

Ladislao Biro

You may never have heard of Ladislao Biro, but you have certainly heard of the pen he invented – the ballpoint pen, or biro. Before Biro invented his pen, people wrote with fountain pens. The ink smudged and blotted and the pens sometimes leaked. In the 1930s Biro was a magazine editor in Budapest in Hungary. He noticed that the inks which the magazine's printers used dried very quickly. Biro wondered if quick-drying inks could be used in pens. He came up with the idea of a tube of ink with a free-moving ball on the end. As a person wrote, the ball collected ink from the tube and rolled it on to the paper. The pen would be cheap and could be thrown away when the ink ran out.

Biro began to work on his invention but before he could patent it the Second World War broke out. Biro left war-torn Europe and fled to Buenos Aires in Argentina. There, he and his brother Georg, who was a chemist, began to improve the pen. In the early 1940s Biro began to manufacture his new pen, the biro.

Biro did not have enough money to start a big manufacturing company. In 1944, he sold his invention to another company, who began to mass-produce the pen for the British and American armed forces. The servicemen and women liked the pens because they did not leak and were easy to carry around.

Biro was pleased that his pen was popular, but he did not gain much from his invention. The biro was later sold to the French firm, Bic, who now sell twelve million pens a day. Biro sank into obscurity in South America. His name, however, has become a household word.

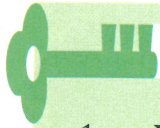
1900 *born in Hungary*

1938 *applies for patent for first ballpoint pen*

1939 *flees from Hungary to escape Nazis; goes to France, Spain and then Argentina*

c. 1943 *begins to manufacture pens*

1944 *sells invention*



Answer in sentences.

- 1 Where was Ladislao Biro born?
- 2 How did working as a magazine editor help him to invent the biro?
- 3 Why did he sell his invention in 1944?
- 4 Which French firm still manufactures his invention?
- 5 Find four reasons in the passage for the popularity of ballpoint pens.
- 6 Is it true that Ladislao Biro made a huge fortune out of his invention?
- 7 In what year did Ladislao Biro leave Hungary?
- 8 What happened to Biro's invention in 1943?
- 9 "Biro sank into obscurity in South America." Explain in your own words what this means.
- 10 "His name has become a household word." Explain in your own words what this means.

Biro
The New Writing Instrument

- Writes an average of 200,000 words without refilling.
- Writes on a ball bearing with a velvet touch and a smooth gliding action.
- The ink dries as you write.
- Does not smudge even on wet paper.
- Makes at least six perfect carbon copies.
 - A boon to left-handed writers.
 - Does not leak at any altitude.

Biro
REFILL SERVICE
'Biro' Service retailers will fit a refill unit and service your 'Biro' for an inclusive charge of five shillings.