

DISCOVER

like



ROSALIND FRANKLIN

WOMEN OF *Valour*

Born in London in 1920, Rosalind Franklin was an accomplished chemist and X-ray crystallographer.

Described as a child as 'alarmingly clever', Franklin was the only Jewish student at her school, where she excelled in science, Latin and sport.

Following completion of her PhD at the University of Cambridge at the age of 25, Franklin went on to lead studies in DNA diffraction techniques. Her work in X-ray crystallography was crucial to understanding the molecular structures of viruses, graphite and coal - though she encountered sexism at work, and was mistaken by male colleagues for a technical assistant.

Most significantly, her work was instrumental to the discovery of DNA's double-helix structure by her colleagues, Watson and Crick. However, while they went on to win the Nobel Prize, Franklin's contribution was uncredited, and her work went largely unrecognised during her lifetime.

Omitted from most books until the 1990s, her exclusion from scientific history has prompted widespread outrage, leading Franklin to be dubbed a feminist icon, the 'dark lady of DNA' and the 'Sylvia Plath of molecular biology.' Following her death at 37 from ovarian cancer - thought to be linked to her work - the Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science was named in her honour.



Reflections

- Rosalind was a chemist at a time when few women worked in the field. Are there still barriers to women and girls' participation and achievement in science today? What about for men and boys who are interested in stereotypically 'feminine' pursuits? What does this say about how we as a society value so-called 'women's work'?
- Rosalind's contributions were overlooked in favour of her male colleagues. For men and boys - when it comes to gender equality, what does it mean to be an ally?

TEACH

like



SARAH SCHENIRER

WOMEN OF *Valour*

Born in Krakow in 1883, Sarah Schenirer was a schoolteacher who became a pioneer of religious education for Jewish girls.

Born to an influential rabbinic family, as a child Schenirer was intelligent and eager to learn. Envious of her brothers' opportunity to study Torah, Sarah's father provided her with religious texts that he had translated into Yiddish.

After finishing school, Schenirer continued her education while working as a seamstress. She attended lectures and plays for women and would stay up late after work to study the weekly parsha. Devoted to Orthodoxy, Schenirer dreamed of bringing Jewish women back to 'passionate observance'.

In 1917, she founded an afternoon school for girls – an uncommon notion at the time - in her home, which emphasised a love of Torah and mitzvot. This groundbreaking school would soon become the basis for the global Bais Yaakov movement, and Bais Yaakov girls then and now praise her as 'Sarah Imeinu'.

She later co-founded a teachers' seminary and shortly before her death in 1935 published her 'Collected Writings', which was advertised as the first religious book by a modern woman.



Reflections

- Do all women and girls around the world have equal access to education? What are some of the barriers that they experience?
- What opportunities have you had in your life that your mother, grandmother, great-grandmother did not?
- Who is a woman in your life that you consider to be a role model? What values or traits does she embody?
- Do you think there are opportunities to increase gender equality in the Jewish community? How could this be achieved? What kinds of challenges might be experienced when working to increase equality?

RESIST

like



HANNAH SZENES

WOMEN OF *Valour*

Born in Hungary in 1921, Hannah Szenes was a military parachutist and poet who is often described as a 'forgotten wartime heroine'.

Having become a Zionist after experiencing antisemitism at school, Szenes immigrated to Palestine at the age of 18. Following completion of studies at the Girls Agricultural School, Szenes lived on a kibbutz before joining the Haganah, a Zionist paramilitary organisation, where she trained first as a wireless operator and later as a paratrooper.

In 1943 she volunteered to join a covert military mission whose ultimate aim was to provide aid to European Jewry. Szenes was the only woman in her unit. The group was dropped into Yugoslavia in 1944 to support anti-Nazi forces before proceeding to Hungary. Szenes was arrested at the Hungarian border. Though she was imprisoned and tortured, she adamantly refused to give up the codes for her radio transmitter. Szenes' mother was also arrested, but both women remained silent. Szenes was convicted of treason and at the age of 23 was executed by firing squad.

