

Inventions

An **invention** is something that did not exist before humans created it. It is not something that someone discovers. A **discovery** happens when someone finds something that already exists. Isaac Newton discovered gravity; he did not invent it. The wheel was invented, but fire was discovered.

Inventions are important because they can save or improve lives and can make things faster, easier, or cheaper. Some inventions, like the telescope, answer questions, such as "What is in space?" One invention can build upon another invention; therefore, each invention does not have to be entirely original. Some inventions are accidental. An inventor may be working on one thing and find that he or she has invented something else. Some inventions, especially early ones like the wheel or the bow, took many years and the efforts of many people to develop.

The wheel is the most important mechanical invention ever. People use it in machines, clocks, windmills, engines, and many other assemblies. Potters first used it in Mesopotamia about 5,000 years ago to make clay vessels. Around that same time, people began to attach wheels to carts, which made moving heavy objects easier. They made solid wheels from wooden planks attached together. By 2000 B.C., people had added spokes to the wheels. Wheels have been developing ever since.

Pen and ink are important inventions developed about 7,000 years ago in the Middle East. People needed them to keep track of land ownership, harvests, accounts, and other records. Humans first used whittled stone, then whittled sticks for pens. The Egyptians and Chinese made ink from lamp oil mixed with water and dyes. At first, people used clay tablets as we use paper now. Afterward, they used wood pulp, papyrus (hammered plant), and animal skin. Many years later, someone invented the material we consider paper.

Other important inventions have been the wedge, bow and arrow, sundial, abacus, glass, lever, pulley, compass, and gunpowder. Tools, including the arrowhead, bow, knife, and ax, are a type of invention. Writing and languages are also inventions.

When a person creates an invention, he or she usually wants the world to know who is responsible for the invention. The inventor may also want to receive money for the invention. A patent lets the inventor do this. Containing diagrams and descriptions of an invention, a patent is registered with the government to give exclusive control and possession of a particular invention to a certain person, usually the inventor.

Exercise:

1. What is the difference between an invention and a discovery? _____

2. What does someone have to do to gain rights to an invention? _____

3. What is the most important invention you can think of, and why is it important? _____
