

**10. He's one of the most influential mathematicians of all time.**

Don't take my word for it. Here's what some of the most important figures in mathematics and computer science have to say about him. Richard K. Guy wrote that Gardner "brought more mathematics to more millions than anyone else." According to Donald Knuth, "More people have probably learned more good mathematical ideas from Gardner than from any other person in the history of the world." And Persi Diaconis wrote, "Martin Gardner has turned dozens of innocent youngsters into math professors and thousands of math professors into innocent youngsters."

**9. He introduced the general public to numerous fun mathematical topics.**

These include hexaflexagons, tangrams, Fermat's last theorem, the problem, John H. Conway's game of life, Newcomb's paradox, the four-color map problem, Penrose tiles, RSA cryptography, and fractals. He did this mostly via the 300 "Mathematical Games" columns—25 years' worth—that appeared in *Scientific American* and in spin-off books.

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## 5. He was a mystorian.

In 1998 he wrote, “I belong to a group of thinkers known as the ‘mysterians.’ It includes Roger Penrose, Thomas Nagel, John Searle, Noam Chomsky, Colin McGinn, and many others who believe that no computer, of the kind we know how to build, will ever become self-aware and acquire the creative powers of the human mind.”

### 4. *The Annotated Alice* (1960) was his all-time bestseller.

It reflected his love of the works of 19th-century British fantasy writer Lewis Carroll (a.k.a. mathematician Charles Dodgson). Gardner’s annotation uncovered hidden logical and mathematical references in *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*.

### 3. He published his first peer-reviewed mathematics paper at age 74.

His article with Fan Chung and Ron Graham appeared in *Mathematics Magazine* and won an MAA award for expository writing. Over the next two decades, many more articles appeared in MAA publications, including the award-winning *Math Horizons* article “The Square Root of Two = 1.41421 35623 73095...”

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## 8. His interest in mathematical magic inspired Mathematics Awareness Month 2014.

The theme “Mathematics, Magic, and Mystery” is named after his second book. The site [www.mathaware.org/mam/2014](http://www.mathaware.org/mam/2014) features 30 activities, many echoing favorite Gardner topics such as magic squares, Möbius bands, geometric vanishes, topological magic, card tricks, and Fibonacci numbers.

## 7. He was first and last a debunker.

He wrote extensively about fringe science, skepticism, and rationality, starting with his first book, *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* (1952). Just before he died, he published “Oprah Winfrey: Bright (but Gullible) Billionaire” in the *Skeptical Inquirer* (2010), a magazine he helped found in the 1970s.

## 6. Unlike many skeptics, he was neither an atheist nor an agnostic.

In a 2005 interview with the MAA’s Don Albers, he said, “I am a philosophical theist. I believe in a personal god, and I believe in an afterlife, and I believe in prayer, but I don’t believe in any established religion.”

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## **2. He was a great believer in the role of play in mathematics.**

In *Mathematical Carnival* (1975) he wrote, “Surely the best way to wake up a student is to present him with an intriguing mathematical game, puzzle, magic trick, joke, paradox, model, [or] limerick. . . . No one is suggesting that a teacher should do nothing but throw entertainments at students. Obviously there must be an interplay of seriousness and frivolity. The frivolity keeps the reader alert. The seriousness makes the play worthwhile.”

## **1. He didn’t have an advanced degree in mathematics, or in anything else.**

In fact, he never completed any mathematics classes past high school geometry, trigonometry, and algebra. His only college degree was a B.A. in philosophy from the University of Chicago (1936). He was not a professional mathematician in the traditional sense, yet he’s been cited as one of the most influential mathematicians of all time.

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