Reading 01

**Computer Wallpaper**

Did you know that something as simple as the wallpaper on your desktop computer can tell people a lot about you? According to researcher Donna Dawson, our desktop computers say something about what we're like because they are part of our "personal space."

A picture of a child or family on the monitor often means the person cares deeply about their loved ones. A photo of the person surrounded by friends shows they value their popularity and probably work well with other people. On the other hand, pictures showing examples of past successes, like winning a championship or award ceremonies may mean a person is only interested in themselves.

Pictures of nature and natural scenery tell people that you are driven to succeed and use the pictures to relax and remove the stress in your life. Cityscapes, pictures of cities or towns, show that you are a romantic who enjoys travel and adventure. Most people with cityscapes as their wallpaper are optimistic, happy people who feel even better thinking about the places they've visited or want to visit.

Desktop images of animals and pets show that you are optimistic and kind-hearted. You are often happy and you enjoy life and act young. Cartoons or drawings show that you are a multitasker, someone who does many things at once. You have many responsibilities, but you handle them well. That's one reason you like having something to smile about when you look at your computer wallpaper.

Then, what does plain blue wallpaper tell us about a person? According to Dawson, a person with plain blue wallpaper probably values their privacy and keeps work from becoming too personal.

Reading 02

**Cloud Advertising**

"That one looks just like a dragon! And look over there. That one looks like an old man with a beard!" Do you remember lying on your back in a grassy field on a breezy summer afternoon, discovering the soft, fluffy shapes in the clouds in the sky? Those were the good old days when you could see anything and everything in the clouds.

But now people look at the sky and see clouds in the shape of a motor company's advertising logo, or a message inviting them to go out and buy a certain brand of beer. These cloud images are not products of their imaginations. Instead, they are produced by a machine. These new floating advertisements are called Flogos; the name stands for "floating logos." They're made from a combination of soapy foam and a lighter-than-air gas such as helium, and they vary in size depending on the advertisement.

Flogos can last up to an hour if weather conditions are good, and they can fly several kilometers high. Advertisers can rent a Flogo machine for $2,500 a day. It will release four Flogos per minute. Advertisers can fill the air with any shape or message they want.

Some people question if the Flogos are pollution-free. However, the Flogo's inventor insists that the soap he uses is natural, and that a Flogo just disappears in the air. Though it may be true that Flogos are environmentally friendly, some people believe that Flogos may replace natural clouds in our memory with man-made ones. They are afraid that soon there will be nowhere left where their imaginations can float freely.

Reading 03

**Baseball Superstitions**

What does it take to win in sports? Skill? Hard work? Concentration? Sure, all of these things are important. But what about luck? Did you know that even the great Michael Jordan wore his blue University of North Carolina shorts underneath his Bulls uniform for good luck on the court?

Many players believe that following certain sports superstitions will bring them good luck. Some use lucky equipment, wear lucky clothing, or follow lucky routines or habits. Baseball has many superstitions. Some baseball players have a lucky baseball glove, lucky socks, lucky underwear, or lucky baseball caps. When they are winning all of their games, they insist on using them even if they get smelly. Some players don't even want their uniforms washed if they are winning because they worry it will ruin their luck. Another superstition is that they shouldn't shave their beards after their first win.

Other baseball superstitions include tapping home plate with the bat before the pitch and not stepping on the foul line when walking on and off the field. Turk Wendell, a pitcher in Major League Baseball, always chews on black licorice and brushes his teeth between innings. Roger Clemens, a famous member of the New York Yankees, always touched the head of the Babe Ruth statue at Yankee Stadium before pitching there. He also chose names for his children that start with "K," the letter standing for a strikeout.

In sports, although practice and concentration are very important, many competitors still believe in following superstitions that seem very strange to most of their fans. In professional sports, success is so important it is no wonder competitors do whatever they can to win.

