

First Place 2009 SACP Middle School Essay Contest

How a Toilet Saved Your Life: The Story of an Underrated Invention

A popular setting for science fiction novels is a world where all technology has failed. These stories point out how our lives would change without the cars we use for transportation, the refrigerators that keep our food cold, and the computer that is being used right now to type this essay. If you want to know how life would be different without these inventions, I suggest that you read a few science fiction books. I, however, am going to describe the impact of a technology that rarely, if ever, gets any credit: the toilet.

For centuries, humans lived in extremely squalid conditions that would appall anyone living today. Little effort was made to dispose of our waste; the streets were covered with piles of rotting feces, and infection raged around the world. From medieval times to the 1800's, many epidemic diseases, such as cholera, were connected to drinking water contaminated by sewage. With the invention of the toilet, however, drinking water finally became safe, and civilization took a major leap forward. This innovation was so effective, in fact, that the world population of 500 million in the year 1500 has skyrocketed to its present amount of 6.5 billion people. In other words, there are thirteen times as many humans now as there were five hundred years ago!

Without the toilet, our lives would be much different because many people that are currently alive would have never been born. If a few key people, such as Thomas Edison or Alexander Graham Bell, had died from diseases related to bad hygiene, we would be without many of our most important modern conveniences. If only one of your sixty-four great-great-great-great-grandparents had died of cholera, you would not exist! Whether you call it a potty, urinal, W.C., loo, lavatory, john, outhouse, or latrine, the toilet has played an influential role in human history, and many people would not be here without it.

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