

It's On The Table

by [Peter Glassman](#) (March 2024)



The Race-Track Periodic Table, by John Clark, 1933

Twelve-year-old Rob has the best grade point index in his seventh-grade class. He goes beyond classroom teaching and homework assignments to higher learning texts, especially for scientific topics. Rob's class has just begun their first exposure to academic chemistry. Their corpulent teacher, Mr. Boomer Blipstik, pulled down a roll-up chart.

"Class, in chemistry, knowing this chart is a fundamental necessity. It's called the Periodic Table of the Elements." Blipstik directed his pointer to the chart, stopping his green laser dot on the symbol *Fe*. "*Fe* stands for iron. It comes from the Latin word *ferrum*, which means iron."

A girl named Norma raised her hand, "Mr. Blipstik, why doesn't the chart use *Ir* for iron?"

Blipstik smiled as he rubbed one of his three chins, "It was decided many years ago that all chemical elements in the world would be designated by a mythology character like Mercury, a mineral, a place, a property of an element, or by a scientist's name. The language used first began with Greek or Latin but has entries from Spanish (Platinum), Scottish (Strontium) and others."

Norma asked, "Do we have to learn all those elements in English and what's on the chart?"

Blipstik smiled again, "The good news is no. But it's yes if

you continue with a scientific career in college. No more questions now. I want to give you a home assignment from which we will understand what this Table of Elements means.” He ran his green laser dot over several areas of the chart. “Everything on this planet is composed of elements represented on this table. Your assignment is to pick out something at home and define its elements.”

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Rob rummaged all through his house and couldn't find anything interesting. His mother and father couldn't come up with anything acceptable. He took his science book to the bathroom. While sitting on the commode, it came to him. To confirm his eureka moment, Rob asked his grandfather about his idea. “What do you think, Papa?”

“Well, Rob, one thing is certain,” mused Papa. “Your science teacher is correct about the Table of Elements being all-inclusive. So, yes, I suggest you bring your idea to Mr. Blipstik.”

“Papa, we have to bring the thing we're gonna talk about to class the next day.” Rob seemed perplexed.

Papa grinned, “But you will be bringing it in. Think about it.”

Rob smiled and then laughed. “Oh yeah, you're right.”

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Mr. Blipstik collected the science homework papers. He ruminated over Rob's item with his thoughts and whispered, “I don't know if I should select your choice, Rob. However, instinct tells me it'll be all right.”

Blipstik spoke from his desk, “I've chosen eight of your items for class discussion. Those eight students will present their specimens to the class. Everyone must bring in a picture of

one item on today's homework list for tomorrow's class. You can also use a cell phone and photograph it. The eight people chosen will use the laser pointer on the Periodic Table to illustrate the elements in their objects."

Mr. Blipstik announced the students' names. After class was dismissed, he stared at Rob's choice again and mumbled, "In all my years of teaching this class, no one has ever selected this item. I really can't imagine how he's going to do it. After all, it's not specifically on the Periodic Table of Elements—or maybe it is."



Rob approached his grandpa again. "Well, Papa, I went online like you said, and here's what I have. Both items exist as a gas. How should I talk about this so the class won't laugh?"

Papa ruminated, "Whatever you say has to be educational. I think by focusing on the chart and using the correct word choice, you'll make a good showing."



The next day the selected students pointed the green laser dot to the elements on the chart that best illustrated the composition of their homework item. The first was Norma, who had mounted her objects on a black sheet of paper. The students looked at the paper as it was passed around the class.

Norma stood straight, "One thing on my sheet is a feather. The other things are toenail clippings from me and my older brother."

The pupils recoiled, uttering "toenails" with disgust. Mr. Blipstik handed her the laser pointer after maintaining order. Norma continued, "Okay, what the feather and the toenails have in common is they are formed mostly of a protein called

keratin. The main element of toenail and feather keratin is nitrogen, shown here on the table as the letter N. Nitrogen is also in the air we breathe, and the meat we eat." She took a bow with the applause.

Blipstik came to Rob's turn. He was last. "Okay students, so far all the things we've seen today could be broken down into elements found on the Periodic Table. Rob has chosen an item I know we'll all be very interested in. C'mon up, Rob."



Rob stood up front. "Well, class, you can't see what I brought here today, but I want you to know that what I'm going to talk about is something everyone in this room did bring with them." He picked up a large white rectangular card with "BOWEL GAS" in red letters on it. The class roared with laughter.

Rob took a breath and continued his presentation, "Bowel gas is formed from swallowed air, plus the food we eat and drink, and by the action of bacteria in our large intestine. Part of this gas is called hydrogen sulfide and chemically is H₂S." He aimed the green laser dot on the H and then the S. "H is for hydrogen and S stands for sulfur. It's responsible for the odor of our bowel gas. In large quantities, H₂S smells like rotten eggs."

The class laughed again.

"In fact..." Rob continued. "...eggs contain a lot of hydrogen and sulfur."

A girl in the back row shouted, "Then Ralphy must eat a lot of eggs."

"Yeah, I do." The boy named Ralphy let out a loud colonic expulsion causing five students to run to the opposite side of the room.

Raucous laughter ensued as well as a shouted, "Bowel gas ...

bowel gas ... run for your lives.”

Blipstik got them back to their seats. “Please, let Rob finish his interesting discussion.”

“Interesting?” A boy shrieked. “He’s talking about farts.”

Blipstik waved his arms again to calm the group.

Rob held up another card. “The other major component of bowel gas is methane. It’s an odorless gas but is highly explosive and flammable.”

The students were wide-eyed. Tall Jimmie raised his hand, stood up, and said, “Yeah, last year at a birthday party I cut a big one on the fireplace igniter, and a giant blue flame shot out and gave me a sore tush for a week.”

Blipstik again quelled the laughter, “Rob will you show us the elements making up methane on the Periodic Table?”

“Yes, methane chemically is CH₄, composed of carbon and hydrogen atoms here on the Table.” He pointed the green laser dot appropriately.

Mr. Blipstik smiled at his science students, “Well, class, Rob’s choice reinforces what science tells us and what the Periodic Table shows, that all elements on this planet are on the chart, even parts of our bodies and the things we’re all made of. Let’s clap our hands for everyone who passed something in for their homework assignment.”

“How did Rob pass his Bowel Gas in, Mr. Blipstik?” a girl asked.

Ralphy released another colonic blast and shouted, “That’s how.”

The bell rang and the smiling Blipstik announced, “Class dismissed.”

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