Reading 04

**Peer Pressure**

"We're all going to cut science class today. It's too boring! We're going to sneak out and get lunch early. I know you want to come with us. Let's go!" Maybe you've heard one of the popular kids at school say something like this. So what do you do? Do you just give in and do what the other kids suggest, or do you go to class no matter what they say?

Situations like this often come up. And it is not easy to make your own decision when your friends want to do something you're not quite sure about. Sometimes, you feel you should do something because everyone else is doing it, and it is hard to go against the majority. This is called "peer pressure" because peers are pressuring you to do what they want.

Some people give in to peer pressure because they want to be more popular. Some worry that others will make fun of them if they don't go along with the group. The idea that "everyone is doing it" makes them follow the crowd. Sometimes peer pressure can be good if your peers encourage you to be a better person. But most peer pressure pushes you to do something you don't really want to do. And it affects almost everyone without exception. So what can you do to deal with it?

First of all, you should follow your own feelings and beliefs and be self-confident. When you are self-confident, you can say "no" to the people trying to pressure you. It also helps to have a good friend who respects your beliefs. That way you won't be alone when you stand up to peer pressure.

Reading 05

**The Lipstick Effect**

You don't have to understand the stock market or use difficult charts to prove a country is having a tough economic time. You have only to look at lipstick sales to judge how big an economic downturn a country faces. Sales of cosmetics like lipstick go up when the economy is bad and go down when the economy improves. This is called the "Lipstick Effect."

The lipstick effect goes as far back as the Great Depression of the 1930s. During this time period many jobs were lost and many factories closed, but sales of cosmetics rose. In Germany, although many people lost jobs, the biggest cosmetic company did not need to fire a single worker. More recently in the USA, during the hard times of 1990 and 2001 more workers were needed in the cosmetic industry while other manufacturers were cutting workers. As a matter of fact, after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, lipstick sales doubled!

Researchers have discovered that when times get tough and there is less money to spend on large, expensive products (like new cars, designer shoes, or jewelry) women buy little things to improve their mood. Most of these items are cosmetics. The most popular item women buy is lipstick. A new color of lipstick can sometimes be enough to brighten a woman's mood. A similar thing happens when men shop during an economic slump. They have less money to spend but they still want to treat themselves, so they buy smaller, less costly gadgets instead of sports cars or new houses.

Reading 06

**The Rumba**

If you've ever wondered how dancers would tell the story of a man and a woman's love for each other through dance moves, you should watch people dance the Rumba. This popular dance from the island nation of Cuba is considered to be the most passionate and romantic ballroom dance. A ballroom dance is a formal dance done in public with a partner. The word "Rumba" refers to a dance party and when the Rumba was first danced, that's exactly what it was.

Like many Latin dances, the Rumba has its roots in Africa. When the Spanish first moved to the New World, they brought African slaves to work for them. Slaves worked long hours doing hard labor and had very few ways to relax. When they got finished with a hard day's work, they would sometimes find the person they were in love with and dance the Rumba. When slave masters saw this dance with its dramatic moves and fancy footwork, they were impressed. They wanted to dance the Rumba in public!

The dance slowly spread and grew in popularity. Then, in the 1930s, the famous ballroom dance teacher Monsieur Pierre saw the Rumba being danced in New York and he decided it was so exciting and interesting it should be danced in London, too. From there, the Rumba spread across the world.

Today there are several types of Rumba people dance. Some dance a type of Rumba that is very fast and features big movements and others dance a type of Rumba that is very slow and uses small steps and more gentle moves. No matter what type of Rumba people dance, the story the dance tells is still the same: The woman teases the man and then pretends to run away while the man uses powerful moves to follow his love across the dance floor. It is because of this playful type of dancing between a man and a woman that the Rumba is called "the dance of love."

Reading 07

**Boxing Day**

In Britain, Australia, Canada and a few other English-speaking countries, people don't stop celebrating when Christmas Day is over ― they also celebrate the following day, known as Boxing Day. Boxing Day has nothing to do with the sport of boxing. In fact, it is a popular day for giving additional gifts. Boxing Day has been celebrated for so long, but it is not known how it started.

