

The History of Cracker Jack

Cracker Jack was invented by Frederick Reuckheim, a successful popcorn salesman in Chicago, Illinois. Reuckheim wanted to stand out from the many other popcorn salesmen so he invented a product that included molasses-covered popcorn and peanuts. He named it Cracker Jack after one of his salesman exclaimed “that’s a Cracker Jack!” – which meant it was of excellent quality. Reuckheim packaged Cracker Jack in easy-to-sell wax-sealed cardboard boxes.

Reuckheim, however, got his big break when an actor named Jack Norworth published the famous song “*Take me out to the Ballgame*,” with its famous lyrics “buy me some peanuts and Cracker Jack” in 1908. This forever linked Reuckheim’s product and the popular sport of baseball. Ironically, Norworth had never even been to a baseball game.

In 1910, Reuckheim made the decision to include coupons within Cracker Jack boxes that could be redeemed for things like sewing machines or sets of silverware. Reuckheim’s best decision, however, came in 1912, when he replaced the coupons with packaged prizes that appealed to kids. Baseball cards, figurines, whistles, and puzzles were among the many prizes included over the years. Original Cracker Jack baseball cards sell for tens of thousands of dollars today! In 2016, it was announced that special QR codes would replace the traditional packaged prizes in future boxes of Cracker Jack.

1. How was Cracker Jack named?

- A. It was named after product
- B. It was named after a song
- C. It was named after something someone said about it
- D. It was named after crackers

2. What was ironic about the creation of “Take me out to the Ball Game?”

- A. It was about baseball
- B. It had a major effect on Cracker Jack
- C. It linked Cracker Jack with baseball
- D. It was written by someone who’d never been to a baseball game

3. What question is answered in the third paragraph?

- A. What can you get from the Cracker Jack QR codes?
- B. How much do original Cracker Jack puzzles sell for?
- C. How did Reuckheim make Cracker Jack appeal to kids?
- D. Who was Jack Norworth?

4. What is a “big break” as described below?

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- A. opportunity
- B. something that breaks
- C. warning
- D. final chance

5. Which of the following happened last?

- A. Cracker Jack was packaged in wax-sealed cardboard boxes
- B. 1912
- C. Coupons were added to Cracker Jack boxes
- D. Cracker Jack was included in “*Take me out to the Ballgame*”

6. Why did Frederick Reuckheim want to stand out?

- A. Because he knew Cracker Jack would be very popular
- B. Because he thought he could find a way to make his product popular with kids
- C. Because it was tough to earn money in Chicago
- D. Because there were a lot of popcorn salesmen

7. Which of the following IS NOT true about the traditional packaged prizes found within Cracker Jack boxes?

- A. Some are very valuable today
- B. Before there were packaged prizes there were QR codes
- C. Kids like them
- D. Whistles, puzzles, and baseball cards were among the different prizes that could be found in Cracker Jack boxes.