

Just What the Doctor Ordered

When Carol-Ann Normandin was almost 4 years old, a terrible disease changed her life. At first, the symptoms were ordinary: headaches, fever, chills, and stomachaches.

Because those symptoms didn't go away, Carol-Ann's mother had an idea that her daughter was suffering from something more than the flu. It was 1948, and the local health department had sent notices to parents warning them about a disease that left children paralyzed and even dead.

An easy test would confirm Mom's worst fear. She took Carol-Ann's head and pushed it slowly toward the girl's chest. A sharp pain usually meant the disease had taken hold.

"I screamed so loud that I raised the roof," Normandin told *Weekly Reader Senior Edition*. "Once I screamed, [my mother] called the doctor."

The disease went by the name of **poliomyelitis**. Carol-Ann's mother and millions of others simply called the affliction *polio*.

"[My parents] took me to the Toronto Sick Children's Hospital," Normandin said. "I don't remember much else. I remember being in an **isolation ward**¹ looking out the window at my father."



AFP

Jonas Salk invented the vaccine that has almost wiped out polio.

¹ **isolation ward:** room or section in a hospital where patients with contagious diseases are kept away from visitors and other patients

Miracle Vaccine

You might not have heard of polio before. That's because over 50 years ago, on April 12, 1955, the U.S. government approved the use of a **vaccine**² that stopped people from getting the disease. Invented by Jonas Salk, the vaccine all but **eradicated**³ polio worldwide.

To commemorate the anniversary of the vaccine's approval, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C., had an exhibit called "Whatever Happened to Polio?"

Searching for a Cure

Polio has been around since ancient times. But the disease reemerged with a deadly **vengeance**⁴ in the 20th century. The disease is caused by a virus that attacks and destroys the nerve cells in the spinal cord and brain that control muscles in the arms, legs and stomach. Many of those who survive the disease are crippled for life.

From the early 1900s to the mid-1950s, most polio victims were children. More than 80 percent of the victims were under 5 years old. The worst year of the epidemic was 1952, David Rose of the March of Dimes told *Weekly Reader Senior Edition*. There were 57,000 cases that year, he said.

American families were scared out of their wits. Many moved to the mountains and to the deserts, thinking they would escape the illness. Parents refused to let their kids go outside to play.

The disease was so terrible that in 1938, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose legs had been paralyzed by polio in 1921, declared war on the disease. He urged scientists to find a cure.

By 1952, Salk had succeeded in producing an experimental vaccine. Two years later, Salk got permission to vaccinate 1.8 million kids as a test. Those who received the medicine never got polio.

² **vaccine:** a preparation of killed, weakened, or fully infectious microbes that is given (by injection or by mouth) to produce or increase immunity to a particular disease

³ **eradicate:** do away with completely; eliminate

⁴ **vengeance:** punishing force



WHO

A child receives a polio vaccine by mouth.

Disease on Display

The Smithsonian's exhibit looked at the history of polio and Salk's development of a vaccine. Among the objects on display were the leg braces worn by Roosevelt.

Although polio has disappeared from much of the world, it still threatens children in Africa and Southeast Asia. The exhibit's focus was on current efforts to immunize children in those places.

"One of the Blessed"

Carol-Ann Normandin, who is now in her fifties, said it's important that the Smithsonian highlighted the achievements of Salk and other scientists.

"It pleases me a lot that there is an exhibit at the Smithsonian about the polio vaccine," she said at the time of the exhibit. "It is good to remind people about the past so that we can appreciate the present and protect the future."

Normandin says she's "one of the blessed." She regained the use of her legs a year after becoming infected. She never used a wheelchair or wore braces. Today, though, she suffers from problems caused by the disease, such as **arthritis**, a bone disease.

"Today, kids don't have a clue about polio," she said. "When I hear about people who don't get the vaccine, it angers me. There's no reason for people to get polio today."

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. According to the passage, Carol-Ann Normandin had all of the following symptoms EXCEPT

- A headache
- B stomachache
- C fever and chills
- D runny nose

2. The passage describes the problem of the polio disease. How was the problem solved?

- A Kids were not allowed to go outside.
- B Americans moved to the mountains.
- C Jonas Salk invented a vaccine.
- D The Smithsonian held an exhibit.

3. After reading the passage, what can you conclude about Carol-Ann Normandin?

- A She discovered that she is related to Jonas Salk.
- B She is in great health today because she had polio.
- C She does not want kids to receive the polio vaccine.
- D She is grateful to have survived polio.

4. Read this sentence from the passage: "Carol-Ann's mother and millions of others simply called the affliction polio."

In this sentence, the word **affliction** means

- A a lack of motivation or willingness to try new things
- B something that causes pain or suffering
- C a difficult achievement or accomplishment
- D knowledge or experience that is sought after

5. The primary purpose of this passage is to describe

- A polio and how the disease was eradicated
- B how Carol-Ann's mother knew her daughter was sick
- C why the Smithsonian Institution is so important
- D President Franklin D. Roosevelt's paralysis from polio

6. Where is the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History?

7. What might have happened if the polio vaccine had not been invented? Please cite evidence from the text to support your answer.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Many American families moved to the mountains and deserts _____ they were scared their kids would get polio.

- A although
- B because
- C however
- D therefore

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

On April 12, 1955, the U.S. government approved the use of the polio vaccine to stop people from getting the disease.

Who? _____

(did) What? approved the use of the polio vaccine

When? _____

Why? _____

10. **Vocabulary Word:** eradicate: to do away with completely.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____

Teacher Guide and Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 780

Featured Text Structure: Problem/Solution – the writer poses a problem and suggests possible solutions

Passage Summary: “Just What the Doctor Ordered” describes polio and how a vaccine all but eradicated the disease. The story also tells about an exhibit at the Smithsonian that commemorated the anniversary of the vaccine’s approval.

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- D **runny nose**

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6. Where is the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History?

Suggested answer: The Smithsonian is in Washington, D.C. [paragraph 8]

7. What might have happened if the polio vaccine had not been invented? Please cite evidence from the text to support your answer.

Suggested answer: If the polio vaccine had not been invented, millions more children might have been paralyzed or died from the disease. [paragraph 2] In 1954, the 1.8 million kids who received the vaccine didn't get polio. [paragraph 13]

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

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Who? **the U.S. government**

(did) What? approved the use of the polio vaccine

When? **on April 12, 1955**

Why? **to stop people from getting the disease**

10. **Vocabulary Word:** eradicate: to do away with completely.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.