



DISCOVERY ENGINEERING

IN PHYSICAL SCIENCE

Case Studies for Grades 6–12

M. GAIL JONES • ELYSA CORIN • MEGAN ENNES
EMILY CAYTON • GINA CHILDERS

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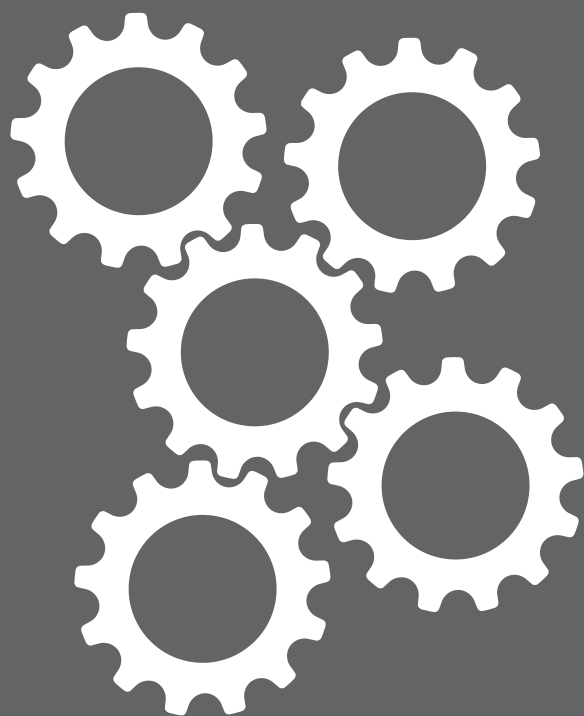
*This book is dedicated to all the youth who remind us
that the smallest things can be the most important.*

Contents

About the Authors.....	ix
Acknowledgments.....	xi
Introduction.....	1

1	Don't Get Bent Out of Shape <i>Memory Wire</i>	11	12	Sweet and Sour <i>The Rise and Fall ... and Rise ... of Saccharin</i>	185
2	Harnessing the Color of Nature <i>Structural Color and Iridescence</i>	25	13	Saving Lives Through an Accident <i>Safety Glass</i>	199
3	From Sludge to Nobility <i>Artificial Dye</i>	43	14	A Wearable Water Filter <i>The Sari</i>	217
4	By the Teeth of Your Skin <i>Shark Skin and Bacteria</i>	57	15	From Ship to Staircase <i>The History of the Slinky</i>	235
5	A Sticky Situation <i>Gecko Feet Adhesives</i>	73	16	Man of Stainless Steel <i>The Discovery of a New Alloy</i>	253
6	It's Hip to Be Square <i>Seahorse Tails</i>	89	17	Super Glue <i>Accidentally Discovered Twice</i>	269
7	Corn Flakes <i>Waste Not, Want Not</i>	105	18	Teflon <i>A Refrigerator Gas Accident</i>	287
8	Get Fired Up With Friction Lights <i>Matches</i>	125	19	Vaseline <i>The "Wonder Jelly"</i>	309
9	That's a Wrap <i>Plastic</i>	139	20	I'm Rubber and You're Glue <i>Vulcanized Rubber</i>	325
10	A Sticky Discovery <i>The Invention of Post-It Notes</i>	153	21	Peering Into the Unknown <i>The Discovery of X-Rays</i>	341
11	Putty in Your Hands <i>The Unintended Discovery of Silly Putty</i>	167	22	Velcro <i>Engineering Mimics Nature</i>	363

Appendix.....	377
Image Credits.....	379
Index.....	383



About the Authors

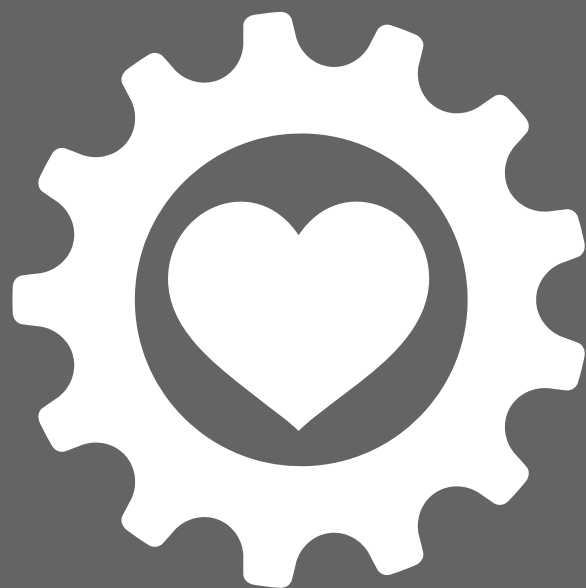
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VELCRO

