Richard John Roberts Encyclopedia Article

Richard John Roberts

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1943

British molecular biologist who received the 1993 Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine with Phillip A. Sharp for the discovery of "split genes." In 1977 Roberts and a team of researchers discovered that the genes of the adenovirus (which causes the common cold) were discontinuous, and that certain segments did not contain any genetic information. Biologists had previously believed that DNA consisted only of unbroken structures, all of which encoded protein structure. His finding influenced the study of genetic diseases, and gave scientists new clues to how evolution was aided by DNA's ability to generate new genetic combinations.