

A Box of Colors

by RV staff writer

What common art supply can be found in almost any school in America? If you said crayons, you would be right. Children love making art with the waxy sticks of colors. Let's take a look at how crayons were invented.

Edwin Binney and Harold Smith were business partners. One of their early products was red barn paint. They also made the first dustless chalk for classrooms. This invention won a gold medal at the World's Fair!

Soon Binney and Smith wanted to make something new. Sticks of colored wax had been around for a while, but they were expensive and mostly used by artists. Many of these color sticks had toxic, or harmful, things in them to make the colors.

Binney and Smith worked until they found a way to make the crayons safe for children. In 1903, the partners made their first box of safe and colorful crayons. This box of colors cost one nickel. Inside were eight crayons: red, blue, yellow, green, violet, orange, brown, and black. Now children everywhere could create colorful art.

Over the years, the two partners continued to find ways to improve crayons. In 1949, they made a bigger box that held 48 crayons. A few years later, they made an even bigger box to hold 64 crayons and added a sharpener. In 2003, the crayon company was 100 years old. To celebrate, they made the world's largest crayon. It weighed 1,500 pounds and was 15 feet long!

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. supply
2. products
3. toxic
4. create
5. improve

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1. "What common art **supply** can be found in almost any school in America?"

- a. materials or equipment b. teacher c. show d. meeting group

2. "One of their early **products** was red barn paint."

- a. vegetables b. math answers c. ideas d. items for sale, goods

3. "Many of these color sticks had **toxic**, or harmful, things in them"

- a. waxy b. harmful, poisonous c. colorful d. beautiful

4. "Now children everywhere could **create** colorful art."

- a. buy b. sell c. make, invent d. look at, observe

5. " the two partners continued to find ways to **improve** crayons."

- a. melt, break, destroy b. add c. receive d. make better