



The Pinnacle

**ALL THAT WALTER WANTED WAS
TO PAY OFF A \$15 DEBT.**



A letter from the publisher



Dear Reader,

This playful book-series is a publication of AlligatorZone®, where students meet startups, an impact initiative as well as a community of life-long learners who explore the world through the eyes of the entrepreneurial problem-solver.

AlligatorZone® is proud to present this series of stories and related playful explorations designed to surface the delightful conversationalist that lurks within each of us, and to shine a light on our charismatic side, while we explore the world of future careers, and perhaps find a calling, sooner than later. This activity book can be enjoyed by students of ages ten through the teens. In fact, any life-long learner will enjoy this booklet.

If you choose to read this book aloud, enunciate like your favorite TV newscaster, actor or YouTuber. If you post it online outside of AlligatorZone, tag @alligatorzone or even #alligatorzone. If reading aloud, slow down so that audiences of all backgrounds may understand you clearly. This exercise fine-tunes our personality, making people pause and listen when we speak. That's because the knowledge in this book series will appeal to most people, and this exercise powers up style with substance.

These stories and explorations will make you look at the world through the eyes of an entrepreneur and observe opportunities to solve problems everywhere around you. Included with this story, is a set of questions to jog your thinking, and an activity for you to go on a journey of discovery, somewhat like an investigative journalist. After you read this book, you can continue learning about more lessons drawn from this book through additional programs offered by AlligatorZone online.

LIFE-LESSONS: With this exploration-book and program, readers will understand, among other things, that

- opportunities to improve things and make a difference exist all around us
- industries require a variety of skills
- there is something to learn even from the most mundane things around us
- the world is an encyclopedia, when we don't hesitate to ask questions
- with practice, one can learn to ask the right questions and solve problems
- persistent efforts can accumulate to grand outcomes despite humble beginnings
- your voice matters
- even learning to think like an innovator makes one a standout leader
- mindfulness is possible in everyday activities
- understanding a company and its leaders makes us better consumers and investors
- those who make a difference do it regardless of their circumstances, and
- curiosity, listening and observation are super-powers that we all have and can use everyday

Enjoy more advanced explorations and collaborative learning that we bring to you by extending stories from this book to an online environment as a member of AlligatorZone. Visit AlligatorZone.org for more.

Have fun with this story and exploration.

Ramesh Sambasivan
Instructional Designer
AlligatorZone® Academy
April 30, 2020



The pinnacle.

(To be read aloud to an audience at home, in school, or online)



Once upon a time, on a small farm in Lewis County, New York, there lived a Quaker family, the Hunts. In fact, Sherman and Rachel Hunt, were farmers who belonged to a branch of Quakers called the Hicksite Quakers. They lived in Martinsburg. That is where their oldest child Walter was born on July 29, 1796.

Walter was the oldest of several children, and was raised in humble surroundings. He studied in a one-room school in the rural community. He left formal schooling in his early teens and became a farmer. It is said that he earned a degree in masonry later on and tried land speculation. However, for someone lacking in formal education, Walter would grow up and do work that will touch human lives in fascinating ways. Walter was a relentless tinkerer and very curious about everything around him. He started helping people around him solving their problems with his mechanical skills.

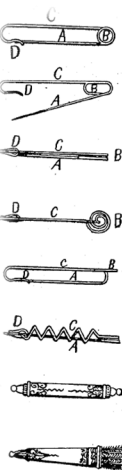
Walter started his life's greatest work as an inventor by helping out the owner and the workers of a nearby textile mill where many of his family members worked. Sadly, he was left off a patent that they filed for his invention that improved the flax spinning machine in their textile mill. However, Walter never seems to have stopped thinking of ways to make things that helped people. He created a better flax spinning machine, won a patent for it, and set about looking for investors in New York City. Walter's humble background seems to have come in the way of his ability to find investors in the big city.

