

# Ballpoint Pens

## Pre-Reading

### A. Warm-Up Questions

1. What kind of pen do you like to use for writing?
2. Do you know when the ballpoint pen was first designed?
3. How did people use to write before the invention of the ballpoint pen?
4. What are the names of some big pen manufacturers?



### B. Vocabulary Preview

Match up as many words and meanings as you can.

Check this exercise again after seeing the words in context on page 2.

- |                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| _____ 1. cartridge    | a) to come out of its container (fluid)    |
| _____ 2. rotate       | b) to make, to produce                     |
| _____ 3. smudge       | c) the creation of something new           |
| _____ 4. invention    | d) a competitor                            |
| _____ 5. popular      | e) well-liked                              |
| _____ 6. immensely    | f) upset because you can't do something    |
| _____ 7. leak         | g) in a large or significant manner or way |
| _____ 8. flood        | h) to blur or partly rub out               |
| _____ 9. frustrated   | i) a container that holds ink              |
| _____ 10. manufacture | j) to make something go around in a circle |
| _____ 11. rival       | k) to come up with a plan or idea          |
| _____ 12. devise      | l) to have too much of something           |

## Reading

1. The ballpoint pen is an instrument for writing on paper. It has a small, round ball made of brass, steel, or tungsten at its tip. When in use, ink from a cartridge inside the pen flows down to its tip. As the ball rotates, it picks up ink and deposits it on the paper.
2. Laszlo and Georg Biro of Hungary designed the first commercial ballpoint pen in 1935. Laszlo, a journalist, was tired of working with messy pens and had noticed how newspaper ink dried very quickly and did not smudge. He decided to construct a pen, with Georg's help, that used this kind of ink. The amount of ink coming out of their pen was controlled by a tiny ball bearing at its tip.
3. When World War II broke out, the Biro brothers moved to Argentina. They found financial backers for their **invention** and, in 1943, established Biro Pens of Argentina to manufacture their pens. Their first design had problems, so the pen was redesigned. The redesigned pens sold quite well in Argentina, but they became **immensely popular** in other countries after British fighter-plane pilots used them during the war (the pens did not **leak** at high altitudes).
4. After the war, several American companies also began to make ballpoint pens. Soon the market was flooded with poor-quality pens, which often leaked or would not write at all. The American public became **frustrated** and stopped buying ballpoint pens. Then, in 1954, a US company called Parker Pens devised a much better ballpoint pen, and the public started buying the pens again.
5. In 1950, Bic, a French company, had also begun to **manufacture** improved ballpoint pens. Over the years, Bic bought many of its manufacturing **rivals** and was soon producing and selling more pens than any other company. Today, Bic produces billions of inexpensive but good-quality pens that are used throughout the world.

*"The pen is mightier than the sword."*

—Edward Bulwer-Lytton

## Comprehension

### A. True or False?

Read the statements below.

If the statement is true, write T beside the sentence.

If it is false, write F and correct the information.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Lazlo Biro was one of the creators of the ballpoint pen.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Lazlo was a professional writer.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. The Biro brothers used newspaper ink when they designed their new pen.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The Biro brothers never changed the original design of their ballpoint pen.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Shortly after the war, several American companies made high-quality ballpoint pens.

### B. Ask & Answer

Practice asking and answering the following questions with your partner.

Then write your answers in complete sentences in your notebook.

- 1. Briefly explain how a ballpoint pen works.
- 2. Why did Lazlo Biro want to design a new type of pen?
- 3. Where did the Biro brothers manufacture their pens?
- 4. Why did they have to redesign their original pen?
- 5. Why did their pens become so popular in other countries during the war?
- 6. Why did the American public not like the first American-made ballpoint pens?
- 7. How did the French company, Bic, become so successful?

## Vocabulary Review

Choose the word or phrase with the closest meaning to the underlined word or phrase in the following sentences.

1. As the ball rotates, it picks up ink and deposits it on the paper.
  - a) opens
  - b) turns
  - c) falls
2. Lazlo Biro was a journalist.
  - a) writer
  - b) teacher
  - c) businessman
3. Newspaper ink dried quickly and did not smudge.
  - a) leak slowly
  - b) cost a lot
  - c) become blurred or smeared
4. They found financial backers for their invention.
  - a) banks
  - b) money
  - c) investors
5. Soon the market was flooded with poor-quality pens.
  - a) watered
  - b) filled
  - c) selling
6. The ballpoint pen is an instrument used for writing.
  - a) instruction
  - b) stick
  - c) tool
7. The ink from a cartridge flows down to the tip of the pen.
  - a) point
  - b) container
  - c) bag

## Discussion

1. How have writing instruments changed over the years?
2. Pens range in price from a few cents to hundreds of dollars. Do you think that an expensive, high-quality pen is a good purchase? Why or why not?
3. Do you think that the use of computers and email has hurt pen manufacturers? Why or why not?