

The following content will be used for items 9 - 10.

Here is a passage about George Nissen, the inventor of the trampoline. Read the passage. Then answer the questions that follow.

The Kid Who Invented the Trampoline

by Don Wulffson

It all started with an eleven-year-old from Iowa named George Nissen. One day in 1926, George was at the circus with his family, watching tightrope walkers and trapeze artists. He thought they were great, especially when they intentionally took flying leaps to the safety net below—and then continued performing. They bounced up and down on the net and did twists, spins, and long, fantastic somersaults.

That's when the idea was born. When he was in high school, George decided he was going to make a device that would work like the safety net. It would be a small version that he and his friends could have fun jumping around on.

Soon George had taken over the family garage and begun work on what he called his "bouncing table." "Bouncing tables" had been made before, but mostly as props for stunts at carnivals and shows. What George wanted was a contraption that anyone could order for a backyard or gymnasium.

At the local junkyard, he hunted for materials—springs, rubber inner tubes, and metal for making a frame. Then he took his savings and bought a heavy-duty industrial sewing machine that could sew canvas.

All through high school and then through college, George kept working on his invention. He and his friends had a good time clowning around on the thing. But George was always looking for ways to improve it. It had to be safe, have great bounce, and be strong enough to withstand all kinds of jumping. It was also important that it be easy to transport, set up, and store.

It took almost twelve years. But finally, in 1937, George had created a "bouncing table" that met most of his requirements. He had also invented the machines necessary to produce them and had changed the name to *trampoline*, from the Spanish word *trampolín*, meaning "springboard."

He was now ready, he decided, to make his fame and fortune selling his invention. With trampolines strapped to the top of his old car, he set off on a cross-country tour. In town after town, he demonstrated his contraption in any place where there would be crowds—in front of supermarkets, at parks, at county fairs, and outside sports stadiums. With the money he made from these exhibitions, he bought more materials and continued to develop and improve his invention.

During World War II, George enlisted in the U.S. Navy. Before long, he had persuaded both the army and navy to use trampolines in their preflight training programs, especially those for soldiers learning to be paratroopers and pilots.

After the war, George went into the trampoline business full-time. Sales were slow at first, but then they suddenly skyrocketed. George's hard work, persistence, and unflagging optimism had finally paid off. People bought trampolines for their backyards. Colleges added them to their gymnastics programs. NASA began using them to give astronauts the feeling of weightlessness that the trampoline simulates.

And there's another place where you're bound to see the invention. It's the place where a kid first got the idea for them: at the circus.

Did you know?

- In 1964, a "spaceball" fad swept the country. Spaceball is a sport combining elements of basketball and volleyball and played on a trampoline.
- In that same year, the International Trampoline Federation was formed with seven member nations. Today over forty nations are members, and, for the first time ever, trampolining was a medal sport at the Olympics in Sydney, Australia, in September 2000.