Some people believe Boxing Day began in the Middle Ages. In those days, churches had a special collection box where people threw money for the poor. The day after Christmas the box was opened and the money was counted. Then the money was distributed to the poor in the area.

Others believe Boxing Day started about 300 years ago when nobles hosted Christmas feasts, offering lots of food to many guests. Because many servants were needed to make and serve the food, they could not celebrate Christmas with their families. As a gesture of thanks, the nobles would have leftover food put into boxes for their servants to take home.

Now Boxing Day has become a public holiday in the countries that celebrate it. Although most offices and businesses close, malls are full of people looking for bargain prices on Christmas goods. Some people spend the day making boxes of old or unwanted things and donating them to the poor. Many people donate their time to help service organizations like the Red Cross.

No matter how Boxing Day got its start, it's a wonderful time to donate things or give small gifts to people. By doing so, you can make someone's holiday much happier.

Reading 08

**The Surprising Risks of Playing It Safe**

Have you ever done something that was really dangerous just because you thought it was safe? Maybe you did a dangerous trick on your bicycle or skateboard because you were wearing a helmet and thought you couldn't get hurt. The psychology of this sort of behavior is called the Peltzman Effect, named after Sam Peltzman, professor of economics at the University of Chicago. Peltzman believes that those moments when people think they are the safest are the times when they act most dangerously.

Peltzman said that people drove more dangerously when they wore seat belts. Driving a large 4WD vehicle has a similar effect on drivers' behavior. Because drivers of large vehicles sit up higher and can see better, they feel they can make better judgments when they drive. They are better protected in accidents, so they act more dangerously. This makes driving more dangerous for other drivers.

The Peltzman Effect isn't just limited to driving. In 1972, the FDA passed a law requiring child safety caps on most medicine bottles. The device was designed to prevent children from accidentally taking the medicine, especially painkillers such as aspirin. Requiring safety caps sounded like a great idea, but there was an unexpected side effect. Because the safety caps are so hard to take off, some people leave them off altogether. Worse, some parents leave the bottles where kids can reach them because they feel that it is safe because of the cap. A study on the Peltzman Effect concluded that more than 3,500 children have been poisoned by aspirin because of the safety caps.

The Peltzman Effect describes how we tend to take more risks and act more dangerously when we feel safest. What's more, the effects of these behaviors can be quite different from the outcomes we expect.

Reading 09

**Pablo Picasso**

Pablo Picasso was an amazing painter who experimented with color and shape. Picasso wanted to find ways to paint emotions or moods. His paintings opened people's minds and showed there were many ways to express ideas.

Born in Spain in 1881, Picasso learned to paint at an early age because his father was a painter. At fourteen, Picasso began attending the Academy of Fine Arts in Barcelona. Although Picasso did well, his teachers wouldn't let him develop his own style. So he changed schools. Though his new teachers praised his work, they still criticized it as being too different. Picasso became determined to express himself in his own way.

Frustrated with his career in Spain, nineteen-year-old Picasso moved to Paris, where he learned about abstract art. He started copying famous paintings so he could paint in any style. However, an important development in his own style came along when his best friend committed suicide. Picasso was so upset that he painted only in blue and gray. He painted the poor and the physically and mentally disabled. This is known as his "Blue Period."

In 1904 his painting style changed again when he fell in love with an artist's model. He began painting everything with shades of rose, red, pink and earth tones. He mainly painted circus performers and artists during this time, called his "Rose Period."

Picasso's style went through another change as he began to learn about African art and geometry. Instead of painting with different colors, he used different shapes. His paintings shocked people because they looked like they had been broken and put back together incorrectly. Everything was geometric and abstract. Picasso's new style became known as "Cubism." Cubism was so unique it became very popular.

Pablo Picasso is most remembered for his Blue, Rose, and Cubist periods. But Picasso never stopped experimenting with painting. His painting styles kept changing until his death at age ninety-two.

