UNIT 4. IT WAS ALL NEW ONCE

READING 1

MULTIPLE CHOICE

The ballpoint pen

Most of us have at least one, but how did this popular item evolve?

One morning in 1945, a crowd of 5,000 people jammed the entrance of Gimbels Department Store in New York. The day before, Gimbels had placed a full-page advertisement in the New York Times for a wonderful new invention, the ballpoint pen. The advertisement described the pen as 'fantastic' and 'miraculous'. Although they were expensive, $12.50 each, all 10,000 pens in stock were sold on the first day.

In fact, this 'new' pen was not new at all. In 1888, John Loud, a leather manufacturer, had invented a pen with a reservoir of ink and a rolling ball. However, his pen was never produced, and efforts by other people to produce a commercially successful one failed too. The main problem was with the ink. If it was too thin, the ink leaked out of the pen. If it was too thick, it didn't come out of the pen at all.

Almost fifty years later, in 1935, a newspaper editor in Hungary thought he spent too much time filling his pens with ink. He decided to invent a better kind of pen. With the help of his brother, who was a chemist, he produced a ballpoint pen that didn't leak when the pen wasn't being used. The editor was called Ladislas Biro, and it was his name that people would associate more than any other with the ballpoint pen.

By chance, Biro met Augustine Justo, the Argentinian president. Justo was so impressed with Biro's invention that he invited him to set up a factory in Argentina. In 1943, the first Biro pens were produced.

Unfortunately, they were not popular, since the pen needed to be held in a vertical position for the ink to come out. Biro redesigned the pen with a better ball, and in 1944 the new product was on sale throughout Argentina.

It was a North American, Milton Reynolds, who introduced the ballpoint pen to the USA. Copying Biro's design, he produced the version that sold so well at Gimbels. Another American, Patrick Frawley, improved the design and in 1950 began producing a pen he called the Papermate. It was an immediate success, and within a few years, Papermates were selling in their millions around the world.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Question 1-5. Read each part carefully and choose the correct option, A, B, C or D.

1. People went to Gimbels to buy a ballpoint pen because

A. they couldn't get them anywhere else.

B. they had been told how good the pens were.

C. they had never seen a ballpoint pen before.

D. they thought the price was good.

2. Why were early ballpoint pens not produced commercially?

A. Nobody wanted to buy one.

B. It cost too much to produce them.

C. They used too much ink.

D. They didn't work properly.

3. Why was Ladislas Biro's pen better than earlier models?

A. It didn't need to be filled with ink as often.

B. It was designed by a chemist.

C. The ink stayed in the pen until it was needed.

D. It was easier to use.

4. Biro's first commercially-produced pen ...

A. was produced in a factory owned by the Argentinian president.

B. only worked if used in a certain way.

C. was a major success.

D. went on sale in 1944.

5. Patrick Frawley's pen ...

A was a better version of an earlier model.

B took time to become successful.

C was the USA's first commercially successful ballpoint pen.

D was only successful in the USA.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

READING 2

SUMMARY COMPLETION

MARCEL BICH

The man who turned a luxury item into an everyday object .

Marcel Bich, a French manufacturer of traditional ink pens, was the man who turned the ballpoint pen into an item that today almost anyone can afford. Bich was appalled at the poor quality of the ballpoint pens that were available, and was also shocked at their high cost. However, he recognised that the ballpoint was a firmly established invention, and he decided to design a cheap pen that worked well and would be commercially successful.

Bich went to the Biro brothers and asked them if he could use the design of their original invention in one of his own pens. In return, he offered to pay them every time he sold a pen. Then, for two years, Bich studied the detailed construction of every ballpoint pen that was being sold, often working with a microscope.

By 1950, he was ready to introduce his new wonder: a plastic pen with a clear barrel that wrote smoothly, did not leak and only cost a few cents. He called it the 'Bic Cristal'. The ballpoint pen had finally become a practical writing instrument. The public liked it immediately, and today it is as common as the pencil. In Britain, they are still called Biros, and many Bic models also say 'Biro' on the side of the pen, to remind people of their original inventors.

Bich became extremely wealthy thanks to his invention, which had worldwide appeal. Over the next 60 years his company, Societe Bic, opened factories all over the world and expanded its range of inexpensive products. Today, Bic is as famous for its lighters and razors as it is for its pens, and you can even buy a Bic mobile phone.

Now complete the summary. Choose NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS from the passage for each answer.

It is thanks to Marcel Bich that people today are able to **1** ..... a ballpoint pen. It was the bad quality and **2** ..... of the pens which were available at the time that inspired him to design a 3 ..... ballpoint pen that would be both inexpensive and reliable. After getting permission from the Biro brothers to base his pen on their **4** ....., he carefully **5** ..... other ballpoints that were sold in the shops, and in 1950 introduced his own version, the "Bic Cristal". It was popular with the **6** ....., and Bich became very rich. His company, Bic now makes a variety of cheap **7** ....., such as lighters and razors.

LIVEWORKSHEETS