



(SOME OF) THE GREATEST INVENTIONS IN THE PAST 600 YEARS

Quiz: play and learn

What makes an invention “great”?

Inventions can make our life better: they can help us complete our tasks easier, entertain us, expand our knowledge, and even save lives. According to the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO, 2007, 2010), a few examples of things that have inspired inventors to invent are the following:

- 1) Needing something that is not available in the market
- 2) Wanting to help somebody
- 3) Combining two or more products to produce a new and better product
- 4) Applying a better understanding of nature
- 5) Combining traditional knowledge with modern scientific concepts
- 6) Improving past inventions

Most major inventions don't have just one inventor. Instead, they have been developed separately by many people, or many people have contributed in their evolution from basic concepts to useful inventions. Identifying the “greatest inventions of all the times” is definitely not an easy task. In fact, there are numerable encyclopedias, books, documentaries, articles, presentations and various lists that prove how subjective this matter can be. On the other hand, there are inventions that without any doubt have improved the humankind's standard of living and this is a critical point in order to characterize an invention as “great”.

In his short article “The Greatest Inventions in the past 1000 years”, Larry Gormley quotes Robert J. Gordon who writes: “Internet surfing may be fun, but it represents a far smaller increment in the standard of living than achieved by the extension of day into night achieved by electric light, the revolution in factory efficiency achieved by the electric motor, the flexibility and freedom achieved by the automobile, the saving of time and shrinking of the globe achieved by the airplane, the new materials achieved by the chemical industry, the first sense of live two-way communication achieved by the telephone, the arrival of live news and entertainment into the family parlor achieved by radio and then television, and the enormous improvements in life expectancy, health, and comfort achieved by urban sanitation and indoor plumbing”.

Adapting the table that exists in the aforementioned article, we have created an educational quiz. You get the year and the impact of (some) of the greatest inventions of the past 1000 years and your task is to find the invention and the inventor!

You are encouraged first to think on your own and recall details from this quest's material and then – if needed– to conduct further online research.

Instructions: Fill in the following table choosing among the inventions and the inventors given in the next two tables. The correct answers can be found in the final page!

(Some of) the Greatest Inventions in the past 600 Years				
	Invention	Year	Inventor	Impact
1		1450		allowed literacy to greatly expand
2		1844		provided a great leap forward for medicine
3		1876		spread communication across wide areas
4		1885		increased personal mobility and freedom
5		1796		protected people from disease
6		1879		extended day and powered countless social changes
7		1892		started agricultural mechanization
8		1903		allowed people and products to quickly move
9		1895 & 1926		made the world smaller
10		1939		transformed business world; predecessor to the Internet

Inventions:

Electric Light	Printing Press	Anesthesia	Radio and Television	Gas powered tractor
Automobile	Vaccination	Telephone	Airplane	Computer

Inventors:

Johannes Gutenberg	Edward Jenner	John Froelich	Horace Wells	Orville and Wilbur Wright
Alexander Graham Bell	Thomas Edison	Karl Benz	Guglielmo Marconi & John Baird	John Atanasoff, et al.

Correct answers

(Some of) the Greatest Inventions in the past 600 Years

	Invention	Year	Inventor	Impact
1	Printing Press	1450	Johannes Gutenberg	allowed literacy to greatly expand
2	Electric Light	1879	Thomas Edison	extended day and powered countless social changes
3	Automobile	1885	Karl Benz	increased personal mobility and freedom
4	Telephone	1876	Alexander Graham Bell	spread communication across wide areas
5	Radio and Television	1895 & 1926	Guglielmo Marconi & John Baird	made the world smaller
6	Vaccination	1796	Edward Jenner	protected people from disease
7	Computer	1939	John Atanasoff, et al.	transformed business world; predecessor to the Internet
8	Airplane	1903	Orville and Wilbur Wright	allowed people and products to quickly move
9	Gas powered tractor	1892	John Froelich	started agricultural mechanization
10	Anesthesia	1844	Horace Wells	provided a great leap forward for medicine

Adapted from Gormley, Larry. "The Greatest Inventions in the Past 1000 Years".

Did you enjoy it? Did you expand your knowledge on inventions?

What about try and make your own quiz? You can try the "classic" way and create in in a .doc format or do it online using free web applications such as <https://www.quiz-maker.com>, <https://quizizz.com>, <https://www.onlinequizcreator.com> (available in 11 languages).

Sources:

Gordon, Robert, J. 2000. "Does the "New Economy" Measure Up to the Great Inventions of the Past?" Journal of Economic Perspectives, 14 (4): 49-74.

Gormley, Larry. "The Greatest Inventions in the Past 1000 Years", The Ohio State University, available online <https://ehistory.osu.edu/articles/greatest-inventions-past-1000-years> (last accessed on April 8th, 2021).

World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), 2007, 2010, *Learn from the Past, Create the Future: Inventions and Patents*, Text: Maria de Icaza & Graphic Design: Sheyda Navab, available online: <https://www.wipo.int/publications/en/details.jsp?id=133&plang=EN> (last accessed on April 8th, 2021)