

THE PROPOSITION

For PhD candidates, their thesis propositions are an opportunity to publicly express their professional and personal convictions about science and society. In this feature they explain their most thought-provoking proposition. This time, a proposition from Mirjam Breure (Soil Biology), who defended her thesis on 28 October 2022.



‘A kid, kitten or kite a day keeps the doctor away.’

‘It is of course a nod to the English saying, “An apple a day keeps the doctor away”. My proposition refers to the health benefits of play. Play is just as essential to health as food and sleep. No, I don’t have a child, a cat or a kite myself. Those three things stand for different kinds of play. And they alliterate nicely, of course. My favourite? Playing with young children. They do nothing else and they love to involve you in their game. I became an aunt four times during the years I was doing my PhD. As an adult, you don’t tend to start playing

with Lego. People should play more. It increases your problem-solving capacity, creativity and social skills. But the main thing, of course, is that it’s fun and relaxing. I was once working at my parents’ house while they were looking after the grandchildren. That day I got a message saying there were problems with my soil samples from Ethiopia. I burst into tears. My little nephew brought me a toy to comfort me. That did me the world of good. The message: if you’re sad, do something fun. Play cheers you up.’ RK