

READING CHALLENGE

The Town Where Lego Comes From

How a poor carpenter from Denmark made the world's favourite toy

Level	A1 — Beginner
--------------	---------------

Age Group	Teens (11-16)
------------------	---------------

Topic	True Stories
--------------	--------------

Duration	~8 min read
-----------------	-------------

Skill	Reading
--------------	---------

You probably know Lego. Almost every child in the world has played with these small, colourful **bricks**. You can build a house. You can build a spaceship. You can build anything you can think of. But do you know where Lego comes from? The story starts in a very small town. A very poor man. And a very simple idea.

A Carpenter in a Small Town

The town is called Billund. It is in Denmark. In the 1930s, it was a very small, quiet place. Only a few hundred people lived there. There was not much to do. There were farms. There were fields. And there was a **carpenter** named Ole Kirk Christiansen.

Ole made things from wood. Tables. Chairs. Doors. He worked in a small **workshop** in his house. He was good at his job. But times were hard. In the 1930s, there was a big economic crisis. People had very little money. They did not buy new furniture. Ole had almost no customers. He needed to find a new way to earn money.

So Ole started making wooden toys. Small ducks on wheels. Little cars. Wooden animals. He was very careful with his work. Every toy was smooth and perfect. He painted them in bright colours. He believed in one thing above all: **quality**. His **motto** was "Only the best is good enough." He wrote this on a sign in his workshop.

The Name "Lego"

In 1934, Ole gave his company a name. He called it "Lego." The name comes from two Danish words: "leg" and "godt." Together, they mean "play well." Ole did not know it at the time, but "lego" also means "I put together" in Latin. It was a perfect name for a toy that is all about putting pieces together.

At first, Ole worked alone. Then his son, Godtfred, started helping him. Godtfred was only twelve years old, but he loved working in the workshop. He painted the toys and helped his father deliver them to shops. Father and son worked side by side. The company was tiny, but they were proud of every toy they made.

From Wood to Plastic

In 1947, something important happened. Ole bought a special machine. It was a **plastic** injection machine. This machine could make toys from plastic instead of wood. Many people in Denmark thought plastic toys were cheap and bad. But Ole saw the future. Plastic was strong. Plastic was light. Plastic could be made in many colours. And plastic could be made in exact shapes.

In 1949, Lego made its first plastic bricks. They were called "Automatic Binding Bricks." They looked a little like the Lego bricks we know today, but they were not as good. They did not **snap** together well. They fell apart easily. Children liked them, but they were not perfect.

Godtfred, who was now running the company with his father, had an idea. What if the bricks could lock together? What if they could stay together when you built something, but you could also pull them apart easily? He worked on this problem for years.

The Perfect Brick

On 28 January 1958, Godtfred filed a patent for a new brick design. This is the Lego brick we know today. It has tubes on the bottom that fit perfectly with the studs on top of another brick. When you press two bricks together, they click. They hold. They do not fall apart. But you can still pull them apart with your fingers.

The bricks are made in a **mould**. Hot liquid plastic goes into the mould. It cools down. It becomes hard. Out comes a perfect Lego brick. The machines are so precise that the difference between bricks is less than 0.002 millimetres. That is thinner than a human hair. This means a brick from 1958 still fits a brick made today. You can mix old Lego with new Lego. Everything connects.

This was the moment Lego changed forever. The perfect brick. Simple. Small. But with endless possibilities.

Lego Grows and Grows

After 1958, Lego became very **popular**. First in Denmark. Then in Germany, the UK, and the rest of Europe. Then in America, Asia, and the whole world. The **factory** in Billund got bigger and bigger. New factories opened in other countries.

Lego started making sets with **instructions**. You could buy a box with all the pieces and a booklet that showed you how to build something specific — a fire station, a castle, a pirate ship. But you could also ignore the instructions and build whatever you wanted. That was the beauty of Lego. You could follow the plan. Or you could use your **imagination**.

In the 1970s, Lego made the first minifigures — the small yellow people. Children loved them. Now Lego was not just about buildings. It was about stories. You could build a castle and then play with the king, the queen, and the knights. You could build a spaceship and send your astronauts to the moon.