In addition to her military work, Hannah was an accomplished poet and playwright, with a number of her works published after her death.



Reflections

- Though celebrated in Israel as a heroine, Szenes has been largely forgotten in her native Hungary. Academics have attributed this in part to a "macho" culture that pushes female heroes to the sidelines. Do you think Australia has a "macho" culture? Have you witnessed any examples of this in your everyday life?
- Szenes was the only female in her unit. Can you think of other examples of women who have excelled in traditionally 'masculine' pursuits? What challenges might they have faced?

CARE

like



GISELLA PERL

WOMEN OF *Valour*

Born in 1907 in then-Hungary (present day Romania), Dr Gisella Perl was a gynaecologist who saved thousands of women when she was imprisoned at Auschwitz.

Perl was the only woman and the only Jew to graduate from her secondary school. Her father initially denied her wish to study medicine, fearing she would stray from Judaism, but eventually relented.

Deported to Auschwitz in 1944, Perl was one of a group of doctors ordered to establish a hospital in the camp - however her medical bag was confiscated on arrival, forcing her to work without even the most basic of supplies.

When Josef Mengele learned of her specialty, he demanded Perl report any pregnant women to him personally. Knowing that these women - many of whom were pregnant as a result of sexual violence - would surely be killed, Perl worked to hide them, performing terminations in the dead of night. She later reflected in her autobiography that "the greatest crime in Auschwitz was to be pregnant".

After emigrating to the United States, at the urging of Eleanor Roosevelt Perl opened her own practice where she delivered thousands of babies of Holocaust survivors. She went on to specialise in infertility treatment before moving to Israel, where she died in 1988, aged 81.



Reflections

- Medical schools have achieved gender parity, however women are still significantly under-represented as senior doctors and in leadership. How could this be addressed? What effect might this have on students in the field?
- How might women's and men's experiences of war be different?
- If women and men were represented equally in leadership, at all levels of society - would the world look different? In what way?
- What happens when a woman does not meet the societal expectation of nurturing, caring, warm, maternal?

FIGHT

like



ZELDA D'APRANO

WOMEN OF *Valour*

Born to an Orthodox Jewish family in Carlton in 1928, Zelda D'Aprano (born Zelda Orloff) was one of Melbourne's most influential feminist activists.

Though she was placed in a gifted class, D'Aprano left school at the age of thirteen to support her family. It was through her work at various factories that she first became aware of the inequities faced by female workers, and her outrage at these disparities prompted what would ultimately become a life-long mission to advocate for the rights of women.

D'Aprano was a fierce agitator; she was fired from several roles for attempting to better the working conditions of women, and in 1969 famously chained herself to the doors of the Commonwealth Building to protest unequal pay. The following year she co-founded the Women's Action Committee, sparking the growth of the women's liberation movement in Melbourne.

Reflecting on her work with her fellow activists, she declared that "we had passed the stage of caring about a ladylike image, because women had for too long been polite and ladylike and were still being ignored". Inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women in 2001, D'Aprano remained a staunch activist until her death in 2018.

