

▶ INVENTION MISHAP

OBJECTIVE

Students will create original, imaginative stories that explain how a familiar product was accidentally “invented.” Students will learn that a mistake can sometimes be turned into success. They also will learn about the power of persuasion.

TIME

30 minutes

MATERIALS

paper

pens or pencils

story of the Slinky (see below), hand written on a sheet of paper.

ACTIVITY

Divide the group into pairs and tell the students that they will have 15 minutes to write a fictional but believable story—of no more than three paragraphs—about how the Slinky was invented. Those who know the true story should serve as observers. Read all the stories out loud to the group, including the true story of the Slinky’s creation. Ask students to cast their vote for the true story of the Slinky.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Was there more than one story that provided a plausible explanation for the invention of the Slinky? If yes, what were the characteristics of the story (ies)? Explain the notion that “an accident or a mistake may inspire an invention.” Do you agree or disagree with this idea? Sometimes using a familiar object in a new or unexpected way produces great results. Has this ever happened for you? What were the circumstances?

The Slinky

In 1943, during World War II, an engineer in the United States Navy named Richard James was assigned to the initial run of a new ship. During this run, James witnessed the unexpected release of a torsion spring onto the floor of the area where he was working. The spring flip-flopped as James watched. When James returned home, he remembered the spring and the interesting way it had behaved. James and his wife perfected a long steel ribbon tightly coiled into a spiral. Eventually the couple arranged for production of a new toy, which was named “Slinky.”