part, but failed the botany, zoology and language sections.) Einstein kept studying and was admitted to the polytechnic institute the following year, but even then he continued to struggle: His professors thought that he was smart but much too pleased with himself, and some doubted that he would graduate. He did, but not by much-which is how the young physicist found himself working in the Swiss Patent Office instead of at a school or university.

Is it true that Einstein's first wife contributed to the discoveries that made her husband famous?

Some researchers think that she did (for example, in 1905 she told a friend that "we finished some important work that will make my husband world famous"), but most agree that, while Mileva Maric was a talented physicist in her own right and a valuable sounding-board for her husband's ideas, she did not make substantial contributions to his most famous work. However, her scientific ambitions were certainly belittled and overlooked, especially by her husband. Einstein actually treated his wife quite badly: He had (and flaunted) many affairs; he was distinctly unhelpful around the house; and he made Maric obey a long list of humiliating rules ("You must answer me at once when I speak to you," for example.) The two divorced in 1919 and Einstein married his cousin Elsa.

Vocabulary Spot

Match the words with their definitions.

- | | |
|--|------------------|
| 1) Something that people wrongly believe to be true | a) humiliating |
| 2) Likely to change or become dangerous without warning | b) contribute |
| 3) Making you feel ashamed and embarrassed | c) lousy |
| 4) Someone who believes that violence is wrong and refuses to fight in wars | d) turn down |
| 5) To divide or break something into several parts | e) controversial |
| 6) A subject, opinion or decision which people don't approve of or disagree about | f) pursue |
| 7) Intended to destroy the power or influence of a government or a belief | g) lack |
| 8) A person or group who believes that important political or social changes are necessary | h) spy |
| 9) To fail a test or course | i) radical |
| 10) Bad or unpleasant | j) precarious |
| 11) To not accept an offer or request | k) split |
| 12) To follow a course of activity | l) pacifist |
| 13) To not have any or enough of something that you need | m) flunk |
| 14) Someone whose job is to find out secret information about a country or an organization | n) myth |
| 15) To give money, goods, or your time and effort in order to achieve something | o) subversive |

Reading Comprehension

Answer the questions according to the text.

- 1) What made Einstein say "I didn't see any other way out"?
- 2) Why did American officers think Einstein was a spy?
- 3) Who is Chaim Weizmann and what did he promise Einstein?
- 4) What can you say about Einstein's education life?
- 5) Why did Einstein's parent worry when he was young?
- 6) What was Einstein's role in his wife's career development?

Writing Spot

Complete the sentences with your own words according to the text.

- 1) The term "ardent Zionist" _____.
- 2) Einstein's attitude towards his wife _____.
- 3) Weizmann's offer _____.
- 4) While some researchers, _____.
- 5) J. Edgar Hoover's efforts _____.
- 6) Manhattan Project _____.
- 7) Einstein's political view _____.

Explain these famous quotes of Einstein with your own words (Use at least 60 words for each).

"Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler."

"I know not with what weapons World War 3 will be fought, but World War 4 will be fought with sticks and stones."

"A person starts to live when he can live outside himself."

"Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere."

"It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity."