

# From rags to riches: Barry Steptoe

Born in London in April 1942, Barry Steptoe is a hugely respected charitable contributor, who rose to fame through establishing a highly successful rag and bone business.

On the day he was born, a terrible flood hit the city of London, making his birth a complicated process as the nurses had to plug the gaps under the doors to stop water pouring in. Fortunately, Barry's birth went well, and he and his mother suffered no ill effects.

Barry began work at the age of twelve, when he was given a job in a South London bubble gum factory. He arrived at his interview two hours early, impressing everyone there with his enthusiasm and attitude.

Growing up, he dreamed of having his own business and worked extremely hard, night and day. Shortly after leaving school, Barry set up his own rag and bone business; selling bits of old junk was his speciality. It was at the age of 17 that he first earned enough money to buy a car. His tatty VW Beetle was, despite barely managing to move above 30mph, his pride and joy and he has kept it to this day.

In the early 1970s, Barry decided to employ more staff and his business began to expand, producing huge profits; it was enormously successful and made over £500m by the year 1980.

After years of success in the rag and bone business, Barry began to think about retirement. Having always dreamed of a warm place to live, he decided to move to Australia. Satisfied that he had worked hard enough, he sold his business to his friend, Sid James, who immediately sold it to the council for a vast profit.

On his 39<sup>th</sup> birthday, Barry married his sweetheart, Maude Boggins and they went on to have five children together. Sadly, Barry lost contact with all but one of his children when he and Maude moved to Australia to live with his mother-in-law.

For the past thirty years, Barry and Maude have been living happily in Melbourne, enjoying the comforts that his hard work has earned. In 1994, Barry established the "Steptoe and Bun" food charity, which distributes food to the homeless. Barry is quoted as simply saying at the time, "It's nice to give something back." He currently has no plans to return to the UK and has told his friends that he would rather wrestle a crocodile than go back to work at his age!

Due to his incredible success and contributions to good causes, the name of Barry Steptoe will always be linked with determination and used as an example of the benefits of hard work.

IAL: to recognise different types of comprehension questions

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zs44jxs/articles/zqmyw6f>

Answer each of the following questions and underline the type of question you think they are.

1) How would you best describe the relationship between Barry and his children? Circle one.

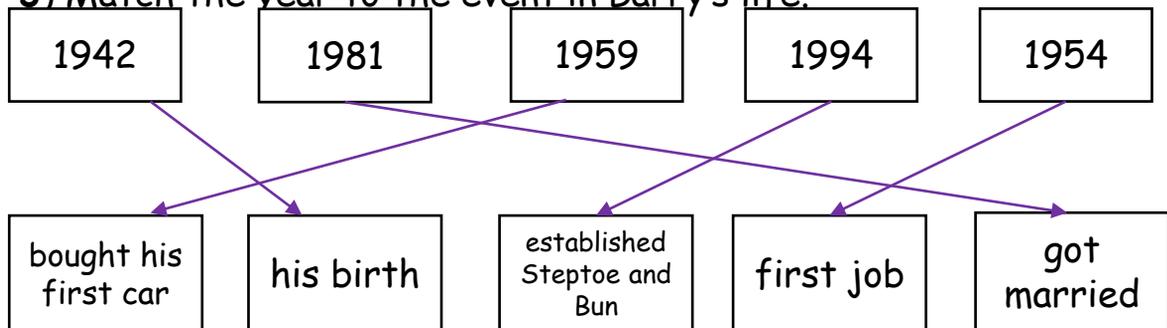
loving	distant	affectionate	full of hatred	angry
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2) What evidence from the text helped you to choose your answer to Q1?

"Sadly Barry lost contact with all but one of his children"  
-reference to the fact that he lost touch with his children

Q1= inference/retrieval    Q2= inference/retrieval

3) Match the year to the event in Barry's life.



Q3= inference/retrieval

4) How do you think Barry felt about what his friend Sid James did with his business after he had sold it to him? Explain your answer fully. annoyed/betrayed/irritated/cheated/disappointed because Sid sold the business "immediately" for "a vast profit".

OR

Proud/pleased for his friend because Sid made "a vast profit"

Q4= inference/retrieval

5) What impressed the people giving Barry his first job interview?

His enthusiasm and attitude

Q5= inference/retrieval

6) Why do you think Barry's business was so successful? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Because he worked "extremely hard, night and day" and had a impressive "enthusiasm and attitude".

Q6= inference/retrieval

7) What impression do you get of Barry as a person?

EG:

kind/caring- because he set up a charity

hardworking/dedicated/determined - "he worked night and day"

funny- he joked about preferring to wrestle a crocodile

content/happy- he has been living happily in Melbourne, enjoying the comforts...

Q7= inference/retrieval

8) What happened in Barry's life in the early 1970s?

"Barry decided to employ more staff and his business began to expand, producing huge profits "

Q8= inference/retrieval

IAL: to ask effective questions to clarify understanding of a text



If you could interview Barry for The One Show (other television programs are available), what questions would you ask him, based on the information in the biography?

EG:

**"What is your favourite flavour of ice cream?"**

-this is not a relevant question and would only lead to a closed answer

whereas

**"Why did you choose to apply for a job at a bubble gum factory?"**

- this refers to a point in the text and the answer could be an interesting one- was it because they desperately needed the money? He was only 12 years old, after all!

Appropriate, open ended questions such as:

- why he hadn't kept in touch with his children
- how he felt having to work at such a young age
- what his family life was like when he was growing up (no mention of brothers or sisters etc)

# Writing challenge

## This week's spellings

thorough throughout thought tough sought  
enough although brought bought roughly

In the Barry Steptoe biography, we are told that he sold his business to his friend, Sid James.

Sid then sold it immediately for a vast profit.

How do you think Barry would have reacted to this?

Write a letter from Barry to Sid, expressing how you think he would have felt. Try to show how you have interpreted the character of Barry.

Did you go for the angry, betrayed option or did you think he would be pleased for his friend?