Reading 10

**Panda Poop**

All animals produce waste. We call it "waste," but we all know it can be very useful. Farmers have long used animal and human waste as a fertilizer. In some parts of the world, animal waste, or poop, is collected, dried, and burned for cooking and heating. But have you ever heard of paper that's made from poop?

The Chengdu Giant Panda Breeding Center in western China has an unusual way of using animal "waste." The center's 40 pandas feed on bamboo and produce about two tons of poop a day. This material is being turned into a new product called Panda Poop Paper. It's not so strange! After all, paper is made from plant fiber: fiber which cannot be digested and simply goes through the body as waste.

Since pandas eat nothing but bamboo, their "waste" is perfect paper material. What's more, pandas have a special advantage. Their stomachs haven't fully developed for their vegetarian diet, so their bodies make use of just 20% of what they eat. The other 80% comes out as poop: very high in fiber, and perfect for paper.

Once the poop is collected, it is cleaned with chemicals, crushed, and poured into frames to dry. After this process, it becomes such good, strong paper that there's no hint of where it came from. Because of its good quality as well as the worldwide popularity of the panda, gift products made from the paper sell well.

Surprisingly, the Chinese weren't the first to make paper from animal waste. They got the idea from the elephant-dung paper made at the Elephant Conservation Center in Chiang Mai, Thailand. A company called Elephant Poo Poo Paper has been selling a similar product since 2002. And Creative Paper Wales in the U.K. sells paper gift items made from sheep waste.

Reading 11

**A Gift of Love**

When Sally became blinded by a hospital's mistake, her world changed forever. Once independent, Sally was thrown into a world of darkness. She felt powerless and useless. She couldn't accomplish anything without the help of her husband, Mike, an Air Force officer.

Mike loved Sally completely but seeing her frustrated also frustrated him. Before she lost her sight, Sally rode the bus to work and home again every day. Without her sight, even getting on the bus was challenging. Traveling in the busy city frightened Sally now.

Mike didn't like to see Sally scared, so he volunteered to drive her to work every day. Things went well at first, but Mike and Sally worked at opposite ends of the city. Mike wanted Sally to regain her confidence, but transporting her to work each day took a lot of time. Mike finally decided that Sally would need to take the bus to work again all by herself.

Sally was terrified, but Mike promised to ride the bus with her every day until she felt comfortable again. He helped Sally learn to use the bus again. He taught her to use her other senses to know where she was. He encouraged her with jokes and loving laughter.

Finally Sally was ready to ride the bus alone. Bravely she said good-bye to Mike and went her own way. Remembering what he taught her, she counted the steps into the bus and felt for a seat. Every day that week she followed her routine and her confidence grew.

One morning the bus driver said to Sally, "You must be the luckiest woman in the world."

Sally couldn't understand what the bus driver meant. Sally asked, "Why do you say that?"

The bus driver replied, "Because every morning a man in a military uniform waits until you get off this bus. He watches you cross the street safely and waits until you are in your office building. Then he blows you a kiss and walks quickly away."

Reading 12

**Learning Zones**

Where in the classroom do you prefer to sit, and why? Psychologists have discovered that seating preference not only reflects students' personalities, but it also has a significant impact on their academic performance. Generally speaking, students show different attitudes depending on where they sit. Based on this observation, psychologists have developed a funnel-like model of "learning zones" to explore the relationship between seating and effective learning.

In this model, the mouth of the funnel (A) is the most ideal position for learning. Students in this front area prove to be the most active and effective learners. They show a greater motivation for learning, which leads them to focus better and participate more actively than the rest of the class. Those in the neck of the funnel (B) are not as attentive, but they ask a lot of questions, partly because of the added confidence they feel from being in a safe zone, surrounded by others. Less desirable is the area "outside the funnel (C, D)," which refers to the sides and the back rows, where students are less involved and find it hard to concentrate, falling asleep at times.

