

中学英语拾级读物

**GRADED  
ENGLISH  
READERS**

第十级

**Strange Stories  
and Amazing Facts**

**奇闻趣事**

第 **1** 册

上海外语教育出版社

• 中学英语拾级读物 •

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Strange Stories and Amazing Facts

# 奇 闻 趣 事

陈秋芳 注释

上海外语教育出版社

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## 前 言

受国家教育委员会中学司委托,由上海外国语学院、北京外国语学院、北京师范大学、华东师范大学所属的四家大学出版社联合编辑、出版的《中学英语拾级读物》(简称《拾级读物》或《GE》)与读者见面了。这是我国中学英语教学的一项重要配套工程,旨在促进中学英语教学的改革。

取名《拾级读物》,不仅因为它有十个级别五十本书,而且还寓有“循序渐进,拾级而上”之意。中学生从初二开始阅读,逐级向上攀登,便可达到借助词典读懂浅近原著的水平。

《拾级读物》每册的词汇量、字数及对应年级大致如下:

级 别	词 汇 量	每册大约字数	大致对应年级
一	500—700	10万	初二
二	600—900	10万	初二
三	800—1200	12万	初三
四	1000—1500	12万	初三
五	1400—1800	12万	高一、高二
六	1700—2000	12万	高二、高三
七	2000—2500	14万	重点中学高三
八	2500—3000	16万	外国语学校高三
九	3000—3500	18万	高材生、中学教师
十	3600—3500	18万	高材生、中学教师

阅读是学好任何一种语言的必由之路,也是获取信息的主要渠道。只做习题,不大量阅读是学不好英语的。近年来不少学生为了应付考试,花费大量的精力和时间去做各种各

样的复习题和模拟试题,但收效甚微,对英语能力的提高并无多大益处。这是英语教学中的一种偏向。《拾级读物》的出版正是为了给中学英语教学提供一套可读性与系统性相结合的课外读物。

《拾级读物》主要供学生自己阅读,但教师可根据学生的实际水平帮助他们选择使用,并进行适当的辅导。特别在阅读方法上教师可作示范性的讲示,引导学生逐步摆脱语法和汉语的束缚。在此过程中,一是要抓篇章大意和故事情节;二是要注意学过的语言现象的再现和在新情境下的发展。对不易理解之处,要启发学生先根据上下文去揣摩,实在影响阅读时再查阅词典。对不影响理解全文的语言难点则要舍得放过。只有这样,才能培养学生良好的阅读习惯,保持他们阅读的兴趣,提高他们阅读的速度。

《拾级读物》的级别是衡量中学生英语阅读水平的客观尺度。为了便于检查,我们还准备编写一套相应的测试材料和教学参考书。

《拾级读物》除供中学生使用外,还可作为中学英语教师培训、进修的教材。

本册读物是第十级第一册。内容包括:神奇的发明,常识和谬误,自然界的奇闻,迷离扑朔的世界之谜,建筑工程精萃,非凡的旅程和世界的未来。所选的文章都出自英美作家之笔,语言规范地道,知识性和趣味性都很强。

鉴于编者水平有限,本读物在选材、注释等各方面肯定存在不少缺点,敬请广大师生、各界读者不吝指正,供我们再版时参考。

《中学英语拾级读物》编辑委员会

一九八七年五月

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## I. Man's Amazing Inventions

### 1. Reading for the Blind

*System devised for military use at night*

Until 1819 lettering for the blind consisted simply of raised characters of the alphabet made of wood, lead, twigs, or even pins and needles arranged in pincushions. Valentine Haüy, founder of the Royal Institute for Young Blind Persons in Paris, made three-inch-deep letters from cloth.

In 1819, the same year that a 10-year-old blind boy named Louis Braille enrolled at the institute, a French artillery captain tried to interest the Academy of Sciences in Paris in a new system he described as "night writing."

Capt. Charles Barbier de la Serre had devised an alphabet of raised dots and dashes on strips of cardboard that soldiers could "read" with their fingertips when in action at night.

He eventually took his method to the institute, but, because his system consisted of a complex arrangement of 12 dots to each letter, it was not a success.

Braille, now a teenager, became interested in

Barbier's system and simplified it. From this he soon developed the now internationally used Braille system.

## **2. The First Hotrod**

*An idea that ran out of steam*

The first steam carriage to transport passengers on a highway was designed by Richard Trevithick<sup>1</sup> in 1800. Despite warnings by James Watt<sup>2</sup> that the boiler would explode, the engine ran on a steam pressure of 60 pounds. Watt was opposed to high-pressure engines—his engines seldom ran on more than seven pounds—and said that Trevithick deserved hanging for introducing such a device.

The vehicle had its first outing on Christmas Eve 1801, and three days later Trevithick invited some friends to take a ride. The journey ended abruptly when the carriage broke down, so the travelers made for the nearest inn where they warmed themselves with mulled ale<sup>3</sup>. But the boiler fire was still burning merrily, and when the party returned, the carriage was a smoldering wreck.

## **3. First Car—First Crash**

*And the inventor lands himself in court*

Nicholas Cugnot,<sup>4</sup> a French artillery officer, was

the world's first motorist. Within minutes of starting, he had the world's first motoring accident. And he became the world's first convicted dangerous driver.

His three-wheel vehicle appeared in 1769. A steam-driven, two-cylinder engine drove the front wheel, and Cugnot said his contraption would carry four people at a speed of just under two miles an hour.

But the weight of the huge copper boiler on the front of the carriage made it almost impossible to steer. On its maiden run the machine ran into and demolished a stone wall.

Undismayed, Cugnot spent the next year building a larger version as a fan carriage for the French War Ministry. He demonstrated the new machine on a Paris street. The military observers were impressed, particularly as Cugnot promised that it could carry five tons.

