

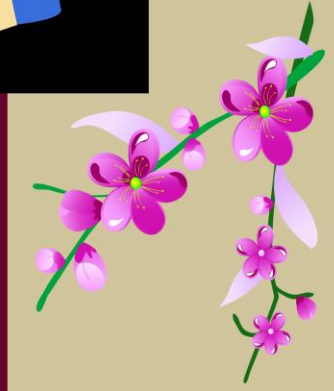
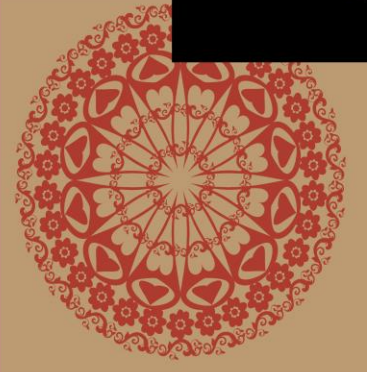


Informational Text Pack  
for  
March



Umbrellas  
and  
Barbie

by Margaret Whisnant



# Table of Contents

	Page Number(s)
<b>The Very Necessary Umbrella</b>	
Text .....	1-3
Questions (CCSS Aligned).....	4-6
<b>Barbie Millicent Roberts</b>	
Text .....	7-9
Questions (CCSS Aligned).....	10-12
<b>Answer Keys</b>	
The Very Necessary Umbrella.....	13
Barbie Millicent Roberts .....	14
<b>e-Bibliography and Clipart Credits .....</b>	<b>15</b>

# The Very Necessary Umbrella

by Margaret Whisnant

Since the dawn of civilization people have been proving that necessity is, indeed, the mother of invention, even for something as ordinary as an umbrella. It was, in fact, among the earliest items on the necessity list. Thousands of years later our need for this handy little gizmo hasn't diminished. To show how much we appreciate not being rained on, Americans have tagged March as National Umbrella Month. The surprising twist in the story is that people weren't thinking about rain when they invented the umbrella. Etymology reveals a different necessity.

*Umbrella* is derived from the Latin term *umbra*, meaning "shade," or "shadow." It's companion word, *parasol*, is from two Latin terms: *parare*, meaning "to shield" or "make ready" and *sol*, the word for "sun." The umbrella's original job, therefore, was to offer protection from the sun, but for several thousand years people were downright snobby and chauvinistic about it.

The first man-made umbrellas appeared in China around 2000 BCE. They were true works of art with frames of mulberry bark or bamboo and coverings of skillfully decorated paper or pure silk. They were so expensive only rich people could afford them, and they quickly became a symbol of power and privilege. Royals and rich people went about on foot or horseback comfortably shaded by umbrella-carrying servants or riding in umbrella-covered carriages. Because of the oils applied to the canopy, these early devices could shield their owners from rain, but it was the sun that mattered. Pale skin was a mark of feminine beauty in ancient China, so umbrellas were fashion necessities for wealthy women.



This article has three pages of script.

# Questions

for

## *The Very Necessary Umbrella*

by Margaret Whisnant

Use the text to answer the following questions. Use the spaces provided for recording your answers.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Which of the following *best* states the article's main idea?
- (A) why people need umbrellas
  - (B) who invented the umbrella
  - (C) different styles of umbrellas
  - (D) the difference between parasols and umbrellas
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The etymologies of the words *umbrella* and *parasol* indicate that their original purpose was to
- (A) indicate wealth.
  - (B) demonstrate male dominance.
  - (C) protect people from the sun.
  - (D) represent gods and goddesses in religious ceremonies.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Which of the following facts from the text does *not* support the author's claim that people were snobby and chauvinistic about umbrellas for several thousand years?
- (A) In ancient China, only the rich could afford umbrellas, and they became a symbol of power and privilege.
  - (B) In ancient Egypt, only the Pharaoh and the elite were allowed to use them.
  - (C) Because umbrellas were thought of as feminine accessories, men of Renaissance Europe went out in the rain, snow, and blazing sun without them.
  - (D) Most early umbrellas could not fold shut, and the wooden frames of those that could were difficult to handle when wet.
4. What common reason for using umbrellas was present in ancient China, Japan, and Egypt?

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Fifteen questions in full file.

# Barbie Millicent Roberts

by Margaret Whisnant

With more than 100 careers to her credit, she has been more successful than the average girl. She has owned a pink Corvette and over 40 pets including a lion cub and a zebra. Without stretching beyond her original 11 ½” stature, she has represented 45 different nationalities. She turned 50 in 2009 on March 9<sup>th</sup>, her official birthday.



She’s Barbie Millicent Roberts, the world’s most popular doll.

It was the mid 1950s when Ruth Handler noticed how much her young daughter Barbara and her friends enjoyed playing with adult paper dolls. They pretended to be cheerleaders, models, college students, or adults with careers. Ruth knew how beneficial it is for children to imagine their futures. Young girls, she thought, needed a teen doll, but every three-dimensional model on the market at that time represented an infant or a toddler. There was a void in the toy market, and she was in a position to fill it. In 1945, she, her husband Elliot, and their friend Harold Mattson had formed a toy company they called Mattel (MATT for Mattson, EL for Elliot), and it was doing well.

Ruth Handler found her inspiration in Europe. In 1952, a German cartoonist created a sassy female character for a Hamburg newspaper. He called her Lilli. She was a post-World War II girl—fashionable, confident, and a gold-digger always on the look-out for a rich husband. The public loved Lilli and her extreme hourglass figure. In 1955, she became a plastic doll, but most sales were to adults who bought her as a gag gift or a conversation piece.

Lilli came in two sizes—8” or 11 ½” with a stand. She wore lipstick, painted eyebrows, side-glancing eyes, a long pony tail, and a black-and-white-striped bathing suit. Other wardrobe items could be purchased separately. Ruth Handler found her in 1956 while shopping in Germany. She bought a Lilli for her daughter and two others for the designers at Mattel. They didn’t share her enthusiasm for the curvy doll idea. Ruth persisted, convincing her husband and the all-male design team that a teen fashion doll would sell, especially if they made full use of another new marketing tool—kid’s TV. Youngsters pestered their parents until they got what they saw in the commercials.

**Full text is three pages.**

# Questions

for

## Barbie Millicent Roberts

**Directions:** Refer to the text to answer the following questions. Record your answers in the spaces provided.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Which sentence from the text *best* states its main idea?
- (A) She's Barbie Millicent Roberts, the world's most popular doll.
  - (B) Ruth knew how beneficial it is for children to imagine their futures.
  - (C) Barbie has faithfully portrayed current trends in fashion, makeup, hairstyles, and careers.
  - (D) Barbie's glamorous life has not been without controversy.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The author organizes Barbie's story into the following main points:
- (A) facts about her beginnings
  - (B) her spectacular growth as a fashion doll
  - (C) controversies and legalities
  - (D) her present status

In the blanks before each quote from the text, write the letter of the main point that it supports.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. *Of course, she caused an uproar, but Mattel and Barbie refused to apologize for her trademark, humanly impossible figure.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. *Barbie's personal life went public in the 1960s when Random House published a series of books that revealed her full name as Barbie Millicent Roberts.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. *Barbie and her boyfriend Ken, named after Ruth and Elliot Handler's son, became an item in 1961.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. *It was the mid 1950s when Ruth Handler noticed how much her young daughter Barbara and her friends enjoyed playing with adult paper dolls.*
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. *Experts argue that her impossible figure can distort a young girl's body image and bring on all manners of eating disorders and psychological problems.*

**Fifteen questions in full file.**

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## Barbie Millicent Roberts

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