Studies about learning zones suggest that students can benefit from a change in traditional seating plans. In fact, a growing number of teachers have begun adopting less traditional seating arrangements, such as "U-Type." There being no side and back areas, teachers can bring out more participation from their students and increase student-teacher interaction.

Reading 13

**Crop Circles**

Sometimes extraordinary things show up in ordinary places. In the 1800s a strange sight began to be reported by farmers. Then in the 1970s this strange event began to happen more and more often. People traveled for miles to stand in the fields and take photographs of something they couldn't easily explain. What were they looking at? It was the crop circles ― large and complex designs set into the middle of ordinary farm fields. No one could understand how these huge patterns were made.

Crop circles are found most often in fields of wheat, corn, barley, or rice. They have been seen all around the world, in more than 70 different countries. Scientists have found that the plants inside a crop circle are drier than the ones outside it. The plant stems are bent and not broken in most crop circles, and sometimes the soil in the design has more iron than the soil outside of the design. Unfortunately, these facts alone do not help scientists answer their questions about crop circles. These facts only make them more mysterious.

Some people believe crop circles are made by UFOs landing in farm fields. Others think aliens are leaving us messages in the beautiful designs. Still others believe there are electric and magnetic forces known as electromagnetic fields under the ground that make plants bend over in designs. Some people say they actually made the crop circles with special equipment. Scientists have found some crop circles that are definitely made by people, but they are usually a little different from other crop circles. So the mystery of who makes crop circles and why they make them continues to this very day.

Reading 14

Theories Mysterious wonder

**A Home away from Home**

Overseas vacations are expensive. You have to spend a lot of money on flights and hotels when you go abroad, and most of the time, flights and hotels take up the biggest part of your holiday expenses. But there is a way to save money and all it takes is a little effort! Thanks to home exchange programs, you can get a unique travel experience for less money.

The basic idea of the home exchange program is to trade houses for free during vacation. These programs are arranged through home exchange websites. On these websites, people from various locations exchange information as well as pictures of their homes.

Once the two families agree to exchange homes for vacation, they stay at each other's homes for free. Oftentimes, they can even use each other's cars or take care of each other's pets. In doing so, families save money which would otherwise have been spent on a hotel. Also, families experience something they wouldn't experience if they stayed in a hotel. They get to experience the lifestyle of a different place, people and even culture.

Yet, people are concerned about the negative side of the program: what if the visitor steals or breaks things in the home? However, Anne Pottinger, an owner of one of the home exchange websites says that she has had few reports of such accidents. Rather, she adds, it is safer to have people stay at your home while you're away than to leave it empty.

So why not get involved? Do an Internet search for "home exchange program" and find information from home exchange websites and become one of the 60,000 participants who enjoy the many advantages of the program.

Reading 15

**Who, Him? He's My Dad!**

It's true that many dads in the wild aren't interested in parenting, but there are some that work pretty hard to give their little ones a good start. Maybe one of these dads will remind you of your own dad!

The male giant water bug doesn't seem to mind a heavy load on his back for his kids. The female puts about 100 to 150 eggs into the back of the male, and then she leaves. Once the female is gone, the male has to look after the eggs. It usually takes one to two weeks for the eggs to hatch. The father giant water bug jumps around to allow air to flow to the growing eggs and he makes sure they get enough water. All this time he can't fly because of the weight of the eggs growing rapidly on his back.

Now let's turn to the male stickleback fish who builds a nest in water weeds. When the mother leaves after laying her eggs, the father watches over his young. If the young fish go too far from the nest, their father helps with their safe return by carrying them back in his mouth. The male stickleback looks after all his young ― as many as 100 ― until they can live on their own.

A similar example can be found in emperor penguins living in cold areas. Female emperor penguins can't blame their husbands for being fat! The male emperor needs his fat because he can't feed himself while looking after his egg until it hatches. For about 62 to 67 days, the egg stays on top of the father's feet, in very cold temperatures that drop down to -39℃. As a result, the father may lose nearly 50 percent of his body weight while waiting for his baby penguin to be born!

