

Unit 11 • Getting the Main Idea

1. Until 1840 there was no such thing as a postage stamp. If you wanted to mail a letter, you took it to the post office and paid the postmaster the proper amount. If there was a crowd, you stood and waited. Then in 1840 in England, a man named Rowland Hill had an ingenious idea. He thought that if people had stamps to stick on their envelopes, they wouldn't have to go to the trouble of visiting the postmaster for each letter they wanted to send. The idea was accepted in England, and the first stamps were made with a picture of Queen Victoria on each one.
2. If you live in the country or have ever visited there, chances are you have heard a rooster crow to welcome the new day. However, roosters crow at other times too, as thousands who attend the annual Rooster Crow competition well know. The affair began in 1953 and has grown into a great tourist attraction in Rogue River, Oregon. There are barbecues, old-car contests, and an art exhibit. The main event, however, is the contest to see which rooster will crow most often. One year's victor was Hamlet, who crowed fifty-seven times in thirty minutes—earning a trophy and prize money for his owner. The all-time record of 109 crows is held by a rooster called Beatlebaum.
3. Although the Chihuahua is one of the ten most popular breeds of dogs in the United States, it is not as well known as some others. The average height of a Chihuahua is four to six inches. It has dark eyes and fine, smooth hair. It may be gold, red, brown, or fawn in color. A Chihuahua usually weighs from two to four pounds, but some weigh less than two pounds. In fact, some Chihuahuas can easily stand on a person's hand! They are alert, intelligent, playful, clean, and friendly animals. It is thought that the Chihuahua's ancestors were brought to Mexico from China by Spanish merchants. Today the tiny Chihuahua can be found throughout the United States.
4. Louis Braille was blinded in 1812. As a small boy he learned the alphabet by feeling twigs that were formed into letters. This was a slow, difficult way to learn, but Louis mastered the letters. Louis Braille thought that if soldiers could "read" these symbols at night, blind people could read a special "writing" made by using similar dots. The alphabet he developed, based on raised dots a blind person feels with the fingertips, is called Braille.
5. The notion that a horseshoe is lucky dates from ancient times. The grounds for the belief vary widely. In ancient times iron was considered a sacred metal. Another theory is that the horseshoe acquired its magical reputation because it is similar in shape to the crescent moon, which was once considered a symbol of good luck. Still another theory is that the superstition is somehow related to the mystic number seven, the number of nails in a horseshoe. At any rate the belief goes back to the time of the Romans. In modern times President Truman hung a horseshoe above the door of his office in the White House.

Unit 11 • Getting the Main Idea

1. The story is mainly about
 - (A) Rowland Hill.
 - (B) Queen Victoria.
 - (C) the problems in post offices in the 1800s.
 - (D) the history of the postage stamp.

2. The story is mainly about
 - (A) why roosters crow.
 - (B) a rooster named Beatlebaum.
 - (C) the annual Rooster Crow competition in Rogue River, Oregon.
 - (D) a rooster that crowed fifty-seven times in thirty minutes.

3. The story is mainly about
 - (A) the Chihuahua.
 - (B) Mexico.
 - (C) China.
 - (D) Spanish merchants.

4. The story is mainly about
 - (A) how Louis Braille was blinded in 1812.
 - (B) why Braille is easy to learn.
 - (C) the Braille alphabet.
 - (D) the history of Braille.

5. The story is mainly about
 - (A) why the horseshoe is considered a lucky symbol.
 - (B) why the number seven is lucky.
 - (C) which president hung a horseshoe outside his office.
 - (D) how the horseshoe resembles the moon.