

Name:..... Date:.....

Cleaning chemistry

Soap was 'invented' by the Romans about 5000 years ago. The word 'soap' comes from Mount Sapo, where the Romans used to sacrifice animals on fires of burning wood. Alkaline substances are found in wood ash. Rain washed animal fats and wood ash into the River Tiber. This made a soapy solution good for washing.

The history of soap

Soapmaking has been known in Britain since the Middle Ages (13th–15th centuries). Soap was used in making cloth, not for washing people. Soap removes natural grease from wool, making the fibres easier to handle and to dye different colours. Soap was made in Spain, Italy and France using olive oil. Castile in Spain and Marseille in France became famous for their high quality soaps.

In the 16th–17th centuries, soap was made from whale fat (blubber), animal fat (tallow) and olive oil. Tallow was also used to make candles, which were the main type of lighting. The cost of candles increased because so much tallow was bought by soapmakers. Poor people could not afford candles. To solve this, the government banned tallow for soapmaking and taxed soap as a luxury item.

Indoor washing and bathing became popular in the 19th century, as the Industrial Revolution made running water and plumbing available. Gas lighting became popular, replacing candles. The tax on soap was stopped in 1853. This gave soapmakers freedom to make soaps for washing people. Soapmaking is now a multi-million pound business!



Pear's Soap
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Sunlight Soap
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Some famous soaps are:

- Palmolive, first made by Johnson in America from palm and olive oils
- Pears, first made in 1789 by Andrew Pears, a barber, as a soap kind to faces
- Sunlight, made by William Lever from cottonseed oil, tallow and resin
- Lifebuoy, a soap made from phenol, an antiseptic, also made by Lever from about 1900
- Wright's Coal Tar soap made in 1883 using phenol as an antiseptic.

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What you do

1. Underline the names of the substances in the passage used to make soap.
2. Use these words with others from the passage to explain why soap was taxed:
competition, high prices, demand.

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3. Explain why soap was not made for washing people until after 1853.

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4. Why do you think people liked to use soap for washing?

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5. Lifebuoy soap used to be advertised using the slogan 'For Preservation of Health'. Why was this a good slogan?

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6. Which of the famous soaps are made today? Go to your supermarket/chemist and find out.

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