COMMONLIT

Name: _____ Class: _____

How an 11-Year-Old Boy Invented the Popsicle

By Shelby Pope for NPR
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Frank Epperson is responsible for inventing the popsicle at 11 years old in 1905. What started as a delicious accident, evolved into a world-wide phenomenon that is still enjoyed today. Epperson's original invention has changed much since the idea's conception in 1905, changing hands between big companies, feeling the effects of the Great Depression, and sparking heated debates. Regardless, the popsicle has maintained its reputation as an iconic, icy treat. As you read, take notes on how Frank Epperson's frozen treat became such a success.

[1] The next time you pop a Popsicle in your mouth, think about this: You're enjoying the fruits of an 11-year-old entrepreneur's labor.



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Back in 1905, a San Francisco Bay Area kid by the name of Frank Epperson accidentally invented the summertime treat. He had mixed some sugary soda powder with water and left it out overnight. It was a cold night, and the mixture froze. In the morning, Epperson devoured the icy concoction, licking it off the wooden stirrer. He declared it an Epsicle, a portmanteau of icicle and his name, and started selling the treat around his neighborhood.

In 1923, Epperson decided to expand sales beyond his neighborhood. He started selling the treat at Neptune Beach, a nearby amusement park. Dubbed a "West Coast Coney Island," the park featured roller coasters, baseball and an Olympic-sized swimming pool. Neptune flourished in the pre-Depression[1] days, and consumers eagerly consumed Epsicles and snow cones (which also made their debut at Neptune).

Buoyed[2] by this success, Epperson applied for a patent[3] for his "frozen confection[4] of attractive appearance, which can be conveniently consumed[5] without contamination by contact with the hand and without the need for a plate, spoon, fork or other implement"[6] in 1924. The patent illustrates the requirements for a perfect ice pop, including recommendations on the best wood for the stick: wood-bass, birch and poplar. Eventually, Epperson's children urged him to change the ice pop's name to what they called it: a Pop's 'Sicle, or Popsicle.

1. The Great Depression was a worldwide economic decline that lasted from 1929 to 1939
2. **Buoy** ***(verb):*** to cause (someone) to feel happy or confident
3. A license that ensures a right or title for a set period, particularly the right to exclude other from making, using, or selling an invention
4. **Confection** ***(noun):*** a dessert made with sweet ingredients
5. **Consume** ***(verb):*** to eat or drink (something)
6. **Implement** ***(noun):*** an object (as a tool)

[5] This origin story is charming, if somewhat apocryphal[7] (sources differ on the details), but it didn't have a happy ending for the inventor. A broke Epperson sold the rights to his creation to the Joe Lowe Co. in the 1920s, much to his regret: "I was flat[8] and had to liquidate[9] all my assets," he later said. "I haven't been the same since."

The Lowe Co. went on to catapult Epperson's invention to national success. During the Great Depression, the company debuted the two-stick version of the Popsicle to help consumers stretch their dollar — the duo sold for 5 cents.

But this delicious duo faced competition from Good Humor, which had recently debuted its own chocolate-covered ice cream on a stick, and Lowe was sued for copyright infringement. The court's compromise? Popsicle could sell water-based treats, and Good Humor could sell ice cream pops. Popsicle tested the limits of the agreement, selling a "Milk Popsicle," and the two companies tussled in court about the definitions of sherbet and ice cream over the years through a series of lawsuits.

The giant food corporation Unilever scooped up the Popsicle brand in 1989, expanding the brand beyond its original fruity flavors. It also bought Good Humor, ending the feud between the two icy competitors.

Over the years, Epperson's childhood invention has achieved iconic status, standing in for any frozen treat the way Kleenex means a tissue. That explains why also over the years, Unilever has worked to keep the name Popsicle its and its alone: In 2010, the company threatened legal action against artisan[10] Brooklyn ice pop makers People's Pops for using the word "popsicle" on its blog.

[10] As for Epperson, he died in 1983 and is buried in Oakland's Mountain View Cemetery, where he's featured on a tour celebrating local food luminaries[11] including chocolate mogul Domingo Ghirardelli and mai tai[12] inventor Victor "Trader Vic" Bergeron.

His story lives on in many forms — from the official Popsicle website, where it's illustrated in comic form, to an inspirational Christian self-help book about trusting in God's grand plan for your life. Epperson's childhood invention, born randomly on a freezing night, has also proved to be resoundingly successful and long lived: These days, some 2 billion Popsicles are sold each year.

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7. **Apocryphal** ***(adjective):*** well-known but probably not true
8. "Flat" can mean utterly ruined or destroyed
9. **Liquidate** ***(verb):*** to convert valuables to cash
10. **Artisan** ***(noun):*** a worker skilled in making things by hand
11. **Luminaries** ***(noun):*** a very famous or successful person
12. a popular alcoholic drink

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which TWO statements best identify the central idea of the text? [RI.2]
    A. The events of the Great Depression forced Frank Epperson to sell the rights to the popsicle.
    B. While originally an accident, Epperson helped to make the Popsicle famous through his hard work.
    C. The copyright issues between Good Humor and Joe Lowe Co. show how patents are not enough to protect one's rights.
    D. Popsicles would have sold better if Frank Epperson would have kept their original name, "Epsicles."
    E. After Epperson was forced to sell his business, the Popsicle continued to grow in popularity.
    F. Epperson should have resisted selling his business because he could have potentially made so much more money.

2. PART B: Which TWO details from the text best support the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
    A. "In 1923, Epperson decided to expand sales beyond his neighborhood" (Paragraph 3)
    B. "A broke Epperson sold the rights to his creation to the Joe Lowe Co." (Paragraph 5)
    C. "But this delicious duo faced competition from Good Humor," (Paragraph 7)
    D. "Unilever scooped up the Popsicle brand in 1989, expanding the brand beyond its original fruity flavors." (Paragraph 8)
    E. "As for Epperson, he died in 1983 and is buried in Oakland's Mountain View Cemetery, where he's featured on a tour celebrating local food luminaries," (Paragraph 10)
    F. "Epperson's childhood invention, born randomly on a freezing night, has also proved to be resoundingly successful and long lived," (Paragraph 11)

3. PART A: In the context of paragraph 2, what does the word "portmanteau" mean? [RI.4]
    A. Collision
    B. Embodiment
    C. Combination
    D. Division

4. PART B: Which section from paragraph 2 best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
    A. "accidentally invented"
    B. "summertime treat."
    C. "icy concoction"
    D. "icicle and his name,"

5. How does paragraph 5 contribute to the overall article? Cite evidence from the text in your answer. [RI.5]

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. Does Frank Epperson deserve credit for inventing the Popsicle? Why or why not?

2. If Frank Epperson were alive today, what advice do you think he would give to young inventors and entrepreneurs? Why?

3. In the context of the text, why should we value our youth? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

4. In the context of the article, why do people succeed? Was Frank Epperson's success "random," as paragraph 11 of the article suggests? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.