

Did An Apple Really Hit Sir Isaac Newton?

Sir Isaac Newton was one of the most influential scientists in history. Newton's laws of motion were the basis of Newtonian physics, which led to innumerable advances in science and technology.

Newton is probably best known for being the "father of gravity." Chances are, you have heard the story about how Newton was sitting under an apple tree one day, and an apple fell from the tree and hit him on the head. As the story goes, Newton wondered what made the apple fall straight down and hit him on the head, and he realized that gravity must be the answer.



But is this story true? Well, as it turns out, it's mostly true.

There is no evidence that the apple actually hit Newton on his head. But most of the story really happened, at least according to a biography written by Newton's friend William Stukeley.

Stukeley published "Memoirs of Sir Isaac Newton's Life" in 1752, but many of the anecdotes from the book were written years before the book was published. The "apple story" was first recorded by Stukeley in 1726, the year Newton died.

In Stukeley's account, he and Newton were sitting out in the garden one day, sipping tea under an apple tree. Newton told Stukeley that he was sitting under an apple tree one day when the idea of gravitation came to him.

"Why should that apple always descend perpendicularly to the ground," Newton thought, when he saw an apple fall from the tree. "Why should it not go sideways, or upwards, but constantly to the earth's center? Assuredly, the reason is, that the earth draws it. There must be a drawing power in matter." (gravity)

So, even though the apple didn't actually bonk Newton on the head, a falling apple did indeed inspire his theory of gravity.

When Newton told Stukeley the apple story, they were sitting under a different apple tree than the one that inspired Newton. Many different places claim to be the home of this tree, but by most accounts, the actual home of the tree is at Newton's family home of Woolsthorpe Manor, near Grantham, UK.

The tree, which is over 400 years old, still sits on the property. The tree and the property it sits on are protected by the British National Trust.

There's also another difference between the actual story and the way the story is usually presented. The apple that falls from the tree is usually depicted as red. However, the tree at Woolsthorpe Manor is a Flower of Kent, a variety of apple tree that produces green apples.

So, yes, the story of Newton and the apple is true...mostly!