

Name _____

Date _____

Jobs and Gates: Innovation of the Computer

Read this passage with your partner or small group. Use a highlighter or colored pen to mark vocabulary that you would like to explore further.

Forty or so years ago, computers were the tools of “the man”: big corporations, the Pentagon Only big corporations and the government had the money and space to operate them. In those days, the average person had no use for computers. But because of two young men, almost the same age but from very different backgrounds, that attitude was going to change, and the world would never be the same again. These rivals for putting computers into every home had completely different views on how to go about it. One was a code writer; he knew how computers worked. The other was a marketing genius.

Bill Gates grew up in a well-to-do family in Washington State. He demonstrated his gift for programming at a very young age, creating software programs in middle school and beginning to develop software for others with his friend Paul G. Allen when only 20. At that time computers looked a lot different than they do today. Software was text-based only, and Gates was very good at programming. With their success, Gates left college and the two formed Microsoft. Gates knew how to make great software. But he didn’t make the products aesthetically pleasing.

Steve Jobs grew up in a middle-class family living outside San Francisco. Although almost the same age, he was very different from Gates. Jobs spent a lot of time trying to find himself. He spent a short time in college. He tried working as a video game designer with Atari. He traveled to India searching for spiritual enlightenment. But at 21 he found his calling. He and his friend Steve Wozniak, who was as gifted in computer programming as Bill Gates, started Apple Computer in the Jobs family garage. Jobs and Wozniak changed the computer industry by making the machines smaller, cheaper, easy-to-understand, and available to everyday consumers.

The two men took different paths in the computer business, too. Jobs was interested in making his Apple computers user-friendly from the hardware out. Gates left the design of computer hardware to companies like IBM who were competing against Apple for the home computer market. Instead, he focused Microsoft’s efforts on developing and improving operating systems and software programs. Both Jobs and Gates used cut-throat methods to stay ahead of the competition, like Xerox and IBM. They were both powerhouses in the computer industry by the mid-1980s. Only one thing stood in the way of total domination in the field: each other.

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Jobs and Gates: Innovation of the Computer, continued

Both of these computer giants had their ups and downs during their careers. In the 1980s Apple fired Jobs from the company he had created. The board thought his ideas were holding them back. Jobs only returned when the company failed to succeed without him. From the late 1990s on he brought Apple to the forefront again when he produced winning innovations like the iPod, iPhone, and iPad.

Gates's Microsoft, in turn, grew so fast and dominated so much of the market that the federal government investigated him for monopolizing the industry. To stop the threat, he loaned \$150 million to Steve Jobs to save Apple. In the past decade Bill Gates has been known more for his charities and generosity than for his computer innovations.

Steve Jobs died in 2011, and Bill Gates stepped down from the day-to-day running of Microsoft in 2008. Since then he spends most of his time on his charitable efforts. That leaves us with the question, which man was most responsible for bringing computers into the life of the average person?

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