



THE TOOTHBRUSH STORY

Discussion: Student A & Student B – “The Toothbrush”

Student A	Student B
- How often do you buy a new toothbrush? - Do you prefer soft, medium, or hard bristles? Why? - What's the weirdest place you've ever brushed your teeth? - If your toothbrush could talk, what would it say about your habits?	What kind of toothbrush do you use—manual or electric? Have you ever forgotten your toothbrush while traveling? What did you do? Do you think brushing your teeth is relaxing, boring, or something else? If you could invent a “smart toothbrush,” what special features would it have?

The Curious History of the Toothbrush

Have you ever wondered who invented the toothbrush? The answer might surprise you – and make you grateful for modern dentistry.

Ancient civilisations took dental hygiene seriously, even if their methods seem rather peculiar today. The Babylonians chewed on twigs around 3500 BCE, essentially using nature's own toothpicks. The Egyptians, never ones to do things simply, created tooth powder from crushed rock salt, mint, and dried flowers. One can only imagine the breakfast conversation: "Darling, pass me the crushed rock salt, would you?"

However, the first proper toothbrush appeared in China during the Tang Dynasty, around 619 CE. Inventive minds attached pig bristles to bamboo or bone handles. Yes, pig bristles – presumably the pigs weren't consulted about this arrangement. These brushes eventually travelled along the Silk Road to Europe, where they became fashionable amongst the wealthy.

Europeans, however, found pig bristles rather too stiff for their liking. Some preferred horsehair brushes instead, though one might question whether horses were any more enthusiastic about donating their hair than pigs were about their bristles.

The modern toothbrush finally emerged in 1938 when nylon bristles were invented. This was revolutionary – no animals were bothered, and the bristles didn't retain moisture and bacteria like natural fibres. Suddenly, dental hygiene became far more hygienic, which seems rather important for something meant to clean your teeth.

Today, we have electric toothbrushes, sonic toothbrushes, and brushes in every colour imaginable. We've certainly come a long way from chewing twigs and crushed rocks. Next time you brush your teeth, perhaps spare a thought for those ancient Babylonians. They would have been absolutely thrilled with your fluoride toothpaste and soft nylon bristles.

Post-Reading Discussion: Student A & Student B

Student A: Ask your partner these questions

- Which ancient toothbrush method do you think was the most creative? Why?
- Would you ever try brushing your teeth with crushed rock salt and mint? Why or why not?
- Will people laugh at our toothbrushes in the future, the way we laugh at chew sticks?
- If you had to design a toothbrush for ancient Egyptians, what materials would you use?

Student B: Ask your partner these questions

- Why do you think the pig bristle toothbrush became popular in China?
- Do you think using animal hair for toothbrushes was a good idea at the time? Why or why not?
- What do you think is the most important invention in dental hygiene history?
- If you could invent a toothbrush for the year 2050, what special features would it have?

Comprehension Questions

1. What did the Babylonians use to clean their teeth, and approximately when did they start this practice?
2. What three ingredients did the Egyptians combine to make tooth powder?
3. Where and when was the first proper toothbrush invented?
4. Why did Europeans prefer horsehair brushes to pig bristle brushes?
5. What significant development happened in 1938, and why was it considered revolutionary?
6. According to the text, what advantages did nylon bristles have over natural fibres?

True or False Questions

1. The Egyptians used crushed rock salt, mint, and dried flowers in their tooth powder.
2. The first toothbrush was invented in Europe during the Renaissance.
3. Toothbrushes with pig bristles travelled from China to Europe along the Silk Road.
4. Europeans thought pig bristles were too soft for effective cleaning.
5. Nylon bristles were invented in the 19th century.
6. Natural bristles retained more moisture and bacteria than nylon bristles.

Student Task: Design Your Own Toothbrush

Imagine you are a toothbrush designer. Your job is to create the most interesting, useful, or unusual toothbrush in the world. Answer the questions below and describe your invention.

Step 1: Brainstorm Your Toothbrush

What is the name of your toothbrush?

What does it look like? (Color, shape, size)

What special features does it have? (e.g. music, timer, lights, voice, self-cleaning)

Who is it for? (Children, travelers, lazy people, pets, etc.)

What makes it better than a normal toothbrush?

Step 2: Describe Your Toothbrush

Use these sentence starters to help you:

My toothbrush is called “_____”.

It is designed for _____.

It has _____, which helps people _____.

The best thing about it is _____.

I think people will love it because _____.

Optional Speaking Task

Present your toothbrush to your partner or group. Try to convince them to buy it!

Teacher's Answer Key

Comprehension Questions

1. What did the Babylonians use to clean their teeth, and approximately when did they start this practice?
 - The Babylonians chewed on twigs around 3500 BCE.
2. What three ingredients did the Egyptians combine to make tooth powder?
 - Crushed rock salt, mint, and dried flowers.
3. Where and when was the first proper toothbrush invented?
 - In China during the Tang Dynasty, around 619 CE.
4. Why did Europeans prefer horsehair brushes to pig bristle brushes?
 - Europeans found pig bristles too stiff for their liking / too harsh.
5. What significant development happened in 1938, and why was it considered revolutionary?
 - Nylon bristles were invented. It was revolutionary because no animals were needed, and the bristles didn't retain moisture and bacteria like natural fibres.
6. According to the text, what advantages did nylon bristles have over natural fibres?
 - They didn't require animals to be used, and they didn't retain moisture and bacteria.

True or False

1. **True** - The text states Egyptians created tooth powder from crushed rock salt, mint, and dried flowers.
2. **False** - The first proper toothbrush appeared in China during the Tang Dynasty (around 619 CE), not in Europe.
3. **True** - The text mentions these brushes "travelled along the Silk Road to Europe."
4. **False** - Europeans found pig bristles too *stiff*, not too soft.
5. **False** - Nylon bristles were invented in 1938, which is in the 20th century, not the 19th century.
6. **True** - The text states that natural bristles "retain moisture and bacteria like natural fibres" unlike nylon.