

49 - Balloons

Did you know the earliest balloons were made out of animal parts? Thankfully, we use less gross materials now, but who made the first balloon float & why? Why are balloons used at parties & what other uses of balloons are there?

Hundreds of years ago, the Aztecs of Central America are said to have twisted cat bowels into animal shapes and filled them with air. In old Europe, entertainers had fun using balloons made with animal intestines, bladders, and stomachs.

Thanks to science, your birthday party is a lot less gross, and a lot more colorful. The development of rubber 200 years ago changed the way balloons were made. In 1824, a scientist named Michael Faraday created the first rubber balloon to help him study Hydrogen. He took two sheets of rubber, stuck them together and filled them with the lightweight gas. Faraday was impressed by the rubber's elasticity.

This successful experiment created a brand new balloon and in 1825, rubber manufacturer Thomas Hancock began selling do-it-yourself balloon-making kits to kids. At the turn of the century, balloon makers were starting to use latex rubber, as they do today, but the balloons themselves still looked pretty bland. That changed in the mid-1930's with the first colored balloons, sold at the Chicago World's Fair.

Things You'll Learn

1. What gas was originally used to make balloons float, and why did they stop using it?
2. What are some other important uses for balloons besides just for parties?
3. How can a balloon be used for transportation?

Activities

1. No need to wait for your next party, [Here](#) is a fun balloon game you can play now!
2. Have you ever played balloon hockey? Check [this](#) out!
3. Grab some Legos and make your own balloon powered car! You could even make a race track or pile up some blocks for your car to crash into. You can find the instructions [here](#).

Additional Resources

Hydrogen is very dangerous so PLEASE DO NOT TRY THIS AT HOME! However, it is fun to watch trained scientists blow up Hydrogen balloons. Hydrogen was used in early balloons and blimps to allow them to float. Unlike Helium, Hydrogen can easily catch fire. Hydrogen is no longer used to make balloons float but it is commonly used in science experiments in high school and college. See what happens when a Hydrogen balloon gets close to fire [here](#).

Kid News

Is it cold or warm where you live? How would you like to live in Yakutsk, Russia? It is one of the coldest cities on Earth, experiencing daily winter temperatures of -30 degrees Fahrenheit with colder days regularly hitting -59 degrees Fahrenheit. Unfortunately, school is not canceled until it reaches -67 degrees. The local people even work and shop at outdoor markets during the winter. You can read more about this frozen land [here](#).¹

¹ This activity guide is for the Who Smarted? podcast www.WhoSmarted.com