

Informational Reading Comprehension

Read the passage, and then answer the questions that follow.

The History of the Candle

It is hard to picture what life was like before electric light bulbs. Long ago, people depended on the sun to light their days, but when the sun would go down, they needed to find other sources of light. Before electricity, burning various fuels like wood or oil was the only way to create light. Candles became another option around 3000 BCE. The first candles were made by the Ancient Egyptians, who dipped reeds into animal fat to burn them. Historians called these early candles “rushlights,” and they were actually more similar to flaming torches than to modern candles because they weren’t coated in wax.



The first candles with wicks were developed later by the Romans, who dipped rolled sheets of papyrus in melted beeswax or tallow, made from the fat of animals like cattle and sheep. All around the world, other early civilizations developed their own versions of candles using whatever resources they had available. Early Chinese candles were made of rolled rice paper and wax from insects and seeds. Japanese candlemakers used wax extracted from tree nuts, and Indian crafters made candle wax by boiling the fruit of cinnamon trees.



Europeans preferred beeswax, but it was very expensive, so beeswax candles were generally saved for religious services and festivals. Ordinary people mainly used tallow candles in their homes. However, there were several problems with tallow. First, the animal fat gave off a terrible odor when it burned, and it filled the house with smoke. Also, tallow melted quickly. In order to keep tallow candles burning, the wicks needed to be trimmed constantly.

Over time, many substitute ingredients were found and tried, including oils from whales, bayberries, and turnips. In the 1850s, most candlemakers switched to paraffin wax, made from petroleum, for its inexpensive cost, lack of smell, and clean burn. Today’s candles are made with a variety of waxes, like paraffin and soy. Interestingly, traditional beeswax candles are still popular and have stood the test of time. Modern candles come in many shapes and sizes and are often perfumed with rich fragrances that release pleasant aromas as the candles burn. Although we now have other choices for light, we still enjoy the warm, decorative glow candles bring to our homes and celebrations.

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Answer the following questions about “The History of the Candle.”

1. This passage is *mostly* about:

- a. the use of candles to provide heat
- b. the modern usage of candles
- c. the ways ancient people made candles
- d. the best ways of making candles

2. How were rushlights different from candles?

3. Fill in the chart with the substances used to make early candles in each area.

Egypt	
Rome	
China	
Japan	
India	
Europe	

4. What is a likely reason why people in different places used different materials for making candles?

5. What were three problems with tallow candles?

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

6. Choose two ways modern candles have improved from candles of the past.

- ☐ They smell good.
- ☐ They provide light.
- ☐ They burn cleanly.
- ☐ They are festive.

7. Read the sentence from paragraph 4.

Interestingly, traditional beeswax candles are still popular and have stood the test of time.

Using the information from the entire passage, what does the phrase “stood the test of time” mean in this context?

8. Which of the following text features would best support the information detailed in the text?

- a. a timeline of lighting inventions
- b. a graph of the most popular candle scents
- c. a diagram of an Egyptian rushlight
- d. a map showing different resources used for candles

9. Light plays an important part in many ceremonies, often through the use of candles, lamps, or fire. Name some ceremonies or celebrations you know of where light plays an important role.