Reading 16

**Philo Farnsworth**

Philo T. Farnsworth is not a name most people know. But his work changed the way we learn, the way we live, and even the way we think. Philo Farnsworth is responsible for one of the most important inventions of the 20th century: television.

Philo Farnsworth was born in America in 1906. He was interested in science and technology at an early age. When he was twelve years old, he built an electric motor for his family's washing machine. When he was fourteen, he was already giving a lot of thought to electrons. As he was driving the family's horse-drawn plowing machine, he noticed the evenly spaced rows of the potato fields. This sight gave him the idea that electrons could scan an image one row at a time ― an idea that was the key to electronic television.

By the time he was twenty-one years old, Farnsworth had started his own company and had managed to build the world's first electronic television. It was a very simple device. But after years of hard work, Farnsworth was able to introduce the kind of television we now use.

Farnsworth was a great inventor, but he lived an unhappy life. He had a legal battle with the company, Radio Corporation of America (RCA) over who the real inventor of the TV was. He won the case, but the government stopped companies from making TVs during the war, so Farnsworth didn't make much money from the invention. Worse, he didn't like what television became. When he was young, he imagined television as a convenient way for distant audiences to enjoy lectures by famous professors, or entertainment by the best symphonies and ballets. When he was older, television became much more popular, and he was very disappointed in the silly programs on TV. He even told his own son, "There's nothing on it worthwhile, and we're not going to watch it in this household."

Reading 17

**Sunblock - Block Out Wrinkles Now!**

Sometimes young men and women appear much older than they are and some older people look quite youthful. What creates this difference? Several factors make people appear younger or older than their age, but one important cause is related to sun exposure. Exposing yourself to the sun makes you look older than you really are. Nearly four out of five wrinkles are caused by sun damage.

So, if you protect yourself from the sun's rays, can you look younger than your real age? The answer is "Yes!" To prove this, when you go home, use a mirror and look at the skin on your buttocks. That skin had little sun exposure. Your clothing protects it and it stays smooth and unwrinkled. It probably looks like the youngest skin on your body. By using sunblock regularly, you can protect the rest of your skin, keeping it as smooth as that of your buttocks.

Although many people try later in life to erase wrinkles, it is better to prevent them from the beginning. It only takes a minute each day to protect your skin for a lifetime. Simply apply sunblock with an SPF of at least 30 every day. SPF stands for Sun Protection Factor. The higher the SPF on sunblock, the more protection it offers against the harmful rays that cause sunburn.

Not all people are aware of how damaging sunlight is to the skin. Nevertheless, the facts are clear. Too much sun damages your skin. By using sunblock now, you'll save money later on skin-care treatments and makeup. You may even save your life by reducing your risk of skin cancer! So use sunblock regularly and start protecting your skin now!

Reading 18

**Language Is a Mirror of History**

If you look closely at certain words in a language, you can often understand a little of the history of the people who speak that language. For example, consider this list of some familiar English words: *cow*, *sheep*, and *pig*. Now, compare them with the following: *beef*, *mutton*, and *pork*. While the words in the first group refer to living animals, those in the second indicate the meat taken from these animals. But there is yet another difference between the two sets of vocabulary. Every word in the first list is Anglo-Saxon in origin, that is, Old English. On the other hand, those in the second group have their roots in French.

Such differences teach us about one of the most important events in English history: the Norman Conquest of England. The Normans were the people who lived in the Duchy of Normandy, the area in the north of modern-day France. In 1066, they invaded and conquered England. Naturally, French-speaking Norman kings, nobles and religious leaders replaced the English ruling class. And most of the native English population was forced to work on lands owned by the Normans. English farmers also raised animals such as cows, sheep, and pigs whose names were in English, their native tongue. But the meat they produced went to the wealthy land-owning Normans who used French words for what they ate.

