

## Get the Point?

by Carrol J. Swanson

**Take a close look at your pencil. That brightly colored stick of wood has a story to tell.**

The first pencils weren't anything like the ones we use today. Graphite, a soft mineral, was discovered in England in the 1500s. Called wadd, it was broken into chunks and wrapped in sheepskin and string to keep the writer's hands clean. But wadd crumbled easily and smudged black, greasy marks onto whatever it touched. Oh boy, wadda mess!

People found lots of uses for it, though. Shepherds marked their sheep with it, the military used it in cannonballs, and artists added it to their palettes. Some people even ate it! Graphite was believed to cure headaches and to calm upset stomachs.

Eventually someone discovered that mixing clay with the graphite made it less crumbly and easier to work with. By the end of the seventeenth century, a new profession—pencil making—spread throughout Europe.

Pencil makers rolled the mineral-and-clay mix into rods and placed them inside two grooved slats of wood glued together. Companies carefully guarded their secret recipes for the graphite-clay mixture, what we call lead today.

Joseph Dixon was one of the first Americans to experiment with pencil making. In 1812, thirteen-year-old Joseph listened as a family friend, Francis Peabody, described how pencils were made. Joseph's father owned ships and often sailed home to Marblehead, Massachusetts, with vessels full of graphite for ballast. Following Mr. Peabody's description, Joseph began experimenting with graphite and clay to make his own pencils.

⑥ Several years later he tried to peddle his pencils in Boston, with little success. Customers complained about the gritty leads and the rough, uncomfortable wooden cases.

Joseph didn't give up. A talented inventor, he designed machines that produced straight, even pencil leads; smoothly grooved cedar slats; glue; and paint. By 1866 every machine that played a part in pencil making had been created by Joseph. Sales skyrocketed, and Dixon pencils soon became common everywhere.

Today, pencils are the most widely used drawing and writing instruments in the world. Most people use the familiar yellow pencils, but others like pencils with personality. Some are covered in metallic rainbows, cartoon characters, or glow-in-the-dark paint. So grab your favorite pencil and get to work!

1. What **best** describes Joseph Dixon as a child?
    - A curious and creative
    - B shy and quiet
    - C bossy and nosy
- 
2. Why did Joseph Dixon become very successful?
    - A He sold graphite as medicine to cure headaches and calm upset stomachs.
    - B He traveled to Marblehead, Massachusetts, with vessels of graphite.
    - C He designed machines that produced straight, even pencil leads.

3. What is the purpose of the last paragraph in the selection?
- A to tell the reader that pencils come in a variety of styles
  - B to tell the reader that pencils have a long and interesting history
  - C to tell the reader that pencils are successful because of Joseph Dixon
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4. In paragraph 6, what does *peddle* mean?
- A buy
  - B make
  - C sell

5. What is *most likely* the reason the author titled this selection “Get the Point?”
- A It is a way to grab the reader’s attention and persuade the reader to buy a pencil.
  - B It is a play on words referring to the point on a pencil and the point of the story.
  - C It is referring to the story’s attempt to quiz the reader on the history of the pencil.
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6. What is the *main* purpose of this selection?
- A to describe the history of the pencil
  - B to describe Joseph Dixon’s success
  - C to describe the many uses of a pencil

## End of Sample Items

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**NCEXTEND2 EOG Reading Grade 8 Sample Items**

<b>Selection Title</b>	<b>Question Number</b>	<b>Correct Answer</b>	<b>Thinking Skill</b>	<b>Objective Number</b>
Get the Point?	1	A	Analyzing	2.01
Get the Point?	2	C	Knowledge	2.01
Get the Point?	3	A	Analyzing	4.01
Get the Point?	4	C	Knowledge	6.01
Get the Point?	5	B	Generating	4.01
Get the Point?	6	A	Analyzing	2.01