But the steering again let him down, and as he tried to turn a corner, the carriage overturned. The ministry lost interest — and Cugnot lost his freedom. Magistrates sent him to jail and impounded his machine.

By the time he was able to think of modifications, France was in the grip of the Revolution. He moved to Brussels, where he died in 1804.

Cugnot's ill-fated gun carriage was later rebuilt and remains his only monument—in the Paris Conservatoire des Arts<sup>5</sup>.

#### **4. Trains that Could Run on Air**

##### *Early attempts to develop air-driven trains*

Trains have been powered by steam, diesel oil, electricity, and, experimentally, jet and rocket engines. But in 1844 Isambard Kingdom Brunel,<sup>6</sup> the great British inventor, built a train that was driven by air.

His plan was to pull a train along a tube between the tracks. The lead coach was attached to the 15-inch-diameter pipe by means of a piston arm.

Huge pumping engines every three miles along the track extracted air from the pipe in front of the train, and the pressure behind the piston forced it along.

Brunel built an experimental section of pipe on the South Devon Railway. But the copper and leather pipe valves corroded in the salty air and were chewed away by rats.

Seventeen years later another British inventor, T. W. Rammell, designed a system in which the whole train was blown and sucked along a tube. But the idea of huge tubes crisscrossing the country was unrealistic, and in 1870 pneumatic railways went underground.

That year a 312-foot-long model subway opened in New York beneath lower Broadway. Its 22-seat cars were driven like sailboats, by a blast of air.

But in 1880 electric trains seemed more promising,

and the long search for a railway that could run on air was abandoned.

## 5. Words Along a Wire

*The telephone evolved from attempts to aid the deaf*

By an odd coincidence the first message transmitted by telephone, an instrument that has proved such a great boon in emergencies, was a cry for help from its inventor.

At the moment Alexander Graham Bell<sup>7</sup> was ready to test his invention for the first time, he accidentally spilled some acid on his clothes.

So the first words his assistant, waiting in the basement of Bell's home, heard over the receiver from his employer, who was in the attic, were: "Mr. Watson, come here! I want you!"

Bell, born in Edinburgh in 1847, had been trying to design a machine for communicating with the deaf when he stumbled on the basic principles for a telephone. He found that when an iron diaphragm was vibrated by the human voice, close to a magnet around which was a wire coil, a weak current was created. This could be transmitted along a cable to a corresponding diaphragm.

Although Bell is generally acknowledged as the inventor of the telephone in 1876, several others worked

to develop a telephone before him, notably the German Johann Philipp Reis, who claimed success in 1861. And in 1871 an Italian, Antonio Meucci, filed a caveat for an invention of his make in Havana in 1849.

But it is doubted that Bell's predecessors transmitted articulate speech, and the German patent office later decided Reis had not invented a "speaking telephone."

Bell later went on to invent the gramophone record, the photophone—which was the forerunner of film soundtracks—the electric eye, and the induction balance.

## **6. Mightier than the Sword**

*Blot was blessing in disguise*

Fountain pens were born out of sheer exasperation. In 1884 Lewis Edson Waterman,<sup>8</sup> an insurance salesman, had just won an important contract from several rivals. Waterman handed his client a fine quill pen and a bottle of ink to sign the contract. The pen splattered the document; Waterman hurried away to find another form ... and a rival stepped in and completed the deal.

This incident spurred Waterman to design the first practical fountain pen with a controlled flow of ink. He applied the principles of capillary attraction—by which sap defies gravity and rises in plants. In the piece

of hard rubber linking the pen's ink reservoir and the nib, Waterman cut a hair-thin channel. This admitted a small amount of air into the ink chamber, keeping the internal air pressure in balance, so that the ink leaked out only when pressure was put on the nib.

The first Waterman pens were filled with an eyedropper, a technique soon replaced by the development of flexible rubber sacs, which drew in ink after the air had been squeezed out.

The modern fountain pen can be traced back to a simple reed or bamboo stem used by the ancient Greeks and Egyptians, and to the quill pens of the Romans.

The term "fountain pen," indicating that the pen contained a reservoir, was first used in England in 1710, but they were on the market in Paris in 1656.

## **7. Electropathic Belt**

### *Shock therapy, Victorian style*

Victorian England was obsessed with the idea of a "sound mind in a healthy body." Especially the latter! Health gadgers—a few useful, some harmful, most useless but harmless—abounded.

Girls with prominent ears wore "Claxton's Ear-Cap"<sup>9</sup> as they slept. Rheumatic sufferers underwent excruciating treatment on "Zander's Mechanical Exercisers."<sup>10</sup> Sedentary adults bought mechanical horses that



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simulated riding and came with sidesaddles for women.

But one of the oddest inventions was "Mr. C. B. Harness's Electropathic Belt."<sup>11</sup> This battery-operated appliance, strapped around the midriff, delivered a series of mild electric shocks. An advertisement proclaimed that the belt "acts upon all organs of the body, rarely failing to alleviate most of the disorders resulting from local or general debility."

It could also "improve the figure and prevent chills," not to mention that it renewed "exhausted nerve form" and cured hysteria. But the one thing it could not do was to survive in the face of advancing medical knowledge.

## **8. Alarm to the Admiralty**

### *Glass-shutter signals from Portsmouth to London*

At the end of the 18th century, bad food, inhuman treatment, and appalling living conditions roused more than 50,000 men of the Royal Navy to mutiny.

On April 13, 1797, an informer on HMS *Sovereign* at Portsmouth told an officer that mutiny was imminent, and only minutes later British Admiralty authorities were handed a message: "Mutiny brewing in Spithead."

The signal had been flashed the 70 miles from Portsmouth to London in three minutes, by means of a