

Headline English

2011, week 27 *Learn English through reading on current world affairs*

1 **Urban brains behave differently from rural ones**

2 original at:

3 <http://www.economist.com/node/18864354>

4 "Hell is a city much like London," opined Percy Bysshe Shelley in 1819.
5 Modern academics agree. Last year Dutch researchers showed that city
6 dwellers have a 21% higher risk of developing anxiety disorders than do
7 their calmer rural countrymen, and a 39% higher risk of developing mood
8 disorders. But exactly how the inner workings of the urban and rural
9 minds cause this difference has remained obscure—until now.

10 Dr Meyer-Lindenberg has used a scanning technique called functional
11 magnetic-resonance imaging (fMRI) to examine the brains of city dwellers
12 and country bumpkins when they are under stress.

13 In his experiment, participants lying with their heads in a scanner took
14 maths tests that they were doomed to fail (the researchers had designed
15 success rates to be just 25-40%). To make the experience still more
16 humiliating, the team provided negative feedback through headphones, all
17 the while checking participants for indications of stress, such as high blood
18 pressure.

19 The urbanites' general mental health did not differ from that of their
20 provincial counterparts. However, their brains dealt with the stress
21 imposed by the experimenters in different ways. These differences were
22 noticeable, amongst others, in the amygdalas. The amygdalas are a pair
23 of structures, one in each cerebral hemisphere, that are found deep inside
24 the brain and are responsible for assessing threats and generating the
25 emotion of fear.

26 People living in the countryside had the lowest levels of activity in their
27 amygdalas. Those living in towns had higher levels. City dwellers had the
28 highest. To those of a Shelleyesque disposition, this might not come that
29 surprising.

Questions

- 1) In what manner is Percy Bysshe Shelley's opinion of the city vindicated by modern science?
- 2) What exactly is the innovative contribution of Dr. Meyer-Linderberg's study (with regard to previous research)?
- 3) What did Dr. Meyer-Lindenberg examine in his research?
- 4) Of what did Dr. Meyer-Lindenberg's experiment consist?
- 5) Who are the 'urbanites' (line 19)?
- 6) What is the function of the amygdalas?
- 7) What did Dr. Meyer-Lindenberg's experiment show?
- 8) What is your opinion on living in the city vs. living in the countryside? Do you consider life in cities more stressful?

Vocabulary

dweller (line 6) – a resident or an inhabitant

doom (line 14) – to destine, especially to an adverse fate.

all the while (line 16-17) – at or during this time; all along

assessing (line 24) – to estimating, evaluating or judging

You can find additional explanation and more examples to help you understand and use English words and phrases at <http://dictionary.reference.com>, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> or <http://www.ldoceonline.com/>

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Tým jazykové skupiny Spěváček:

