Name_____

Handheld Calculators

People today have access to "handheld" calculators in many different mediums: computers; smartphones; and small, individual calculators. Push a button here or a button there, and it computes complex calculations instantly. We think of this as "modern" technology.

One of the earliest handheld calculators first became available in the early 1960s. Personal computers came into widespread use twenty years later, and cellular phones with calculators sometime after that. Thousands of years ago, long before the invention of batteries or electricity, early versions of a calculator were already in use.

The first calculator was called an "abacus," also known as a "counting frame." An abacus looks like a wood rectangle with a series of wires stretched across. Small rocks or beads are slid along the wires. There are other types using small ropes or grooves made in hard sand along which small beads slide.

People would use an abacus to solve addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, square root, and cube root problems with amazing speed. These counting devices are so quick and portable that they are still used today in some countries among trade merchants.

Abaci were standard issue in most American grade schools until the mid 1900s. With the advent of handheld calculators, they quickly became obsolete.

Text Questions

1. Which phrase or statement best defines an abacus?
   a. a handheld calculator
   b. a wood rectangle with a series of wires stretched across; small rocks or beads are slid along the wires
   c. used for addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, square root and cube root with amazing speed
   d. quick and portable
2. Which is a synonym for the word *advent* as it is used in the fifth paragraph?
   a. coming
   b. arrival
   c. approach
   d. appearance
3. In which situation might an abacus not be used?
   a. by your ancestors
   b. by merchants in foreign countries
   c. by students in the 1950s
   d. by your parents at the store
4. What is the main idea of the text?
   a. A battery-operated calculator is the only way to solve arithmetic problems.
   b. Everyone should have a handheld calculator.
   c. An abacus is an effective counting device.
   d. An abacus is obsolete.
5. In what ways have handheld calculators made our lives easier?

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