

Happy Accidents

How do people invent new things? Sometimes they imagine the invention and then create it. But sometimes it's just a happy accident!

The slinky toy was created by accident. Richard James was an engineer for the Navy. He was trying to make a spring that would keep equipment steady on ships. He accidentally knocked a spring off a shelf. The spring "walked" down the shelves below. So cool! His wife Betty told him to make it into a toy. Thanks, Betty!

Another toy that started as an accident is play-doh. A soap company wanted to make a product to clean wallpaper. The product didn't sell very well as a cleaner. But it sold well as a toy!

When he was 11, Frank Epperson wanted to make his own soda. He filled up a cup with soda powder and water and stirred it with a stick. When his mom called him to come inside, Frank forgot to bring in his cup. It froze overnight. In the morning, Frank found he'd invented the Popsicle!

These examples are all fun. But important stuff has been made by accident too. Alexander Fleming was a famous scientist who discovered the medicine penicillin. Alexander went on vacation. He forgot to throw away some samples of bacteria in his lab. When he got home, he discovered that some of the bacteria had died.



Alexander figured out that mold had grown while he was gone. The mold killed the bacteria. Alexander made a medicine from the mold. He called the medicine “mold juice.” Later, it was called penicillin. It was the very first antibiotic.

Penicillin has saved a lot of lives. And it wouldn't exist if Alexander hadn't forgotten to clean up before he went on vacation. Who knows what will be invented next because of a happy accident!



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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. What was play-doh supposed to be?
 - a. Wallpaper paste
 - b. Wallpaper cleaner
 - c. Popsicle
 - d. Medicine

2. What was the original name of penicillin?
 - a. Antibiotic
 - b. Fleming
 - c. Mold juice
 - d. Bacteria buster

3. Why should we thank Betty James?
 - a. Because she invented popsicles
 - b. Because she thought the slinky should be a toy
 - c. Because she forgot to clean up
 - d. Because she made play-doh

4. What is a possible moral of this story (that your parents might not like!)?
 - a. Don't clean up
 - b. Ignore accidents
 - c. Don't drink soda
 - d. Clean your wallpaper

Instructions for teachers:

These questions can be used to assess understanding of the reading passage.

The item in bold is the correct answer for each question.

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