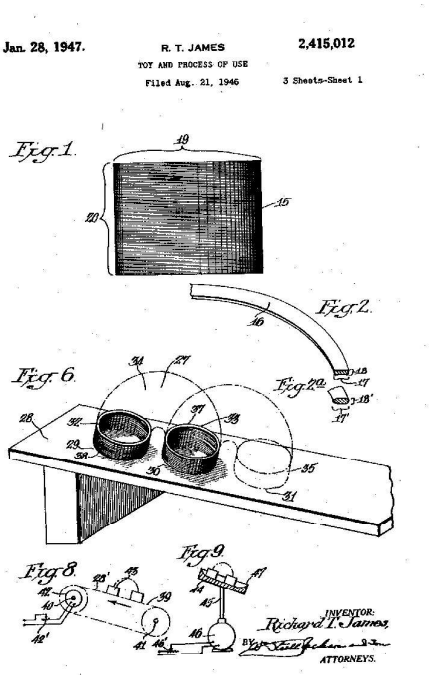

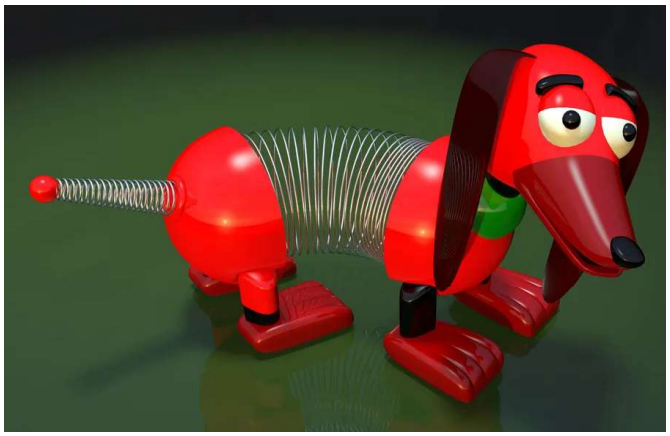

Left: Richard James' "Toy and Process of Use," patented January 28, 1947 U.S. Patent 2,415,012

Right: The Slinky dog had been popular in mid-century homes before its cameo in the 1995 movie *Toy Story*. Aykut67/iStock

"The Accidental Invention of the Slinky"

Adapted from: https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/accidental-invention-slinky-180973016/

The coiled toy certainly is a marvelous, if simplistic, thing. In 1943, mechanical engineer Richard James was designing a device that the Navy could use to secure equipment and shipments on ships while they rocked at sea. As the story goes, he dropped the coiled wires he was tinkering with on the ground and watched them tumble end-over-end across the floor.

After dropping the coil, he could have gotten up, frustrated, and chased after it without a second thought. But he—as inventors often do—had a second thought: perhaps this would make a good toy. A lot of inventors talk about keeping an open mind and maintaining playful habits.

Richard James went home and told his wife, Betty James, about his idea. In 1944, she scoured the dictionary for a fitting name, landing on “slinky,” which means “sleek and sinuous in movement or outline.” Together, with a $500 loan, they co-founded James Industries in 1945, the year the Slinky hit store shelves.

At first, folks didn’t know what to make of it. How could a bundle of wire be a toy? The Jameses managed to convince a Gimbel’s department store in Philadelphia to let them do a demonstration during the Christmas shopping season in 1945. There were 400 Slinkys stocked that day, and they were gone in less than two hours—selling for $1 a pop, or about $14 in today’s value.

Richard James received a patent for the Slinky but it was Betty that masterminded the toy’s success. In 1960, Betty, a new single mother with six kids, took a big risk on the toy and waged the mortgage of their home to go to a toy show in New York in 1963. During the Vietnam War, soldiers would sometimes use a Slinky as a portable, extendable antenna for their radios, fastening one end to themselves and tossing the other end over a tree branch to get a clear signal. The Slinky has even gone to space. Astronaut Margaret Rhea Seddon demonstrated the Slinky’s behavior in zero gravity during a telecast from the Discovery Space Shuttle in 1985. "It won't slink at all," Seddon said in the telecast. "It sort of droops." The Slinky took many forms too, most famously the Slinky dog, which had been popular in mid-century homes before its cameo in the 1995 movie *Toy Story*. Before *Toy Story*, annual sales were only in the hundreds, reports *Popular Mechanics*. The movie boosted the sales of the toy, which James Industries patented in 1997, once again.

When the Slinky was inducted into the National Toy Hall of Fame in 2000, more than 250 million had been sold to date. “If you want to inspire another generation, you want it to be accessible,” Smith explains. “Seeing people start with toys shows you don’t have to be Edison or Steve Jobs to be an inventor. It doesn’t have to be an iPhone. It can be something as simple as a Slinky.”

1) Read the chart below and carefully read the dates. Which sentence accurately completes the chart above? [CCSS3]

1. **Slinky was invented for the Navy but instead became a toy. (1943)**
2.
3. **Slinky went to outer space with Margaret Rhea Seddon. (1985)**
4. **Featured as "Slinky Dog" character in Toy Story movie(s). (1955)**

a. Used in Vietnam War as an extendable and portable antenna for radios. (1955-1975)

b. Used in World War I for soldiers to play with. (1914-1918)

c. Slinky was inducted into the National Toy Hall of Fame. (2000)

d. None of the above.

2) Which statement best supports this article's main idea? [CCSS2]

a. **"**When the Slinky was inducted into the National Toy Hall of Fame in 2000, more than 250 million had been sold to date." - Paragraph 6

b. "The Slinky took many forms too, most famously the Slinky dog, which had been popular in mid-century homes before its cameo in the 1995 movie *Toy Story*." - Paragraph 5

c. "After dropping the coil, he could have gotten up, frustrated, and chased after it without a second thought. But he—as inventors often do—had a second thought: perhaps this would make a good toy." - Paragraph 2

d. "The coiled toy certainly is a marvelous, if simplistic, thing. In 1943, mechanical engineer Richard James was designing a device that the Navy could use to secure equipment and shipments on ships while they rocked at sea." - Paragraph 1