

# 1970s fads – pet rocks

**Pet rocks were very popular for about 6 months in the 1970s. Learn more about pet rocks by making one.**

You will need:

- a clean rock
- a box
- decoration for your rock – paint, fake hair, plastic eyes, etc.

Decorate your rock however you like. You may also want to make the box look like a cage or a pet carrier. Now, pretend the rock is a pet and write a user's manual for your rock. How often do you need to feed and water the rock? How often does it need to go for a walk?

## Questions

1. Do you think anyone today would pay money to buy your pet rock as a gift?

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2. Why do you think this was such a popular gift in the 1970s?

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3. One reason why the pet rock was popular in the 1970s was that it gave people a few minutes of cheap, meaningless fun in difficult times. They could laugh at the pet rock and take their minds off any problems. Think up an advertising campaign and slogan to sell your pet rock to people today. How would you convince people to buy it? Do people today need cheap, meaningless fun as much as people in the 1970s?

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### Age range

- Years 3/4 (SP4/5).
- Years 5/6 (SP6/7).

### Resources

Copies of the worksheet, clean rock, small box, pens, pencils, crayons, paints and brushes, paper or computer (for writing the manual).

### Using the worksheet

California entrepreneur Gary Dahl was joking around with friends one night in 1975 about the perfect pet. It wouldn't eat, make noise, or need to be potty trained. Dahl joked that a rock would fit the bill. Everyone laughed, but within two weeks, he had written *The Pet Rock Training Manual* and marketed the idea at a trade show. A story in 'Newsweek' magazine and an appearance on a popular America TV show followed, and, within a few months, a million pet rocks had been sold, making Dahl a millionaire.

Not much was ever heard of Dahl again, but he is considered a source of much motivation among entrepreneurs and people trying to get rich with silly ideas. The story of the pet rock illustrates several things about entrepreneurship. One is that almost any idea can be successful if the timing is right. Another is that people will buy almost anything.

You may want to begin your study of this topic by discussing fads with students and why some useless things become so popular. The pet rock would seem to be a complete waste of money, but it made people smile, at least briefly, and that was what they needed at the time, so they bought it. You may like to discuss with students what they think people today need.

### Younger students

Students may want to put together a "TV" ad for their rock and perform it for the class. Or they could put together a magazine ad and show it to the class. Classmates can decide which ads would convince them to buy a pet rock.

### Outcomes

The students can:

- Understand what a fad is.
- Think about how marketing works.
- Learn about one of the fads of the 1970s.

### Older students

The students may like to use the pet rock as an example and then design a completely different project. They could think up an idea for something they think people need and then make an ad and present it to the class. Classmates could decide if they are convinced to buy the item.

### Outcomes

The students can:

- Understand what a fad is.
- Learn more about what people in the 1970s thought by understanding a popular fad.
- Learn how marketing works to convince people to buy things they might not need.