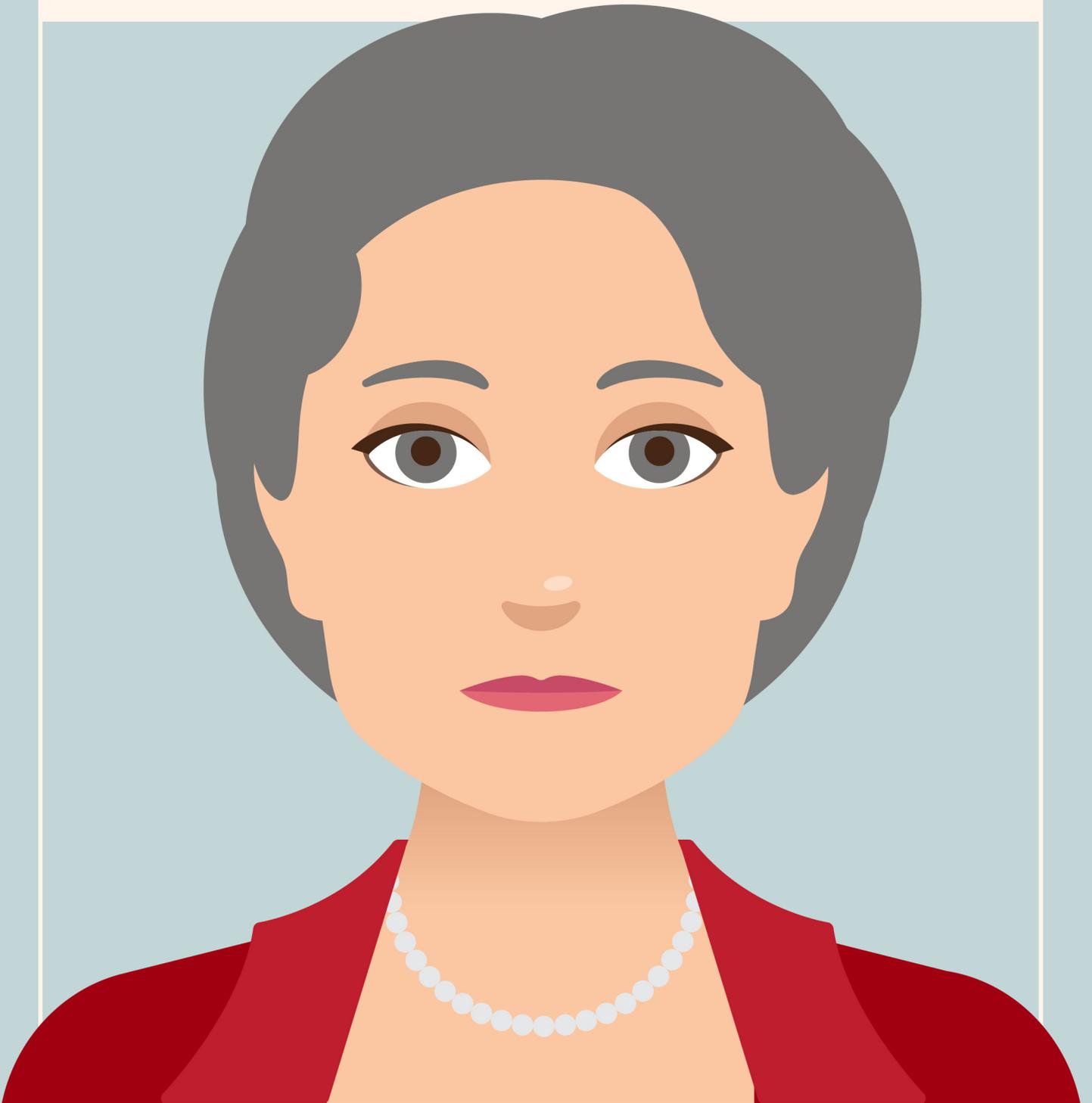


Reflections

- There have been calls for a statue of Zelda to be erected in Melbourne. Currently just 3% of all statues in Australia are of women (in fact, there are more statues of animals than there are of women). What might be the reason for this so-called "bronze ceiling"? What impact does it have?
- What kinds of barriers do women face in the workplace today?
- Why does the gender pay gap, which Zelda fought so fiercely, still exist today?
- Are public displays of activism like Zelda's, such as marches, demonstrations and protests, still important today? What effect do they have?

LEARN

like



RITA LEVI-MONTALCINI

WOMEN OF *Valour*

Born in Turin, Italy in 1909, Rita Levi-Montalcini was an Italian neurobiologist, Nobel laureate and senator.

Initially discouraged from attending university by her father who feared it would disrupt her potential as a wife and mother, medical school sparked Levi-Montalcini's interest in neurobiology. However, her academic career was cut short following the introduction of laws that banned Jews from professional careers.

