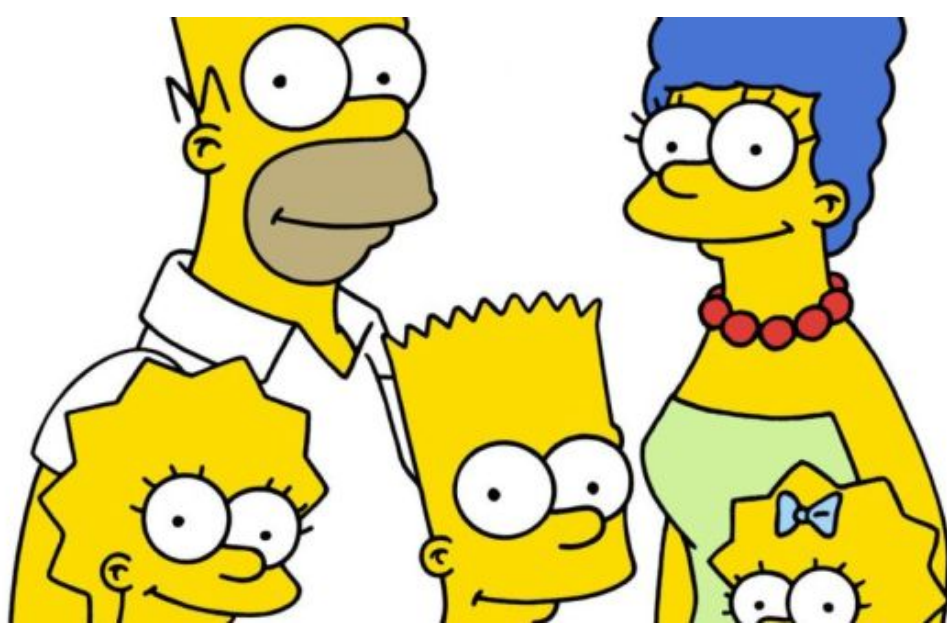


# Homer Simpson and his mathematical equations

The Simpsons: An (almost) infinite trove of mathematical nuggets



Homer predicted the mass of the Higgs Boson 14 years before it was discovered Image: Fox/Handout/Reuters

Michel Destrade

Topics: News Science Homer Simpson  
Simon Singh The Simpson

Wed, Sep 10, 2014, 13:55

Recommend 27

Tweet 10

g+1



Popular science writer [Simon Singh](#) called *The Simpsons* “the most mathematical show in TV history” yesterday at the British [Science Festival](#) in Birmingham.

Singh was presenting his new book *The Simpsons and their mathematical secrets*. He explained that the show is peppered with hundreds of mathematical facts, equations and in-jokes that the casual viewer will easily miss.

There are two reasons at the root of this predilection for mathematics in the show, he said.

First, some of the original scriptwriters were themselves brilliant mathematical students at [Harvard University](#) before they turned to comedy. They never lost their love for the subject and kept it alive through the years.

Second, the show was launched at the same time that VHS recorders hit the mass market, and allowed TV viewers to freeze-frame shows for the first time. It then became possible to increase the comedic density of each frame for future viewing of the fans, or as Singh put it, “to increase the nerdy density”.

The result is that “some pretty hard-core maths” made its way into the show, said the author of the best-selling book *Fermat’s Last Theorem*.

In his talk he gave the example of the mathematical scribbling produced by [Homer Simpson](#) on a blackboard during the 1998 tenth season episode “The Wizard of Evergreen Terrace”.

The first equation predicts the mass of the Higgs Boson “14 years before it was actually discovered”, the author said.

The next line reads “3987 to the power of 12 + 4365 to the power of 12 = 4472 to the power of 12” which, for the mathematically-minded reader, seems to defy Fermat’s Last Theorem. Indeed if you type in the left hand-side of this equation into a phone calculator and take its 12th root, you will get 4472, said Singh. The twist here is that this equation is only a “near-miss solution”, because both sides differ from each other by a 0.000000002 per cent margin of error.

“The Simpsons contain so much maths that you could write a whole book about it,” he said, which is of course what he did.