Engineering Mimics Nature

A Case Study Using the Discovery Engineering Process

Introduction

Imagine a world without zippers, buttons, or Velcro to fasten your clothing. Throughout history, people have designed new ways to keep clothing closed and fitting comfortably. The discovery of Velcro changed the way clothes, shoes, and even suitcases and purses open and close. Velcro is a unique type of hook and loop tape that was inspired by cockleburs in nature. (Cockleburs [Figure 22.1] are seeds covered by hard, curved spines that are difficult to remove if they become hooked onto clothing.) This type of engineering in which objects in nature are used as models for new products is known as biomimicry.

FIGURE 22.1

Cocklebur



Lesson Objectives

By the end of this case study, you will be able to

- Describe the hook-and-loop system that makes up Velcro.
- Analyze how hook-and-loop tape functions to keep materials together and how it is able to repeatedly open and close.
- Design a new application for hook-and-loop tape.

The Case

Read the following description of how Velcro was discovered.

One day in the 1940s, George de Mestral was hunting in the Jura Mountains of Switzerland when he observed that his pants were coated with little cockleburrs. He checked his dog and noticed that the dog's fur was covered with cockleburrs, too. De Mestral was intrigued by the idea that these little seed pods could stick to his pants so effectively. When he returned to work, he looked at one of the cockleburrs under a microscope and saw that tiny hooks on the seed pod were looped into the threads on his pants.

Typically about an inch long, the most common type of cocklebur is from the plant *Xanthium strumarium*. Just one plant can produce many of these spine-covered burs. A single bur contains two seeds that are carried to different areas by animals that happen to bump up against the plant. The cocklebur sticks to the animal's fur until it is dislodged at some point during the animal's wanderings. This mechanism allows for the scattering of cocklebur seeds. And due to the way in which its seeds get dispersed, the cocklebur has been nicknamed "nature's hitchhiker."

Once de Mestral saw the cocklebur hook under his microscope, he decided to make a new type of fastener that mimicked the hooks on the bur and the fibers of his pants. He called this new hook-and-loop fastener Velcro, which is a combination of the words *velvet* and *crochet*. De Mestral went on to obtain a patent in Switzerland for his new fastener, and he began to sell Velcro in the United States in the 1950s. Over the years, Velcro has become a popular feature on shoes, coats, and other products.



Recognize, Recall, and Reflect

1. Why was George de Mestral so fascinated by the cockleburs he and his dog had come across while hunting in the mountains?
2. How does Velcro mimic a cocklebur?
3. What words were combined to make the word *Velcro*?

Investigate

In this activity, you will explore how hook-and-loop tape like Velcro works to fasten things together.

Materials

For each group of students:

- 1 in. strip of hook-and-loop tape
- Video microscope or dissecting microscope
- Different samples of fabric such as velvet, wool, and cotton

Safety Note: Do not handle wool if you are allergic to it. Wash your hands with soap and water immediately after completing this activity.

Create, Innovate, and Investigate

- Begin by observing the two different parts of the hook-and-loop tape. What do you notice about each part?
- Bend each piece of the tape and notice what happens to the piece with hooks.
- Try dragging the hooked tape across different fabrics such as velvet, a piece of wool, and a cotton sock. What do you observe?
- Watch what happens when you pull the hooks away from the different fabrics. Do the hooks bend? Do they break?
- Repeatedly scrape the hooks on a fabric to determine whether they lose the ability to fasten.

Questions for Reflection

1. What did you observe about hook-and-loop tape?
2. Is hook-and-loop tape equally effective in sticking to different types of fabric?

