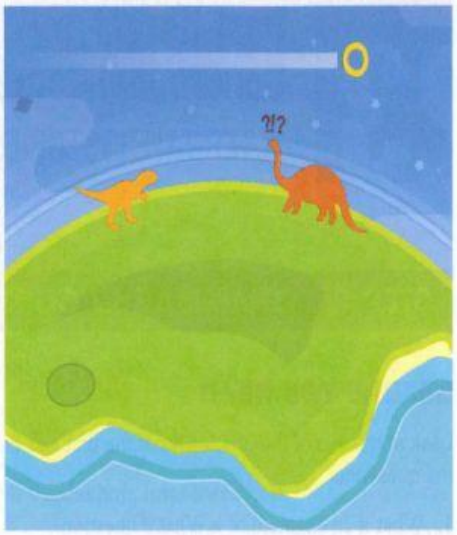
Read this article about alternate histories

What if...

What would have happened if I had stayed in my own country? What would have happened if I had never met my husband? It's human nature to wonder how life would have been different if certain events had (or had not) occurred. There's even a name for the stories we create to answer these *What if* questions—alternate histories. Scientists, historians, fiction writers, and everyday people are always asking *What if* questions. Read some typical examples on the next page.

Science



More than 65 million years ago, dinosaurs roamed[1] our planet. Then a meteor[2] hit the Earth, changing the climate, causing the complete extinction[3] of most types of dinosaurs, and making the development of other kinds of animals possible. But what if the meteor had missed? Phil Currie, a scientist from the University of Alberta, Canada, believes that if the meteor had not struck the Earth, some types of dinosaurs would have become even more intelligent and would have continued dominating the world, the way humans do today. Would humans have been able to develop alongside these "supersaurs"? If yes, what would our lives have been like if most types of dinosaurs had survived?

History

The seventeenth-century French philoscpher Blaise Pascal said, "If Cleopatra's nose had been shorter, the whole face of the world would have been changed." Like Cleopatra, many famous people have changed the course of history,[4] and there has been much speculation on what would have occurred if they hadn't lived. One of the most common questions, for example, is "What would have happened if Adolf Hitler had never been born or if the assassination[5] attempt on his life had been successful?" Many people believe that World War II could have been avoided or at least might have been shortened, saving tens of millions of lives and countless cities from destruction.

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Everyday Life

A woman rushes to catch a subway train. Just as she gets there, the doors close. The train pulls away, leaving the woman on the platform.

What would have happened if she had gotten on the train? The film *Sliding Doors* explores this question by showing us two parallel stories: the life of the woman if she had gotten on the train, and the life of the same woman if she had missed the train. In one version of the story, the woman meets a man on the train, and the two end up falling in love. In the other, she gets mugged[6] while running to catch a taxi and has to go to the hospital. The outcomes of this everyday occurrence—catching or missing a train—show us how a single ordinary moment can change the direction of our lives.

Some people argue that there is no way of ever really knowing what would have happened if a single event had been different. To those people, speculating about the past is just a game, an amusing way to pass the time. Yet to others, it is obvious that alternate histories have a lot to offer. To them, while we can never know exactly how a small change could have affected an outcome, exploring the results of an alternate past—in books, movies, or our own lives—can teach us important lessons.

1 Humans sometimes create alternate histories to imagine
   a Something that didn t happen
   b Something that happened
   c Something that doesn t happen
   d Something that will happen

2 In connection to the extinction of dinosaurs scienties wonder what if
   a The meteor wouldn t have hit the Earth
   b The meteor hadn t hit the Earth
   c The meteor didn t hit the Earth
   d The meteor wouldn t hit the Earth

3 Let s imagine dinosaurs continued roaming the Earth in the present.
   a If not humans would live alongside them
   b If so humans would live alongside them
   c The meteor wouldn t have struck
   d Humans would have become more intelligent

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4 What if some important people hadn t existed

a The text says the course of history may have changed

b Hitler would have been killed

c Alternate lives wouldn t exist

d Cities will not be destroyed

5 The direction of our lives may change..

a If we had done something big differently

b If we live a parallel story

c If a single event had been different

d If it affects an outcome

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