

NAME: _____ CLASS: _____ Number: _____

A SHARP IDEA FROM KING GILLETTE



A salesman named King Camp Gillette invented a **disposable** razor **blade**. His **invention** became a **household name**. It changed the way people shave all over the world to this day.

- 2 King Camp Gillette was born in a small town in the state of Wisconsin in the USA. When he was young, his family moved to Chicago. The family worked hard. His father worked at various inventions. Gillette always liked the idea of inventing something, too. At 18, he left school and worked as a salesman.
- 3 By age 40, Gillette was still a salesman. Both his parents were more successful than he was. His mother published the famous *White House Cookbook*, and his father had a few inventions. The younger Gillette worked hard and also wanted to be an inventor. The president of the company he worked for **encouraged** him. He told him to invent something people could use and throw away. Gillette often thought about this.
- 4 One day when Gillette was ready to shave, his razor blade was too **dull**. It didn't cut. He thought, "I just spend so much time sharpening this blade. Then when I **sharpen** it, it's too sharp and I cut myself." He decided, "I'll make a razor with a safe, removable blade. When the blade is dull, you can throw it away and buy another blade."
- 5 Gillette started to work on this idea. Another inventor named William Emery Nickerson helped him. They became partners. Five years later, they started a company called the American Safety Razor Company. A year later, Gillette renamed the company the Gillette Safety Razor Company. In 1903, the company sold 51 razors and 168 blades. The next year it sold 90,884 razors and 123,648 blades. This was because Gillette had a good product and a good idea. He knew how to advertise. He gave away razors for free to sell more blades. Other companies tried to copy Gillette's **product**, but the Gillette Safety Razor Company became the most popular company.
- 6 By age 55, Gillette was a millionaire. He was famous, too, because his picture was on every package of razors. People all over the world asked for razors with the picture of a man on them. Gillette once said, "In my travels, I have found it in the most northern town in Norway and in the heart of the Sahara Desert." Sadly, in 1929, the U.S. Stock Market crashed,¹ and Gillette lost his money. He died a few years later.

¹ 1929 U.S. Stock Market Crash: people lost all the money they had in stocks and shares in the Stock Market

KEY VOCABULARY

Do you know these words? Match the words with the meanings.

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| ___ 1. disposable | |
| ___ 2. a blade | |
| ___ 3. an invention | |
| ___ 4. a household name | a. not sharp |
| ___ 5. to encourage | b. persuade someone to do something |
| ___ 6. dull | c. something made to be sold; merchandise |
| ___ 7. to sharpen | d. something that is created for the first time; a discovery |
| ___ 8. a product | e. something you use and then throw away |
| | f. make sharp so it cuts easily |
| | g. something that is famous or known by many people |
| | h. the cutting part of a knife or razor |

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LOOKING FOR DETAILS

Decide if the following statements are True (T) or False (F).

- ___ 1. At 18, Gillette left school and worked as a writer.
- ___ 2. At first, Gillette's parents were more successful than he was.
- ___ 3. He started a company called the American Safety Razor Company.
- ___ 4. Gillette gave away razors for free.
- ___ 5. By age 40, Gillette was a millionaire.
- ___ 6. His picture was on every package of razors.

A Complete these sentences with the words in the box.

blade	dull	household name	product
disposable	encouraged	invention	sharpen

1. By the early 1900s, everybody knew the name Gillette. It was a(n) _____
2. When a knife or razor doesn't cut, it is _____.
3. The part of a knife or razor that cuts is the _____.
4. Gillette's _____ changed the way people shave.
5. The president of the company Gillette first worked for _____ him to invent.
6. Gillette invented a(n) _____ razor blade, or a razor blade you can throw away.
7. Gillette's new _____ did not sell well the first year.
8. With the old razors, you had to _____ the blade when it didn't cut anymore.

VOCABULARY BUILDING

Complete these sentences. Circle the correct form of the word in parentheses.

1. Alexander Graham Bell had the idea to (invent / invention) the telephone.
2. The (invent / invention) of electricity changed our lives.
3. I always (encourage / encouragement) my sister to continue with her studies and finish medical school.
4. We know it is difficult to find a job, so we give our son a lot of (encourage / encouragement) to continue looking.
5. There is always a new electronic (produce / product) on the market.
6. The company has started to (produce / product) a very light phone.