The Normans lost control of England in 1204, but their influence on the English language lives on to this day. In the high-status fields of law, government and military leadership, most of the modern English vocabulary has its roots in French. And even in words, like *beef*, *pork*, and *mutton*, we can still see effects of the powerful position the Normans once enjoyed.

Reading 19

**The Rules of Diet in Islam**

Muslims follow the dietary laws found in the Qur'an, their holy book. The foods Muslims are allowed to eat are called "Halal." Foods Muslims may not eat are "Haram," and questionable foods are "Mashbooh."

Haram, or forbidden foods, include: pork, meat-eating animals, and insects. Muslims also consider meat Haram if the animal suffered when it died. Other examples of Haram include coffee, tea, alcohol, and drugs.

According to Muslim law, Halal animals such as cows, sheep, and chickens must be killed in the name of the god, Allah. A prayer of thanks must be said. The animal's throat should be cut with a sharp knife so it dies quickly. Only animals that do not suffer when they are killed are Halal.

Many Muslims believe fasting is important. Fasting is the act of not eating food for a period of time. During the month of Ramadan many Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset. Some Muslims fast on Mondays and Thursdays because they believe fasting helps them to be closer to Allah. Muslims also believe fasting helps to remove their sins and helps them to better understand the suffering of the poor.

In addition to the religious laws on Muslim food, there're a few other dining rules to keep in mind. If you are invited to a meal at a Muslim home, be prepared to sit on the floor to eat. And look for a special bowl near the table, which is used for washing your hands. Finally, only eat with your right hand. By being an informed guest, you'll learn amazing things about the Muslim culture and the importance of food in religion.

Reading 20

**Nature's Sticky Secret**

Mother Nature knows best. But she's not always generous with her secrets. Sometimes she only tells them to the most careful observers.

George de Mestral was a Swiss engineer who enjoyed hiking with his dog in the woods. One day, after a hike, he looked down and saw some seeds stuck to his pants. He was annoyed because the seeds were hard to remove. He pulled a few of the seeds off of his pants and examined them under a microscope. What he saw amazed him: tiny hooks on the ends of the seeds. Small threads from his pants were still stuck in the hooks. De Mestral saw a new way to stick things together and keep them attached.

He was inspired to turn his accidental discovery into a useful product. He borrowed money from a bank, quit his job, and devoted himself to the task. It wasn't easy. Hooks alone didn't work, so he made loops of thread for the hooks to attach to. But the cotton material he was using was too soft. Finally, by using nylon instead of cotton, he made his invention work. It took a decade to develop it. He called it Velcro.

Today, Velcro is used everywhere: in watchbands, sneakers, wallets, and children's toys. NASA uses it to keep equipment from floating around in the space shuttles. We can thank de Mestral for discovering and developing a wonderful way to attach things. But the real thanks should go to nature for revealing the secret.

Reading 21

**The Mystery of Mars**

People have been interested in the planet Mars for thousands of years. The fourth planet from the Sun, Mars is called the Red Planet, because of the red color of its iron-rich dirt. Mars has two moons, Deimos and Phobos, which are probably large space rocks or asteroids that are circling the planet because Mars' gravity is keeping them from floating away.

In our solar system, Mars is the planet that seems most like our Earth. Mars rotates completely every 24 hours and 37 minutes and this makes its day just a bit longer than ours. Mars is only half the size of Earth, but it has many similar features. Did you know that Mars has volcanoes, polar icecaps and storms? It also has different seasons each year like we experience on Earth.

For years people believed that Mars was like Earth's sister planet, with forests and rivers and a civilization of Martians. But they were disappointed to learn that Mars is a severely cold and dry desert planet. The only water on Mars is frozen at its polar icecaps, although rivers may have once flowed across the Red Planet's surface. The planet's atmosphere may have the same gases that Earth's does, but not in the same amounts. There is so little oxygen on Mars that humans wouldn't be able to breathe! And the average temperatures are dangerously low. At the planet's poles, the temperature can be as low as -133℃.