Living under false identities, Levi-Montalcini and her family survived the Holocaust. Post-war, her scientific career flourished, and she became a professor in 1958. Key achievements included the isolation of nerve growth factor, for which she won the 1986 Nobel Prize in Medicine; founding of the European Brain Research Institute; and the receipt of myriad awards and honours.

She was appointed as a Senator for Life by the President of Italy and in 2006, at the age of 97, attended the opening assembly of the Senate, where she was mocked by detractors for her advanced age. A few years later she became the first Nobel laureate to reach the age of 100.

Levi-Montalcini died in 2012 at the age of 103.

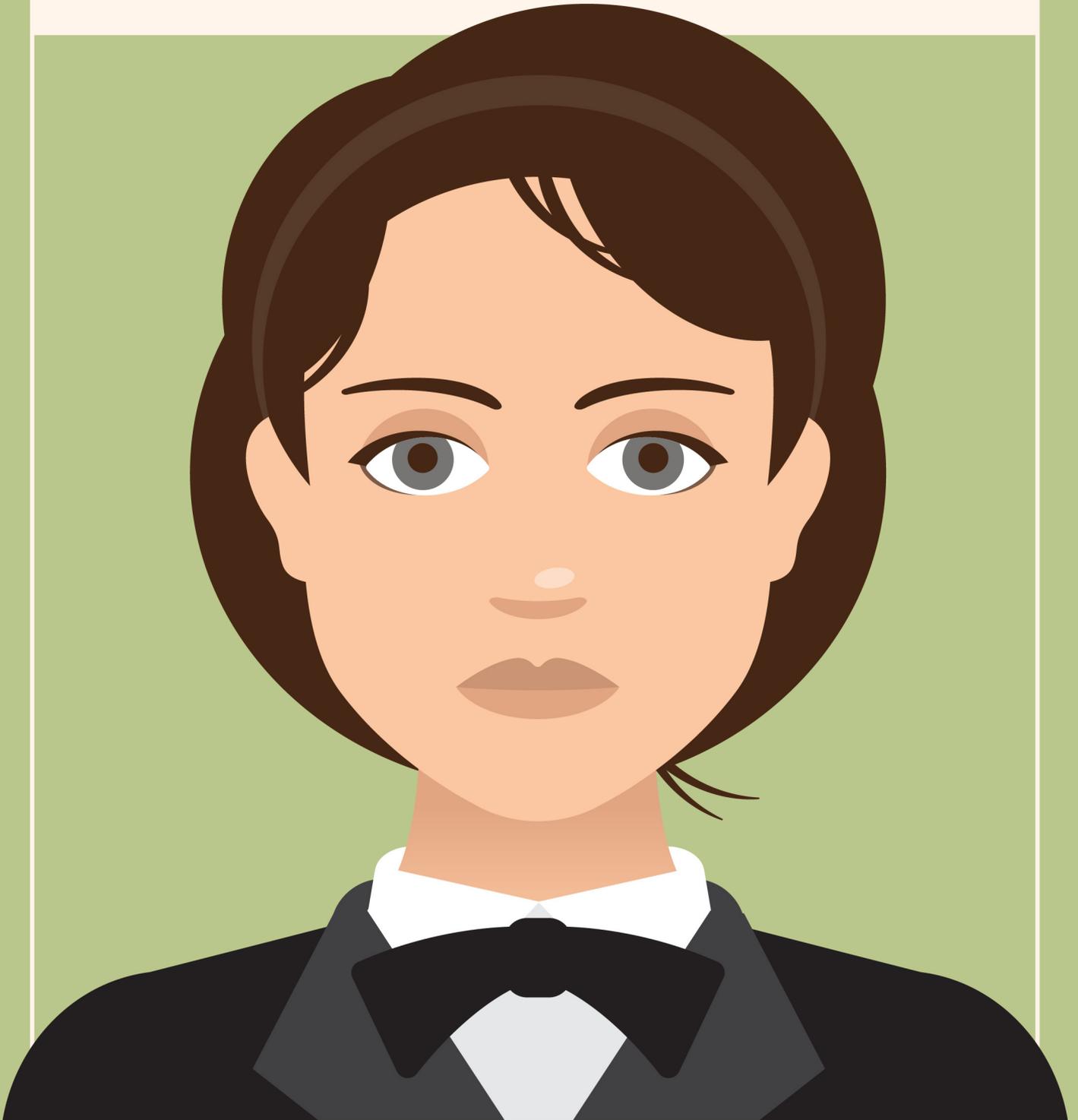


Reflections

- Women are often discouraged from appearing 'boastful', or don't feel comfortable talking about their accomplishments. Why might this be? What are the impacts?
- Women and girls are known to be underrepresented in STEM industries. Are you aware of any initiatives that aim to address this imbalance? Do you think such initiatives are effective?
- Gender inequality is often described as a "women's issue". Is gender equality a concern for men and boys? In what ways does inequality harm them? In what ways might they benefit from it?

WRITE

like



EMMA LAZARUS

WOMEN OF *Valour*

Born in New York in 1849 to a large Sephardic Jewish family, Emma Lazarus was an author and activist.

A prolific author, Lazarus was drawn to writing from a young age. Her first published work, a collection of poems and translations, was written at the age of fourteen. Many of her writings focused on Jewish subjects and themes, including translations of the Hebrew poets of medieval Spain, and her work soon gained recognition overseas.

Lazarus' interest in her Jewish roots grew as thousands of destitute Jews fled to New York to escape Russian pogroms. Lazarus became a passionate advocate for Jewish immigrants and helped to establish the Hebrew Technical Institute, which provided vocational training for new arrivals.

Lazarus is said to have created the role of the American Jewish writer, and her work imparted enduring lessons regarding immigrants and their right to dignity. The lines of her best-known piece, 'The New Colossus' - 'give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free' are inscribed on the Statue of Liberty.

