

## Examining the Bouba-Kiki Effect

### Introduction

In Science Friday’s video *The Bouba-Kiki Effect*, Luke Groskin and cognitive psychologist Kelly McCormick discuss some of the theories behind the Bouba-Kiki Effect. The Bouba-Kiki Effect describes the following phenomenon: When people are presented with a pointy shape and a blob shape and given a choice between two made-up words to name each one, most associate the pointy shape with the made-up word “Kiki” and the blob shape with the made-up word “Bouba.” Originally noted by psychologist Wolfgang Köhler in 1929, this phenomenon has been documented around the world in a variety of cultures, regardless of language. Are people associating the sounds with particular shape characteristics like size or roundness? Let’s take a closer look at the Bouba-Kiki Effect and the three main theories proposed to explain it.

### Vocabulary

cognitive psychology- study of the mind and mental functions like attention, memory, and language.

synaesthesia- neurological condition where more than one sense is involved in the perception of an experience. For example, being able to taste colors.

innate- present from birth.

### Note-worthy

*Write down information from the video and article that you want for your discussion or writing piece.*

### Discussion Questions

*Use the boxes below to record thoughts and interesting ideas during your group discussion.*

What is the purpose of language? Why do you think we developed such a complex set of words?

Are there words that give you a feeling of shape, texture, color, or speed independent of their definition?

Which of the three theories presented in the video do you think best explains the Bouba-Kiki Effect? Why?

*You should incorporate information from the video and class results into your discussion.*

GENERATE IDEAS: In the video, speakers of many languages were asked to identify Bouba and Kiki, and each of them gave the same response. What other demographic groups (e.g. old vs. young) do you think researchers should use to test this effect? Would you expect the results to be the same or different? Why?



## Create your own Bouba-Kiki test!

1. Create a list of two “pointy” sounding words and two “round” sounding words. *They can be real words or nonsense words.*

### My Words

 <b>Pointy</b>		
 <b>Round/Blob-like</b>		

2. Write each word on a separate card or sheet of paper.
3. Test out your words on at least three classmates, friends, adults, etc. Ask them to match your words to one of the original Bouba-Kiki images. Be sure to record your data.  
*Optional: Note information on your participants (age, gender, etc).*

### Data Collection

Participant	Word	Response

## Post-Test Discussion Questions

Use the boxes below to record thoughts and interesting ideas during your group discussion.

How did the results of your test compare with what you predicted?

Compare your pointy and round words with the words of your classmates. Create a list of similarities and differences for the “round” words and the “pointy” words.

- *Take this opportunity to sound out the words, look at their shapes, and think of the images they create.*

Think about the theories that Kelly McCormick presented to explain the Bouba-Kiki Effect. Discuss the words created by your group in relation to the three theories. Which theory is supported by your different words or your test?

***Theory 1- It's Innate***

***Theory 2- It's Your Mouth***

***Theory 3- It's Learned***

