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A Time Capsule From 1883

by Liana Mahoney

Imagine you found a mysterious bottle. On the outside is a label that reads the year 1883. What's inside?

An object that contains a sampling of items collected from a certain time period is called a time capsule. Time capsules are often found in the walls of old buildings, buried underground, or washed ashore.



As long as the maker of the time capsule was careful in choosing a suitable container that kept out moisture, air, and most light, the items inside will be preserved enough to get a glimpse of what life and times were like long ago. Opening a time capsule can be a very exciting thing because it's full of surprises! So, what might be in a time capsule from the 1883?

A newspaper from 1883 might include articles about important leaders and events of the time. Chester B. Arthur was the 21st President of the United States. Queen Victoria was the queen of England. Buffalo Bill's first Wild West show opened in Omaha, Nebraska, and the Metropolitan Opera House opened for the very first time in New York. Sadly, Sojourner Truth, a famous abolitionist and author, died at the age of 96 that year. The very last known quagga, a sub-species of zebra, died in a zoo in Amsterdam in 1883 and became extinct. But perhaps the most tragic headline that might be in a newspaper from 1883 would read something like this: "Indonesian Volcano Erupts, Killing More Than 40,000 People." People all over the world mourned this terrible tragedy when Krakatoa erupted.

What else might be in this time capsule? Perhaps money? In 1883, a coin called

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the Liberty Head nickel was common, as was the Morgan silver dollar. There was also a nickel made with no words printed on it to indicate its worth. This coin is known as the "No-Cents" nickel. A postage stamp from this year would show its price on the front: 2¢! All of these could be in a time capsule from 1883, as could several newly-invented items, such as toilet paper (invented in 1880), blue jeans (1873), light bulbs (1879), and an electric iron (1882). The iron probably wouldn't have been put in a time capsule, though. It weighed over 15 pounds! There might be photographs included in the time capsule, but only a few, since cameras were rare and photos were so expensive at the time. Man-made plastic had been invented about twenty years earlier, so there might even be a few small plastic items included.

Surprised? You might be more surprised to know what items could not have been in the time capsule. These had not yet been invented by the year 1883, but were invented shortly after: Coca-Cola (1886), cotton candy (1897), ball-point pens (1888), zippers (1893), radios (1893), roller coasters (1898), and remote controls (1898). All of these, however, could be in a time capsule from the year 1900. Well, not the roller coaster... it wouldn't fit! But, this just goes to show how very much things - and the way that people live - can change in just a few years!

Time capsules have been found all around the world. Perhaps someday you might even be lucky enough to find one yourself. In the meantime, how about putting together a time capsule of your own to leave for a future generation to enjoy? Ask each member of your family to add one or two things that show what life was like in today's time period. Be sure to choose a good container that will keep your items safe and sound for years to come. Label your container with the year, and consider adding a note inside to tell a little bit about yourself and your life. Who knows? Maybe hundreds of years in the future, someone will delight in opening your time capsule!

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- 1) Which is not the writer's purpose in writing the passage?
 - a. To educate the reader about a time capsule and the tremendous purpose it serves.
 - b. To encourage children to put together a time capsule so that they can influence future generations.
 - c. To express strong disapproval of including Coca-Cola and cotton candy in a time capsule.
 - d. To provide children with an insight into what things to include when they make a time capsule.

- 2) What is a time capsule and what is its purpose?

- 3) Why does the author give an example of a time capsule from 1883? How effective is this example?

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4) Complete the sentences.

a. People find time capsules in the walls of old buildings, buried underground, or _____.

b. The author refers to the Indonesian volcanic eruption as a very _____ incident.

c. The fact that Coca-cola (1886) wouldn't be included in the 1883 time capsule shows how significantly things can change in a short _____ of time.

5) If you had to put together a time capsule of your own today to leave for your future generations, what will it contain? Why?

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- 2) What is a time capsule and what is its purpose?

Time capsule is an object that contains a sampling of items collected from a certain time period. Its purpose is to provide a glimpse of what life and times were like long ago.

- 3) Why does the author give an example of a time capsule from 1883? How effective is this example?

The author gives an example of a time capsule from 1883 to illustrate the concept and show what things are likely to be contained in it. She gives elaborate details of what articles will be part of the newspaper which will be included in the time capsule. It'll talk about Chester B. Arthur and Queen Victoria. It'll also have the news about the Indonesian tragedy. The time capsule will include a coin and stamp which were used in that era. The writer then talks about certain things like Coca-cola and cotton candy, which won't find a place in the capsule because these were not prevalent during that time. Overall, the example is spot on as it helps the reader understand what a time capsule will look like and what things it will include.

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4) Complete the sentences.

a. People find time capsules in the walls of old buildings, buried underground, or beaches.

b. The author refers to the Indonesian volcanic eruption as a very tragic incident.

c. The fact that Coca-cola (1886) wouldn't be included in the 1883 time capsule shows how significantly things can change in a short span of time.

5) If you had to put together a time capsule of your own today to leave for your future generations, what will it contain? Why?

Answers may vary.
