

Children in the News:
Amazon Children “Spontaneously” Understand Geometry

Castelvecchi, Davide, “Amazon Children Spontaneously Understand Geometry.” National Geographic News. 19 Jan. 2006. 27 March 2007
http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2006/01/0119_060119_geometry.html

Recently in the Amazon, a group of isolated Indians called the Mundurucu was studied to see how they comprehend geometry. Even though these Indians do not have words for the geometric shapes, they have a seemingly natural ability to understand the meanings of the shapes. Children in this Amazon community seem to be hardwired for geometry. They were able to understand the concepts about as well as school children in the U.S. do.

The Mundurucu adults were given the same geometry exercise, and researchers found that the U.S. adults performed only slightly better than the Mundurucu adults. This is very impressive considering that the Mundurucu test participants have received little or no education, and have lived mostly in isolation from other cultures.

In the study, two kinds of tests were administered. The first test was to distinguish which shape did not belong with the other shapes. For example, the test takers were given six options of triangles, five of the triangles had right angles but one triangle did not. The subjects were supposed to pick out which triangle did not belong with the group. In the second test administered, each participant was given a map which showed where to find hidden objects. Geometric shapes were used to mark the pathway to one of the three hidden boxes. The children were able to match-up the correct shapes which enabled them to find the hidden objects.

From this study researchers concluded that these children have a natural affinity for geometry.