

Reading Lesson

B1 Services: Self-Service Shopping

Reading

Read the text. What do you know about the history of grocery stores?

Self-Service Shopping

When the first Piggly Wiggly store opened in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1916, it was the start of a shopping revolution. It was the first self-service grocery store. That meant that customers came to the store, took the products from the shelves, and placed them in a metal basket. They then went to a cash desk to pay for the products. Shopping like that may seem familiar, because that's how many of us shop every day. However, in those days it was a completely new experience. To understand how new it was, you need to know how people had shopped before then.



Usually, stores had a counter, with the customer on one side and the storekeeper on the other. All the products were on shelves behind the storekeeper. The customer had to ask the storekeeper, or a clerk, for each item individually, and the storekeeper then placed the item on the counter or into the customer's bag. For items such as flour and coffee, the storekeeper or clerk had to weigh each order individually. They then had to wrap each order. It was a very slow process, and unhappy customers spent a long time waiting in line because the storekeeper could only serve one person at a time. It was also hard to make buying decisions because customers couldn't usually see any price information.

That all began to change when Clarence Saunders opened the first Piggly Wiggly store. He introduced a number of things that are still with us today. First of all, there was a clear entrance and exit so that customers all took the same path through the store. The products were placed on shelves where customers could choose what they wanted. Each product had a price tag on it so that customers could clearly see how much it was. Metal baskets were provided for each customer to carry the products through the store. For the customer, it meant less waiting time and the ability to compare prices. For the storekeeper, it meant that many more customers could be served at the same time. The idea was a success, and soon many more Piggly Wiggly stores opened around the country.

By 1930, the idea had become very popular, and the first supermarket opened in Long Island, New York. Two different inventions made this possible. The first was the automobile. It was now easy for people to travel to a large store on the edge of town and take their groceries home. The second was the refrigerator. Customers could now buy a week's groceries at the same time and keep them fresh. Today, grocery stores continue to use new technology, such as self-scanning and automatic checkout, but the basic idea was created by Clarence Saunders a little over 100 years ago.

counter (n): a surface, usually long and flat, where customers are served or business is conducted

automatic (adj): something that works by itself, not by people

Reading Lesson

Vocabulary

Choose the correct option.

1. That smell is ...! Are you baking a chocolate cake?
a popular b familiar c similar
2. Can you get some ...? I'm going to make some bread.
a sugar b flour c spices
3. When you buy some products, they ... them to see how heavy they are.
a weigh b measure c count
4. On the fish counter, they ... the fish before you put it in your basket.
a fold b tie c wrap
5. The way we get our ..., such as milk and bread, is changing all the time.
a stores b prices c groceries

Comprehension

Choose the correct option.

1. When Piggly Wiggly opened in 1916, it was the first time customers had **seen products on shelves / chosen products without help**.
2. Before 1916, customers were unhappy because **shopping took a long time / staff didn't help people**.
3. It was easier to shop in a Piggly Wiggly because customers could **walk around the store / see prices clearly**.
4. Storekeepers liked the Piggly Wiggly idea because they could **open stores in different areas / serve more customers**.
5. The grocery store became possible when people **could travel easily / started eating fresh food**.

Thinking

In what ways do you think grocery shopping will develop in the future?