While we once thought it to be similar to Earth, Mars is actually much different. Scientists are now trying to find out why Mars is in its current condition and if it was more like our own planet in the past.

Reading 22

**The Power of YouTube**

YouTube is a website where online users can share video clips. It was founded by three young men who once worked together for an Internet bank called PayPal. The idea for YouTube came one night when the three were trying to send an email with a video clip. But the problem was that the attached file was too big. They decided there must be an easier way to share videos with their friends. They thought it would be great if they could develop a new website with such a function. So they quickly created a video sharing service for testing, and their website officially opened in 2005.

Easy to use, YouTube became a big hit. Funny home videos, television show clips, homemade music videos and speeches became popular. Now people watch the videos, make comments about them and rank them.

YouTube became so successful partly because it was started at the right time. The cost of video technology had become reasonable for many people. And, most importantly, many people wanted to hear about events directly from the people who experienced them, rather than learning about them indirectly.

Thanks to YouTube, the way news is reported is changing. YouTube users record live events with their cell phones or digital cameras and post them on the website. This way people can see events reported as soon as they happen, instead of waiting for professionals to tell them about them. YouTube started from a personal video sharing website, but it has grown into a global-scale entertainment destination. At least 70 million videos are watched daily, and more than 65,000 new clips are posted every day on YouTube. No wonder Time Magazine named it the 2006 Invention of the Year!

Reading 23

**Wear Red to Win**

Did you know that the color of uniforms can have an effect on the performance of an athlete? It may sound strange, but recent research suggests this might be true.

Two British scientists studied the results of four sports in the 2004 Athens Olympic Games where the individual athlete had been given either a red or a blue uniform. They discovered that when there was a big difference in the score, color had no effect on the result. But if it was a tight match, the athlete in a red uniform was more likely to win. Then they looked at the uniforms of the soccer teams at the Euro 2004 tournament. Again, teams wearing red won more games.

The two scientists got their idea from previous studies of wild animals. It had been discovered that when a male displays red on its body, it sends a signal of its power and strength. For example, in many monkey species, the more the male shows off its red scars, the more females it can attract for mating.

Based on this fact, the British scientists thought that the principle might work for humans too. According to them, when an athlete sees an opponent in a red uniform, he gets a feeling that his rival could be stronger than him. And that kind of feeling may negatively influence the player's performance in the actual game.

Although the idea is interesting, not everyone accepts that color signals in the animal world can really be applied to humans in sports. They think that it is unreasonable to develop a theory based on such a small number of examples. Much more research has to be done to prove the effect of uniform colors on the performance of athletes.

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**Chew to Be Healthy**

Most consumers know that chewing gum can help ease life's everyday stresses and reduce bad breath. Does chewing gum have more to offer us than that? It sure does! And most schools ban chewing gum, but in a few years they might consider changing that rule. Why?

Chewing gum after a meal actually makes your mouth produce more saliva, a liquid that washes away damaging bacteria. And now, because of xylitol, which helps fight tooth decay, chewing gum may even protect your teeth.

Chewing gum can also make you lose weight. Researchers from the Mayo Clinic proved this! Chewing sugar-free gum 100 times a minute for 12 minutes can burn 70 kilocalories an hour.

Chewing gum might also help your brain function better. A recent study found that chewing gum increases blood flow to the brain by as much as 40 percent. More blood means more oxygen, and oxygen is like fuel for your brain. Your memories even improve when you chew gum. Studies show that people do better on memory tests while chewing gum.

Doctors are now even considering using gum instead of pills to deliver medicine. The inside of our cheeks actually absorbs some substances more quickly than our stomachs can. So gum may be the best method when it is important to absorb medicine fast. In 2006, Danish scientists found that an allergy medicine in gum delivered more of its allergy-fighting substances than the same medicine in a pill.

Studies seem to show that gum could improve our health and brain function. But you should still remember chewing gum in class can be considered rude.