

A Special Kind of Mouse

It is hard to imagine our lives without the personal computer. Computers are part of most people's everyday life. That wasn't the case before the 1980s. In fact, in the late 1960s, computers were huge machines that cost millions of dollars. It wasn't until the 1970s when smaller computers were developed. Still, few people had early computers in their homes.

Personal computers became popular after 1984. That was the year that Apple Computer, Inc., introduced the Macintosh®. It was the first easy-to-use computer of its kind. Part of its basic equipment was a mouse. The mouse controlled the movement of the pointer, or cursor on the screen. The mouse also let users point and click to give commands to the computer. In addition, the mouse was an excellent drawing tool. The mouse was first developed by Douglas Engelbart. His original design was a wooden box on wheels that could fit in the palm of a hand. Apple improved on Engelbart's design and it has become the useful tool we use today.

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MAIN IDEA

Bats

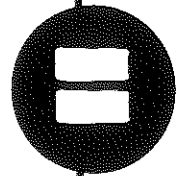
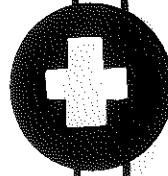
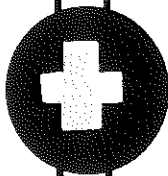
Many people use the expression, "blind as a bat." Usually, they are commenting on someone who doesn't see well or who misses something in plain sight. However, the expression is not really accurate. Bats are not blind at all. Like most animals, they are born blind, but gain eyesight by the time they are nine days old.

Bats are nocturnal creatures that come out at night to hunt. Although they can see well in daylight, they do not have special eyesight for hunting in the dark. Instead, bats guide themselves in the dark by means of a sonar system. Bats make high squeaking noises as they fly. These sounds spread out through the air like waves. When the sounds hit an object, they bounce back as echoes. The bat's large ears pick up the echo sound and locate objects in its path. This method is called echolocation.

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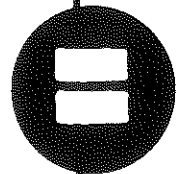
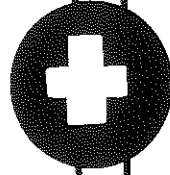
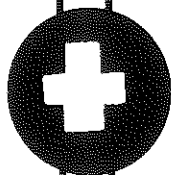
Alien Doubts

Most scientists do not believe that the planet Earth has been visited by alien beings. Scientists dismiss claims of unidentified flying objects (UFOs) and alien abductions. They explain them as either Earth-based aircraft, meteors, weather balloons, or hoaxes. Some bodies in the solar system have been suggested as having potential environments for extraterrestrial life, but due to the lack of habitable environments beyond Earth, scientists suggest that it is still extremely unlikely. In addition, space exploration suggests that no other planet in our solar system would even have the technology to send flying objects to Earth. Finally, the distance between Earth and the nearest star would make it extremely difficult for alien beings to visit Earth. However, all the scientific evidence doesn't stop hundreds of people from claiming to see unidentified flying objects (UFOs) each year.

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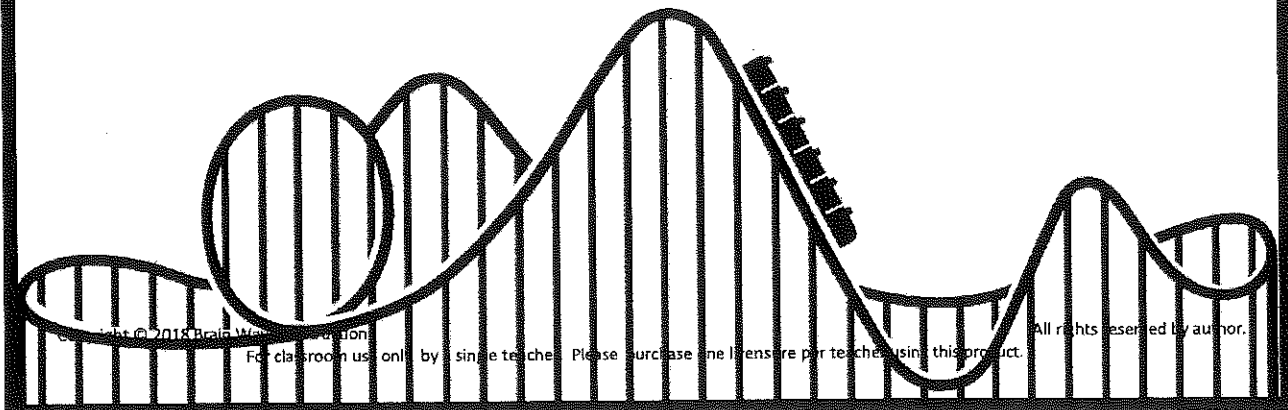
ROLLER COASTERS

If you've ever enjoyed the thrill of a roller coaster ride, then you have LaMarus Adna Thompson to thank. Thompson obtained the first roller coaster patent in 1885. At the time, he was building roller coasters out of wood.

Although roller coasters have been around for over a hundred years, they have seen surges of popularity and times of decline. The first surge occurred when the Cyclone roller coaster was built in 1927 at Coney Island. The Cyclone created quite a stir and roller coasters spread across the country. Then, the Great Depression marked the end of the golden age of roller coasters. In general, amusement parks went into decline. However, in 1972, John Allen designed The Racer and built it at Kings Island in Ohio. The Racer began a second golden age in coasters which continues today. Today, amusement parks keep upping the ante as they try to build the biggest and fastest roller coaster. Some roller coasters now have catapult launching, while others have hanging-train designs.

Many roller coaster riders don't even realize that as they're cruising down the track at 60 miles per hour, there is no engine in the roller coaster. The car is pulled to the top of the first hill when the ride begins, but after that the coaster runs completely on its own. It all happens with the conversion of potential energy to kinetic energy. Once the coaster descends the first hill, it has all the kinetic energy it needs to drive the roller coaster. Different types of wheels keep the ride running smoothly and guide the coaster on the track. When the ride comes to an end, compressed air brakes stop the roller coaster.

It's safe to say that most people riding a roller coaster have no idea who invented them, their history, or their mechanics. All they know is that they better hold on for the ride of a lifetime!



ROLLER COASTERS

FINDING THE MAIN IDEA

Answer each question. Then, fill in the chart next to the question with details from the passage that support the main idea.

1. What is the main idea of the first paragraph?
 - A. Roller coasters were first built out of wood.
 - B. A patent was filed for the invention of the roller coaster.
 - C. LaMarus Adna Thompson patented the first roller coaster.
 - D. Roller coasters are popular.

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2. Identify the best summary for the second paragraph.
 - A. Roller coasters have increased and decreased in popularity.
 - B. The first major roller coaster was the Cyclone.
 - C. Thanks to The Racer, roller coasters became popular again.
 - D. The Great Depression negatively impacted roller coasters.

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3. What is paragraph three mostly about?
 - A. Roller coasters are equipped with different wheels to perform specific functions.
 - B. Roller coasters operate without a motor.
 - C. Roller coasters are stopped with compressed air brakes
 - D. Once the coaster goes up the first hill it has all its momentum.

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