

## THE THEORY OF THEORY

Wait a second! Isn't a **theory** something that we know for sure, knowledge that's been studied, tested, and proven, like the atomic **theory** of matter? It's a serious word, a word that carries weight, right? Researchers study it. Professors teach it. Students are tested on it. Scientifically speaking, that's true. The dictionary defines "**theory**" as "a plausible or scientifically acceptable general principle or body of principles offered to explain phenomena." The germ **theory** of disease, the cell **theory** of organisms, and the general **theory** of relativity are examples of scientific **theories** that have been built up over time on strong foundations of evidence.

But the word **theory** has another common meaning that's nearly opposite! To understand this non-scientific definition, let's turn to the origin of the word. It comes from the Greek *theorin*, which means "to look at" or "to observe" or "to speculate." That term comes, in turn, from the Greek *theoros*, "a spectator," which comes from *thea*, meaning "theater." Perhaps this connection to the theater is part of the reason the word **theory** is sometimes used to suggest that something not completely real is going on. Unlike the scientific definition, the common definition leaves room for speculation. It implies that something isn't proven, that it's just a hunch.



Choose one of the cartoons and then ask yourself, what the heck is going on? Don't limit yourself to only what you see in the cartoon. It's *your theory*. Be creative. Now write your **theory**.