



“Bathtubs”

Reading Comprehension – Informational Passages



Directions: Read the passage. Then answer questions about the passage below.

Bathtubs have a very curious history. The bathtub has been in existence for thousands of years. Given its long history, the modern day bathtub is very different from its **predecessors**. The bathtub originated in ancient Rome as a social gathering place. It did not become the private bathtub, common in American households, until the early 20th century. From its early beginnings in Rome, to cast iron horse troughs, and eventually to the modern day bathtub, it is clear that the bathtub has had quite an evolution.

The Romans are famous for being one of the first civilizations to bathe. Starting in around 500 BC, Roman citizens were encouraged to bathe daily in one of the many public bathtubs. The Romans used the public baths as a place for social events and as a chance to get to know other people. Their public baths were fairly large and most commonly made of marble. The Romans used lead or bronze pipes to fill the tubs with water. Contrary to popular belief, the habit of bathing continued after the collapse of the Roman Empire, and was common throughout the Middle Ages. Bathing eventually went out of fashion at the beginning of the Renaissance period, only to resurface in the 19th century.

In 1883, the Standard Sanitary Manufacturing Company and the Kohler Company began producing cast-iron tubs. These companies advertised their tubs as horse troughs — large tubs where horses could drink — because this was seen as a more marketable product than a bathtub. However, human bathing in the tubs became popular due to the easy to clean surface of the tub, and the desire to prevent disease.

One cannot explain the history of bathtubs without mentioning the name Henry L. Mencken. He was a journalist who **infamously** wrote a false story **regarding** the history of bathtubs. In his story, Mencken wrote that the first bathtub in the United States belonged to Adam Thompson. According to the story, Adam Thompson put a bathtub in his house in 1842. At a Christmas party, four guests tried the tub, and news of the bathtub was in the newspaper the next day. Mencken went on to claim that some people were upset about the news of Thompson’s bathtub because they believed it to be undemocratic. In addition to these, he **fabricated** several other details. He wrote that the bathtub was dangerous, and that the Philadelphia Common Council considered disallowing bathing between November 1 and March 15 of that year for health reasons. He even wrote that several cities put very high taxes on water for houses that had bathtubs.

Mencken claimed that he did not expect people to believe his newspaper story. However, his story was reprinted in many newspapers. Shortly afterward, historians also began to spread Mencken’s **spurious** story. Eight years after he wrote the false story, Mencken wrote a second story admitting that everything he had written about bathtubs was false. His story on the bathtub is now considered to be one of the most famous newspaper hoaxes, or tricks, in history. Even today, some of Mencken’s false information still gets intermixed with the true history of bathtubs.

Finally, after World War I — and after Mencken’s hoax — many new houses were built in the United States with indoor plumbing. Previously, most houses in the United States did not have indoor plumbing. In the early 1920s, only 21% of houses had bathrooms, but by the end of the twentieth century, all new houses had bathrooms.

Today, there are many different types of bathtubs. Luxury bathtubs are made not only for bathing, but also for recreation and relaxation. Some homes have hot-tubs, which are also called spas. The hot tub has a built in heater that keeps the water hot and jets to create bubbles. Some hot tubs even have built-in sound systems so the bather can listen to music while they relax. There are also tubs made just for the elderly and disabled. These bathtubs allow people to walk into the tub without having to step over the edge.

It is **apparent** that, throughout its long history, the bathtub has changed **tremendously** since its birth in ancient Rome.



Questions:

1) According to Mencken's newspaper story, where was the first bathtub located in the U.S.?

- A. Henry Mencken's house
- B. Adam Thompson's house
- C. Millard Fillmore's house
- D. John Michael Kohler's house
- E. None of the above

2) Mencken most likely write a second story about bathtubs because

- A. the first story had become so popular.
- B. he was finally let out of prison.
- C. he felt guilty about lying.
- D. he sought revenge on Thompson.
- E. Both B and C are correct.

3) What were the Roman baths made of?

- A. Iron
- B. Glass
- C. Wood
- D. Bronze
- E. Marble

4) When did Americans start building bathrooms in their houses?

- A. In the mid-1800s
- B. In the late 1800s
- C. During World War I
- D. After World War I
- E. At the end of the 1900s

5) According to the passage, what kinds of bathtubs are being made today?

- A. Spas
- B. Hot tubs
- C. Walk-in tubs
- D. Cast iron tubs
- E. A, B, and C are correct.
- F. A, C, and D are correct.

Vocabulary:

1) A **predecessor** is something that comes...

- A. before something else.
- B. during something else.
- C. after something else.
- D. None of the above are correct.
- E. Both A and B are correct.

2) If something is **infamous**, it is...

- A. heinous.
- B. audacious.
- C. laudatory.
- D. insignificant.
- E. notorious.

3) The best synonym for **regarding** is...

- A. about
- B. so
- C. through
- D. denying
- E. supporting

4) Mencken's story was **fabricated**. This...

- A. means it was complicated.
- B. means it was popular.
- C. means it was accurate.
- D. means it was genuine.
- E. means it was fictitious.

5) The best synonym for **spurious** is...

- A. kind.
- B. unaware.
- C. false.
- D. genuine.
- E. authentic.

6) The best synonym for **apparent** is...

- A. clear.
- B. muddled.
- C. correct.
- D. appropriate.
- E. proper.

7) If something is **tremendous**, it is...

- A. small.
- B. significant.
- C. incorrect.
- D. passionate.
- E. dubious.