Investigating Inherited Human Traits

Pre-Lab Discussion

Heredity is the passing on of traits, or characteristics, from parent to offspring. The units of heredity are called genes. Genes are found on the chromosomes in a cell. The combinations of genes for each trait occur by chance.

When one gene in a pair is stronger than the other gene, the trait of the weaker gene is masked, or hidden. The stronger gene is the dominant gene, and the gene that is masked is the recessive gene. Dominant genes are written as capital letters and recessive genes are written as lowercase letters. If both genes in a gene pair are the same, the trait is said to be homozygous, or pure. If the genes are not similar, the trait is said to be heterozygous, or hybrid. Sometimes genes are neither dominant nor recessive. The result of such a situation is a blending of traits.

The genetic makeup of an individual is known as its genotype. The observable physical characteristics of an individual that are the result of its genotype are known as its phenotype. In humans, the sex of an individual is determined by the particular combination of the two sex chromosomes. Individuals that have two X chromosomes (XX) are females, whereas those with an X and a Y chromosome (XY) are males.

In this investigation, you will observe how the results of different gene combinations produced certain traits.

Problem

How are traits inherited?

Materials (per pair of students)

- 3 textbooks
- 2 coins
- Pencil

Procedure

1. Place the textbooks on the laboratory table so that they form a triangular well in which to toss the coins.
2. Determine which partner will toss for the female and which will toss for the male. Remember that there are two genes per trait.
3. Have the partner who is representing the male flip a coin into the well to determine the sex of the offspring. If the coin lands heads up, the offspring is a female. If the coin lands tails up, the offspring is a male. Record the sex of the offspring in Observations.
4. For all the coin tosses you will now make, heads will represent the dominant gene and tails will represent the recessive gene.
Analysis and Conclusions

1. What percent chance did you and your partner have of “producing” a male offspring? A female offspring? Explain your answer.

2. Would you expect the other pairs of students in your class to have an offspring similar to yours? Explain your answer.

3. If a woman who is homozygous for almond-shaped eyes (AA) marries a man who is heterozygous for almond-shaped eyes (Aa), what are the possible genotypes and phenotypes of their children?

4. What are the possible genotypes of the parents of a child who has wavy hair (Hh)?

5. Which traits in this investigation showed a blending of genes?

Critical Thinking and Application

1. Did you think that anyone in your class has all the same genetic traits that you have? Explain your answer.
2. How might it be possible for you to show a trait when neither of your parents shows it?

3. Do you think you would have some genetic traits similar to your grandparents? Explain your answer.

4. There is a small village in a mountain valley in Spain where a large number of people are polydactyl (have more than five fingers or toes). Why does this trait tend to be passed on from generation to generation?

5. There have been cases in history where a king divorced his queen because she produced only daughters. Using your knowledge of genetics, explain why this was an incorrect move.

Going Further

Repeat this investigation with your partner to “produce” your second offspring. After completing all of your tosses, make a drawing of the offspring. What similarities exist between your first and second offspring? What differences? Would you expect a third offspring to resemble either the first or the second offspring?
provided in description.

1. Using the suggested traits, draw the facial features for your offspring in the space.

2. Locate the trait of your offspring by placing a check in the appropriate box in the table.

3. Continue to fill in the boxes for each trait listed in the table in Figure 1. After each check.

The boxes should be filled only once for each trait.

5. You and your partner should now flip your cards into the well at the same time. More: