

Accidental Inventions

- 1▶ The term “serendipity” is often defined as a “happy accident” or “pleasant surprise.” Throughout the course of human innovation and invention, serendipity has played almost as significant a role in the discovery and application of new products as intentional planning and long-term experimentation has. A number of products that we commonly use today were developed quite by accident. There are many examples of this concept that came about when an insightful person realized a potential benefit in a negative situation.
- 2▶ One of these accidental inventions is the leotard, a close-fitting, one-piece garment worn today by dancers, gymnasts, and acrobats, as well as practitioners of Pilates, yoga, and other forms of exercise. **9A** In 1828, a circus performer named Nelson Hower was faced with the prospect of missing his performance because his costume was at the cleaners. **9B** Instead of canceling his part of the show, he decided to perform in his long underwear. Prior to Hower’s wearing of the comparatively form-fitting underwear, acrobats and dancers wore more modest, looser fitting attire in which to perform, and even rehearse. **9C** Soon after the debut of Hower’s outfit, other circus performers began performing the same way. **9D** When popular acrobat Jules Leotard adopted the style, it became known as the leotard.
- 3▶ The inventions of various new foods and beverages have also come about through serendipity. One example is the Popsicle®. **10A** In 1905, 11-year-old Frank Epperson stirred up a drink of fruit-flavored powder and soda and then mistakenly left the drink, with the spoon in it, out on the back porch until the next morning. **10B** As the temperature dropped overnight, the soda water froze around the spoon, creating a tasty treat. **10C** Years later, remembering how enjoyable the treat had been, Epperson went into business producing Popsicles. **10D**
- 4▶ Another success story involving food and chance is the invention of the chocolate chip cookie, today considered the most well-known type of cookie in the United States. Yet, it has only been around since about 1930 when Ruth Wakefield substituted broken pieces of chocolate bars for the baker’s chocolate that she traditionally used but had run out of for making her already famous chocolate cookies. Instead of melting into the sweet, buttery cookie dough, as Wakefield had hoped, the small bits of chocolate remained separate from the rest of the dough, making a new delicious type of cookie that quickly gained popularity throughout the nation.
- 5▶ Some accidental discoveries have resulted in improvements to already existing products that increase their functionality or practical use for individual consumers. **11A** The inventor of Teflon®, a nonstick coating frequently applied to the surface of cooking implements to prevent food from sticking, had the original intention of devising a new refrigerant for producing cool temperatures. **11B** As the inventor, Roy Plunkett, experimented with the different properties of chemicals to create the cooling substance, he noticed an odd reaction occurring in one of the pressure bottles containing the chemical mixture. **11C** After cutting open the bottle to investigate further, Plunkett observed a waxy substance that was slippery to the touch. **11D** Though far from what he had intended to produce, the material sparked an idea in Plunkett and his employers, and Teflon was trademarked in 1945.
- 6▶ Like Teflon, Super Glue® started from the concept of something entirely different than the resulting product. During World War II, scientists were striving to create materials to make plastic gunsights for soldiers that provided exceptionally clear visibility. **12A** In the course of their research, they manufactured a substance, cyanoacrylates, that stuck to everything it touched. **12B** Initially rejected as completely useless because of its strong adhesive quality, the cyanoacrylates were set aside as a failure. **12C** However, less than a decade later, researchers working for the company Eastman Kodak rediscovered the formulation, creating the popular glue that went on to be advertised as strong enough to attach and hang a car from a crane. **12D**

Look for relationships between the key words in the highlighted sentence in the answer and transitional words in the sentences marked by the black squares that indicate comparison, contrast, or additional ideas.