

The First Computer

Vocabulary

store	to hold or keep until needed
digits	numbers from 0 to 9
retired	removed from use; no longer used

8 Many people have computers that fit on a
18 desk, in a briefcase, or even in a pocket. They
26 can carry their computers back and forth to
34 work. They can also use their computers on
41 buses and planes. They couldn't have done
47 these things with the first computer.

53 The first computer was **enormous!** It
62 weighed 30 tons, stood 18 feet high, and had
71 500 miles of wiring. Even its name was **huge**.
78 It was the Electronic Numerical Integrator and
83 Computer, called ENIAC for short.

89 This computer was built at the University
95 of Pennsylvania. The United States government
101 and the University of Pennsylvania developed
109 ENIAC to figure out the course of bombs
116 during the Second World War. Building it took
123 almost four years. Finally, on Valentine's Day
131 in 1946, the builders turned it on for the first
146 time, starting the computer age.

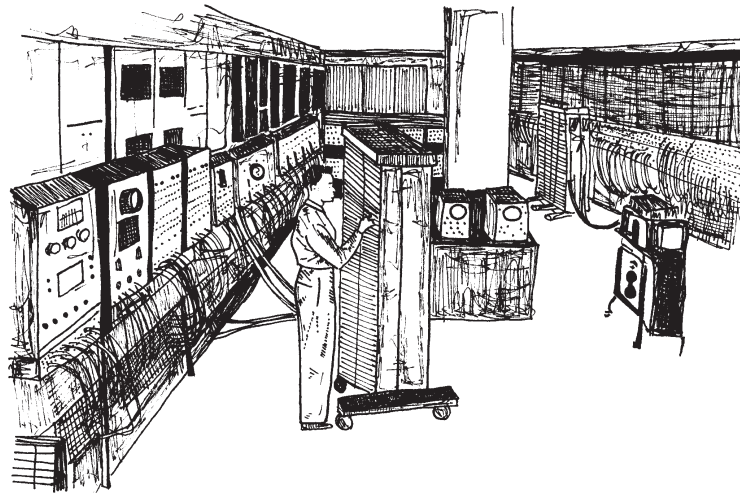
140 The first computer solved problems faster
146 than any person ever could. It could add 5,000

155 numbers in a second. It could multiply 300
163 numbers just as quickly.

167 As amazing as the first computer was, it
175 can't compare to today's computers. The
181 ENIAC could only **store 200 digits**. Today's
188 computers can store 16 million digits. In
195 addition, many of today's computers are 60,000
202 times faster than ENIAC was. Even some
209 calculators that would fit in your pocket are
217 more powerful than the **gigantic** ENIAC.

223 The **massive** machine was hard to use too.
231 It didn't have a keyboard. Engineers had to
239 rewire it for each new problem. It couldn't
247 print numbers or letters either. Instead, it used
255 flashing lights to signal its answers.

261 Even though modern computers are far
267 better, they are based on ideas that started with
276 ENIAC. Scientists used ENIAC for nine years.
283 They **retired** the computer in 1955. Now, parts
291 of the first computer are stored in the
299 Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C.
304



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Comprehension Questions

Identifying the main idea

1. What is the main idea of this story?
 - a. The first computer is now in a museum.
 - b. The first computer led to better computers.
 - c. The first computer was a massive machine.

Recalling a fact

2. Why was the first computer built?
 - a. to solve problems very quickly
 - b. to track bombs during World War II
 - c. to add and multiply large numbers

Getting meaning from the context

3. What does **course** mean in this story?
 - a. a class or area of study
 - b. the direction taken
 - c. a part of a meal

Making connections within the text

4. Why was ENIAC considered important enough to store in the Smithsonian Institute?
 - a. ENIAC tracked the course of bombs in World War II.
 - b. ENIAC led to the development of the modern computer.
 - c. ENIAC could solve problems faster than a person.

Summarizing information

9. Write a summary statement about the following facts: Modern computers are faster than ENIAC. Modern computers can store more digits than ENIAC. Modern computers are smaller than ENIAC. Modern computers are easier to use than ENIAC.
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Connecting the author's and the reader's ideas

5. How was the ENIAC computer like modern computers?
-
-
-

Developing vocabulary

6. ENIAC was a very large machine. Write the four words from the story that are used to describe the large size of ENIAC.
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-
-

Attending to details

7. How many digits could the first computer store?
-
-
-

Processing information

8. Why did scientists retire ENIAC?
-
-
-

Enrichment Activity

An acronym is a word formed from the first letters of several words. ENIAC is an acronym formed by the first letters of the Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer. Look in a dictionary to find out the words used when forming these two acronyms: RADAR and SCUBA. Write the words next to the acronym.