Lazarus died in 1887 at the age of 38. In 2009 she was inducted in to the National Women's Hall of Fame.



Reflections

- Lazarus was an activist for Jewish causes. What are some of the Jewish teachings, traditions or values that support gender equality?
- Do you encounter gender stereotypes in your everyday life? What impact do they have on you? What actions can you personally take to support gender equality?
- In film, TV or fiction - who is your favourite female character? Would the text pass the Bechdel test?
- Do you think there are enough opportunities for young people today, of all genders, to discuss issues relating to equality?

CHALLENGE

like



ANDREA DWORKIN

WOMEN OF *Valour*

Born in New Jersey in 1946, Andrea Dworkin was a radical feminist, activist and writer. Often maligned as the stereotype of a "man-hating feminist", Dworkin was notorious for her uncompromising and unapologetic approach.

The author of 14 books, Dworkin brought a feminist perspective to subjects historically written about or described from a male point of view, including antisemitism, Israel and the Holocaust.

In the early 70s, decades before #MeToo, Dworkin spoke out about her own experiences of sexual abuse and domestic violence. Comparing antisemitism and Zionism with sexism and feminism, Dworkin famously championed the notion of a female homeland as a response to society's oppression of women.

A sought-after speaker, in 1978 Dworkin addressed the first-ever Take Back The Night march. Asked how she persisted with this work, she responded: "I keep the stories of the women in my heart. They urge me on, and keep me focused on what needs to be done."

Shortly before her death in 2005 at the age of 58, Dworkin published 'Scapegoat', a study of Jewish identity and women's liberation.



Reflections

- Dworkin was known (and often criticised) for her bold approach. Do you think there is pressure for women and girls - both in leadership roles, and in general - to "be nice"? What happens if they don't conform to this expectation?
- To what extent is history written by men? Have women's voices and experiences been excluded?
- The word 'feminist' is considered by some to be a loaded term. Why might that be? Would you describe yourself as a feminist? Why or why not? What does feminism mean to you?