The History of Trivia (the Trivia Behind Trivia)

Today, trivia is more popular than ever, with hundreds of thousands of students across the world involved in Quiz Bowl-like competitions, and adults participating in events such as the popular pub quiz tournaments. Perhaps the greatest catalyst for trivia's surge in popularity has been the internet. Information that was previously trapped in the pages of expensive encyclopedia volumes is now freely available to anyone with a computer. The internet has also allowed casual and social gaming to follow in the footsteps of classic trivia board and Parlor games, and iPhone apps such as Trivial appear poised to make sure trivia remains fun and relevant for generations to come. Now, you know the trivia of trivia, so go out and impress your friends with all your newly acquired knowledge.

Can you imagine a world without trivia? Trivia is such an integral part of today's television programming, our most popular games, and our extracurricular activities at school that it seems like it must have been around forever. However, as late as 100 years ago, trivia in its current form did not even exist.

The moder version of Jeopardy! debuted in 1984 with a new host Alex Trebek. Still going strong almost 30 years later, Jeopardy! is one of the longest-running, most successful game shows of all time. In recent years, Jeopardy! has captured headlines and allowed trivia to come full circle to its roots, as former high school Quiz Bowl champions Ken Jennings and Brad Rutter parlayed their trivia expertise into more than 3 million each in winning. In the late 90s and early 2000s, trivia's popularity on TV exploded once again, as often more than 20 million people per night tuned into a new wave of primetime trivia-based games, such as Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?

The first Quiz Bowl competitions were organized by Columbia University students Ed Goodgold and Dan Karlinsky. In 1966, Dan and Ed went on to write the first book to feature tidbits of random but interesting information, and appropriately called it Trivia. The popularity of the book landed it a spot on the New York Times Bestsellers list, and it was the first of many trivia books to hit the market in the late 60s and early 70s. In 1979, the success of the books and growing demand for all things trivia inspired Canadian trivia fans Scott Abbott and Chris Haney to create a board game that rewarded players with diverse general knowledge of topics, ranging from sports to pop culture. That game, Trivial Pursuit, has sold more than 100 million copies and has been played by an estimated 1 billion people worldwide, and was dubbed as the biggest phenomenon in game history by Time magazine. Seeing the popularity of the board game, television producer Merv Griffin decided to bring back a trivia related game show that was originally released in 1964, but cancelled several years later.

Think you know it all? Well, let's explore the trivia behind trivia. The first known use of the word trivial in English dates back to 1589, although an earlier use of trivium in the mid-1400s may have some influence on the modern use of the word. **Trivium**, in this case, was referring to the study of the liberal arts and meant insignificance in the sense that certain facts were viewed to be only of interest to a few. It took a few hundred years until we started using trivia in the modern sense, and it wasn't until the 1900s that we started seeing people relate the word trivia as we do today, with small factoids of information. In the 1950s, as televisions became more commonplace, the demand for unique programming exploded and quiz shows shot onto the scene. Programs such as Dotto, the $64,000 question, and 21 quickly became a staple of primetime TV. The quiz-based game shows grew in popularity until it was revealed in the late 1950s that contestants of those shows had secretly been given assistance by the producers to rig the outcome.

LIVEWORKSHEETS