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.

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

It is thanks to Marcel Bich that most 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.

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Chilies



Chilies originate in South America and have been eaten for at least 9,500 years. Organised cultivation began around 5,400 BC. Christopher Columbus was the first European to encounter chilies, when he landed on the island of Hispaniola in 1492. He thought it was a type of pepper and called it the "red pepper", a name still used today. After their introduction to Europe they were an immediate sensation and were quickly incorporated into the diet. From there they spread to Africa, India and East Asia.

The reason for the chili's "hotness" lies in a chemical called Capsaisin. Capsaisin causes temporary irritation to the trigeminal cells, which are the pain receptors in the mouth, nose and throat. After the pain messages are transmitted to the brain, endorphins, natural pain killers, are released and these not only kill the pain but give the chili eater a short lived natural high. Other side effects include: an increased heart rate, a running nose and increased salivation and sweating, which can have a cooling effect in hot climates.

The reason for the presence of Capsaisin is thought to be to deter animals from eating the fruit. Only mammals feel the burning effects; birds feel nothing. As birds are a better method of distributing the seeds, which pass intact through their guts, Capsaisin would seem to be a result of natural selection.

The smaller chilies tend to be the hottest. This may reflect the fact that they tend to grow closer to the ground and are therefore more vulnerable to animals. The heat of a chili is measured on the Scoville scale. The hottest types such as the Habenero and the Scotch Bonnet rate between 100,000 and 300,000, the world famous Tabasco sauceÒ rates at 15,000 to 30,000, about the same as the Thai prik khee nu, while the popular Jalapeno is between 5,000 and 15,000. Powdered chili is 500 to 1,000 and the mild capsicins and paprikas can range between 100 and 0.

Do the following statements agree with the information in the text? Mark them:

True *if the statement agrees with the text*

False *if the statement does not agree with the text*

Not Given *if there is no information about this in the text*

1. Chilies became popular as soon as they were brought into Europe.
2. Capsaisin causes significant damage to the mouth.
3. Chilies can be part of a birds diet.
4. All large chilies grow high off the ground.
5. People breed chilies for their heat.



LIVEWORKSHEETS

THE HISTORY OF POTATO

A The potato was first cultivated in South America between three and seven thousand years ago, though scientists believe they may have grown wild in the region as long as 13,000 years ago. The genetic patterns of potato distribution indicate that the potato probably originated in the mountainous west-central region of the continent.

B Early Spanish chroniclers who misused the Indian word batata (sweet potato) as the name for the potato noted the importance of the tuber to the Incan Empire. The Incas had learned to preserve the potato for storage by dehydrating and mashing potatoes into a substance called Chuchu could be stored in a room for up to 10 years, providing excellent insurance against possible crop failures. As well as using the food as a staple crop, the Incas thought potatoes made childbirth easier and used it to treat injuries.

C The Spanish conquistadors first encountered the potato when they arrived in Peru in 1532 in search of gold, and noted Inca miners eating chuchu. At the time the Spaniards failed to realize that the potato represented a far more important treasure than either silver or gold, but they did gradually begin to use potatoes as basic rations aboard their ships. After the arrival of the potato in Spain in 1570, a few Spanish farmers began to cultivate them on a small scale, mostly as food for livestock.

D Throughout Europe, potatoes were regarded with suspicion, distaste and fear. Generally considered to be unfit for human consumption, they were used only as animal fodder and sustenance for the starving. In northern Europe, potatoes were primarily grown in botanical gardens as an exotic novelty. Even peasants refused to eat from a plant that produced ugly, misshapen tubers and that had come from a heathen civilization. Some felt that the potato plant's resemblance to plants in the nightshade family hinted that it was the creation of witches or devils

E In meat-loving England, farmers and urban workers regarded potatoes with extreme distaste. In 1662, the Royal Society recommended the cultivation of the tuber to the English government and the nation, but this recommendation had little impact. Potatoes did not become a staple until, during the food shortages associated with the Revolutionary Wars, the English government began to officially encourage potato cultivation. In 1795, the Board of Agriculture issued a pamphlet entitled "Hints Respecting the Culture and Use of Potatoes" ; this was followed shortly by pro-potato editorials and potato recipes in The Times. Gradually, the lower classes began to follow the lead of the upper classes

Questions 1-5

Do the following statements agree with the views of the writer in Reading Passage 1?

TRUE *if the statement agrees with the information*

FALSE *if the statement contradicts the information*

NOT GIVEN *if there is no information on this*

1 The early Spanish called potato as the Incan name 'Chuchu'

2 The purposes of Spanish coming to Peru were to find out potatoes

3 The Spanish believed that the potato has the same nutrients as other vegetables

4 Peasants at that time did not like to eat potatoes because they were ugly

5 The popularity of potatoes in the UK was due to food shortages during the war

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