Walter's most known for the story of how he came up with an invention just to pay of a \$15 debt that he owed to a draftsman for some earlier mechanical design work. The draftsman J.R. Chapin was harassing Walter for his payment. Walter didn't have the money to pay him. Walter had to find a way to make money to pay off the fifteen dollars. As he was thinking about how to do it, he began playing with a piece of wire, twisting it around in different patterns. In a matter of just three hours, Walter Hunt came up with an invention that would eventually touch everyone's lives in the world. He found that he could twist the wire to create a pin with built-in tension, that would fasten a ticket onto a fabric and do it in a safe manner without hurting the fingers of the seamstresses. He filed for a patent, in which he called it an 'Improvement in the Make or Form of the Dress Pin'. On April 10, 1849, Walter Hunt was awarded a patent for this invention.

This was the original 'safety pin' that is commonly seen in households. Walter's invention seems to have withstood the test of time. In almost two hundred years since its invention, the safety pin has not changed in how it works. The safety pin has brought in millions of dollars for manufacturers over the years.

Usually, at this point in a product's story, the inventor's fortunes change dramatically. However, Walter seems to have faced other hurdles. Remember the \$15 that he still owed the draftsman? Walter could not afford to wait to find investors to make and sell the safety pin for tons of money. Nor could he afford to wait for a higher bid for his patent. Like his other inventions, Walter promptly sold the rights to his patent — for a mere \$400. Walter's immediate need was to pay off his debt and to feed his family. The patent for the pin was eventually bought by W.R. Grace and Company, a large corporation that made millions from making and selling Walter Hunt's invention.

Always curious, Walter Hunt was a keen observer of the world around him. He kept inventing several things that changed industries and made our lives better and safer. One competitor with whom Walter had a dispute over a patent, was quoted as saying that Walter was never interested in making money from his patents. He was said to be disinterested in the art of self-promotion. He made very little money from his inventions, even though subsequent buyers profited handsomely. He did not even patent some of his inventions. Walter Hunt died at the age of 63 in relative obscurity without much money, despite being credited for 28 patents and many unpatented inventions. The safety pin wasn't the pinnacle of Hunt's creativity, but its simple elegance has made it an iconic artifact, even defining culture by becoming a symbol of protests and solidarity in various parts of the world — a pinnacle for all pins, so far.



Quiz your audience.

*This performance task is mainly for the younger members of AlligatorZone®.
(Your audience could be a family member, a classmate, a teacher or an observer).*



One of the most prolific inventors of our time was Walter Hunt, the inventor of the safety pin. He died at the age of 63. In what year did he pass away? (Don't use a calculator)

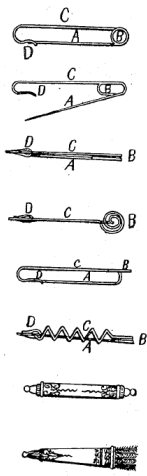
Which company eventually bought the rights to Walter Hunt's patent for the safety pin?

The safety pin seems to have withstood the test of time because of its elegant design, its simplicity and ease of manufacturing it, and its utility. From a very young age, Walter Hunt, who invented the safety pin had trained his mind to observe the world and identify problems to solve. In how many hours of tinkering with a piece of wire did Walter Hunt invent the safety pin?

How old was Walter Hunt when he was awarded the patent for the safety pin?

Next?

Continue to the next page for participating in an exploration, as part of the premium AlligatorZone plan or go online to our learning community and share your thoughts.

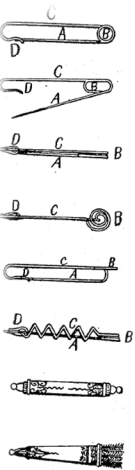


AlligatorZone[®] Exploration

*Note down your responses, start or join a discussion in our learners' online community.
(This performance task is for older students and life-long learners at AlligatorZone.)*