Lego by the Numbers

The numbers are incredible. Lego has made more than 400 **billion** bricks. That is about 50 bricks for every person on Earth. If you put all the Lego bricks ever made in a line, they would go around the Earth more than 16 times.

Lego makes about 36 billion bricks every year. That is about 1,140 bricks every second. The factory machines work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They almost never stop.

About 19 billion Lego pieces are in sets on shop shelves right now. There are more than 3,700 different Lego pieces in different shapes. And more than 400 billion minifigures have been made. If minifigures were real people, they would be the largest population on Earth.

Lego has about 24,000 **employees** around the world. The company earns about 8 billion euros every year. It is the biggest toy company in the world. And it all started in a small wooden workshop in Billund.

Lego Today

Today, Lego is everywhere. There are Lego video games. There are Lego movies — "The Lego Movie" (2014) was a huge hit. There are Lego theme parks called Legoland in Denmark, England, Germany, Japan, America, and other countries. At Legoland Billund, the original park, everything is built from Lego bricks. Cities. Animals. Famous buildings. It takes millions of bricks.

Lego also works with other brands. You can buy Lego Star Wars, Lego Harry Potter, Lego Marvel, and many more. Some Lego sets are for small children. Some are for adults. The biggest Lego set ever is the Lego World Map — it has 11,695 pieces!

The company is still owned by the Christiansen family. Ole Kirk Christiansen, the poor carpenter who **invented** Lego, died in 1958 — the same year the perfect brick was patented. He never saw how big his company would become. But his motto is still on the wall in Billund: "Only the best is good enough."

Why Lego Is Special

There are many toys in the world. But Lego is different. A box of Lego bricks has no story. You make the story. A box of Lego has no rules. You make the rules. Six 2x4 Lego bricks can be combined in more than 915 million different ways. Six small bricks. Almost a billion possibilities. That is the magic of Lego.

Children love Lego because they can build anything. Adults love Lego because it reminds them of being a child. Teachers love Lego because children learn while they play — they learn about shapes, about numbers, about engineering, about solving problems. Everyone loves Lego because it is simple, it is fun, and it never gets old.

And it all started with a carpenter. A small workshop. And a sign on the wall that said: "Only the best is good enough."

Vocabulary

#	Word	Definition
1	carpenter	a person who makes things from wood as a job
2	workshop	a room or small building where people make or fix things
3	brick	a small block used for building; a Lego piece
4	plastic	a light, strong material made in factories, used to make many things
5	factory	a big building where people or machines make things
6	invent	to make or think of something completely new for the first time
7	quality	how good or bad something is
8	mould	a container with a special shape — you put liquid in it, and it becomes that shape
9	snap	to click together quickly and easily
10	popular	liked by many people
11	billion	the number 1,000,000,000 — a thousand million
12	imagination	the ability to make pictures and ideas in your mind
13	instruction	information that tells you how to do something, step by step
14	employee	a person who works for a company and gets paid
15	motto	a short sentence that explains what a person or company believes in

Comprehension Quiz

1. Who invented Lego?

- A) A teacher from Sweden
- B) A carpenter from Denmark named Ole Kirk Christiansen
- C) A scientist from Germany
- D) A toy shop owner from England

2. What does the word 'Lego' mean?

- A) 'Small brick' in Danish
- B) 'Play well' in Danish
- C) 'Build something' in Danish
- D) 'Happy child' in Danish

3. What were the first Lego toys made from?

- A) Metal
- B) Paper
- C) Wood
- D) Plastic

4. How many Lego bricks have been made in total?

- A) About 1 million
- B) About 1 billion
- C) About 400 billion
- D) About 10 billion

5. What is special about the way Lego bricks are made?

- A) Every brick is painted by hand
- B) They are so precise that a brick from 1958 still fits a brick made today
- C) They change shape every year
- D) Each brick has a different size

Answer Key

Q	Answer	Question
1	B	Who invented Lego?
2	B	What does the word 'Lego' mean?
3	C	What were the first Lego toys made from?
4	C	How many Lego bricks have been made in total?
5	B	What is special about the way Lego bricks are made?