

Elementary Book Lesson for Caregivers and Educators



Book Title

Whoosh! Lonnie Johnson's Super Soaker Stream of Inventions by Chris Barton, illustrated by Don Tate

Recommended Ages

4 and up

Book Summary to Share With Children

This book celebrates the inventor of the Super Soaker, Lonnie Johnson, the maker behind one of the world's favorite toys. The Super Soaker is one of the top twenty toys of all time, and it was invented entirely by accident! Lonnie's passion for problem-solving was at the core of his career as an engineer

and his work with NASA, but it is his invention of the Super Soaker water gun that has made his most memorable splash with kids and adults.

Reflection Questions for the Caregiver/Educator

1. As a child, did you ever play with a water gun or Super Soaker? If so, what memories do you have of playing with this invention?
2. This book talks about the struggles that Lonnie Johnson faced as well as his successes. What obstacles have you had to overcome in your life? How has failure also been a critical factor in success?

Reader's Note

The Super Soaker has been around since the late 1980s and yet is still a popular children's toy to enjoy in the summer. Although this is not a new invention, it is not common knowledge that the toy was invented by a Black man. Learning about notable Black leaders, inventors, and entrepreneurs has often been reserved for the month of February during Black History Month and is often limited to people from the Harlem Renaissance and the Civil Rights movement of the 60s and 70s. While learning about historical African American contributions to society helps Black children form healthy personal and social identities, it is also important to learn about contemporary Black people who are still alive and making a positive impact on society today.

Apart from being a scientist, nuclear engineer, NASA employee, and owner of three tech companies, Lonnie Johnson is also a millionaire. In February 2013, Johnson filed suit against Hasbro after he discovered that he was being underpaid royalties for the Super Soaker and several Nerf toys. In November of that year, Johnson was awarded nearly \$73 million in royalties from Hasbro Inc. and sales for the Super Soaker remain close to \$1 billion.



It is important to note that while Johnson's invention is a popular and exciting children's toy to be enjoyed during the hot summer months, playing with toys that resemble guns can pose a very real threat to Black and Brown children, particularly boys. In recent years, Black

boys and youth have been harmed or even killed when a toy gun was mistaken for a real one. This is not stated to discourage those who already have Super Soakers from enjoying them, but it does warrant a note of caution. *Whoosh!* is a wonderful book that celebrates Black excellence and innovation, but it is important to be aware of how playing with toys that resemble or mimic weapons may impact members of Black and Brown communities differently. Please see the list of extension activities at the bottom of the lesson for alternative ways to engage with your child.

Connection to Social-Emotional Learning and Anti-Bias Education

SEL

Self-Awareness

Self-Management

Social Awareness

Relationship Skills

Responsible Decision-Making

ABE

Empathy and Understanding

Healthy, Complex Identities

Respect Across Differences

Notice, Name, and Reject Bias

Responsiveness and Action

Discussion Questions (*essential questions are in bold)

1. How would you describe Lonnie Johnson as a child? What kinds of things did he enjoy doing? Do you have anything in common with him?
2. **What was Lonnie's dream, and how was it challenged? How did he feel when that happened?**
 - a. How would you feel? What helps you feel better when you are feeling frustrated or discouraged by a challenge or obstacle?
3. **How did Lonnie's robot, Linex, demonstrate Lonnie's resilience and determination?**
 - a. How might a robot be helpful to you in your life or your family/community?
4. **What was significant or important about Lonnie's science fair team winning 1st place at the University of Alabama in 1968?**
5. What other accomplishments did Lonnie make in his life during and after college?
6. **Where did Lonnie get the idea for his high-powered water gun? How did this "accident" turn out to be very significant in his life?**
7. **Lonnie Johnson has a passion for problem-solving. How did he cope with setbacks when other people didn't believe in his ideas or his plans fell apart?**
 - a. **How do you like to find solutions and create new things as well?**

Journal Questions/Extension Activities

- Write or draw about an invention that you would like to create. What resources, tools, and support would you need to make your invention a reality?
- Write or draw about a possible career or life goal when you are older. How can you not let disappointments or setbacks keep you from reaching that goal?
- **Activity:** Read through the following list (not exhaustive) of Black inventors: Who would you like to learn more about? Support your child in researching more about these inventors and any other African American creators or entrepreneurs.
 - Benjamin Bannaker - almanac
 - Sarah Boone- ironing board
 - George Washington Carver- peanut butter, Worcester sauce, salad oils, and many more
 - Matthew A. Cherry - tricycle
 - Alfred L. Cralle - ice cream scoop
 - John L. Love - pencil sharpener
 - Thomas Marshall- fire extinguisher
 - Garrett Morgan- gas mask, traffic light
 - Alexander Miles- elevator
 - Madam C.J. Walker- straightening comb
 - [Jerry Lawson](#) - a new kind of video game console