1. Try to get a hold of a safety pin. Observe it closely. Without breaking it apart, can you sketch the shape of the components that make a safety pin?
Go to our online forum for links that show the cap of the safety pin when it is flat and stamped out of metal strips.
2. Think of how the safety pin is used? Does it have any limitations? List them.
3. When Walter Hunt invented the safety pin, it was an improvement on previous pins being used by seamstresses, and dress pins. Think about how you can improve the safety pin to overcome the limitations you may have found.
4. Some things are really small, and finding them when we need them is a challenge. Think of how you store safety pins in your home.
5. Think of where you or your family members last purchased safety pins. Think of how they are packed and sold by the stores. How can you make that better?
6. Walter's patent was eventually purchased by W.R. Grace and Company. Do you know the brand of safety pins you use or is it just a commodity? Has the brand name of a safety pin ever mattered? When is the last time you have seen a commercial for a safety pin?
7. If you were to rekindle an interest in safety pins, what would you do? Think of how different movements have used safety pins to make a public statement or to support a cause. If you could use the safety pin to create a new movement, what would it be?
8. We usually look for a safety pin only when we are in a bind, or when we need them. Think of how we can make safety pins more easily accessible when we are on the go. For example, would it make sense for garment manufacturers to include a safety pin in every piece of clothing they sell, just like they leave extra buttons on the inside of a shirt?
9. Summarize your findings and observations, and post them on AlligatorZone's online learning platform. Share your findings and learn collaboratively with our online community of life-long learners. Visit AlligatorZone.org for more.



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Visit our website <https://alligatorzone.org>



Tips for a Parent, Teacher or a Mentor

(For mentors and coaches using AlligatorZone's Premium Plans)



Here are time-tested tips for mentors who may want to steer the learning at home or in class.

- 1) **Keep it simple.** If the suggested activity calls for going to a specific location, try slipping the field activity into a routine trip to a store or a mall, and make it an ‘oh-by-the-way-let-us-stop-and-look’ kind of detour on an errand, rather than making a special trip for it. The idea is to remove any semblance of pressure to perform and focus purely on the joy of learning something new in a shared experience for a student and the teacher.
- 2) **Go Improv.** Avoid planning and scheduling it in advance. Our goal with the activities is to help children make learning a life-long pursuit and a hobby, not a checklist item that will result in angst until it is completed and cleared.
 - Where an activity involves having a conversation with a stranger at a facility or a manager, consider making it a walk-in experience.
 - This improv-like approach, we believe, teaches the child to be comfortable with uncertain outcomes (“Sorry, the manager is out sick.”) and improvise. They learn to play the hand they are dealt in the project (just like in life). They learn to find alternative sources of information and piece things together.
 - We believe it helps them learn how to focus on things they can control and not worry about things beyond their control.
 - We believe that it teaches them to find insights amid chaos and stay focused on the task at hand despite distractions.
- 4) **Learning, not shopping.** We strive to design activities that do not require making purchases. We strive not to make field activities specific to any particular brand. Use on-site observation to complete the learning with your student. Do not make a purchase for this purpose.
- 5) **Feel free to make a script, if it helps.** If you prefer to schedule a meeting in advance with a store manager or supervisor, prepare a script and encourage your student to be a part of the initial phone request while you stay on the call. Let the student own the process. In our recent summer workshop under the coach’s supervision and guidance we had the 11-year old student conduct a market research. He told us later that it was the first time he had left a voice message and his first time on a business call. The sense of accomplishment and the confidence gained, were priceless.
- 6) **Let the child lead the conversation.** If the student is not yet ready to speak and start a discussion on topics in our activities, try making it a 3-way conversation and keep it casual, referring decision-making to the child (“What do you think?” or “Does that sound reasonable?”) so everyone knows that the student is in charge of the discussion. After the first few times we often see kids lead and handle conversations with aplomb. Let there be no pressure on the student to produce a certain result. Let there be no pressure to use big words or business jargon. If a store owner or employee uses industry parlance or acronyms, seek clarification so the child knows there are no dumb questions.
- 7) **Going off-script is perfectly fine.** Allow the students to find alternative sources of information *under your supervision*, and let them piece things together for their learning. They might find something on TV or Netflix, Youtube, Pinterest or TikTok (if they already use those sites and apps) and be able to connect the dots to fresh insights for improved findings.

Last, but not the least, no matter what, keep it light-hearted and make it a spontaneous and shared experience for both, you and the student.



Sources

(These are the publicly available sources used to compile this story)

Sources:

Please visit AlligatorZone's online learning community to see links to the sources used to pull this story together.

You can also enjoy a curated collection of links to news reports, articles and videos for a deeper and wider understanding of the subject of the story.