Apply and Analyze

How does Velcro work? The product is composed of two pieces of tape. One piece is covered with small hooks and the other piece is covered with small loops. As the two pieces of tape come together, the hooks connect with the loops, creating a bond. When the tape is pulled apart, the hooks flex and release the loops.

A new product designed by 3M Company uses a similar type of fastener with interlocking strips. But instead of having hooks or loops, both of the fastener's strips feature small, flexible pins that are shaped like mushrooms. The pins lock together when the two strips are pressed into each other. This new fastener is called Dual Lock fastener, and the makers of the product claim that it is stronger than Velcro. Find out more about these two fasteners by reviewing the sources listed below. Then answer the questions that follow.

Online Sources

- How does Velcro work?
www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgclivxODH0
 - Velcro, observed under video microscope
www.youtube.com/watch?v=62jhQNYpM3s
 - 3M Scotch Extreme Dual Lock Fasteners review
<http://toolguyd.com/scotch-extreme-fasteners-review>
1. What are the limitations of these types of fasteners when it comes to clothing?
 2. How do you think the cost of Velcro compares to that of zippers or buttons?
 3. Does Velcro last forever? What happens to it over time?
 4. What is the advantage of a fastener with mushroom-shaped pins over a fastener with hooks and loops?
 5. How could you design an experiment that would allow you to measure the strength of each of these fasteners?

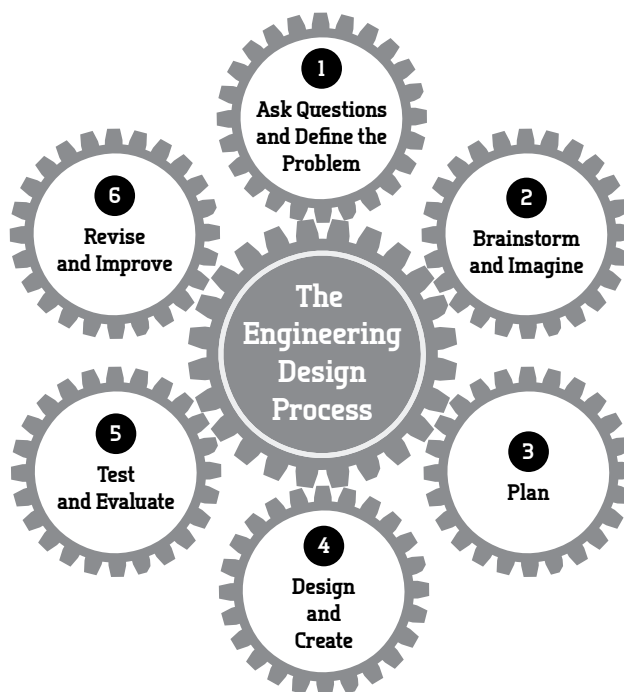
Design Challenge

Engineering is the application of scientific understanding through creativity, imagination, problem solving, and the designing and building of new materials to address and solve problems in the real world. You will be asked to take the science you have learned in this case and design a process or product to address a real-world issue of your choosing.

Engineers use the engineering design process as steps to address a real-world problem (see Figure 22.2). You will now use this process as you come up with a new way to use hook-and-loop tape. In this case, you are asking the question (Step 1) of how you can design a new use for hook-and-loop tape. Drawing on your creativity, you will then brainstorm (Step 2) a new product that uses hook-and-loop tape to solve a problem. Afterward, you will create a plan (Step 3) for this new product. Next, you will create a sketch and/or model of your product (Step 4). Then, you will work with your classmates to think about how you would test (Step 5) and refine (Step 6) your product.

FIGURE 22.2

The Engineering Design Process



1. Ask Questions

Hook-and-loop tape serves many other purposes aside from being a fastener for clothing and shoes. For instance, the product can be used to hold down rugs, keep electrical cords coiled up, attach a remote control to a television, and much more. Based on your previous observations and research, consider a new problem that may be addressed or product that could be created using hook-and-loop tape. What are situations in which you would need to fasten objects together—and also easily be able to pull them apart? What problems could you solve using hook-and-loop tape?

2. Brainstorm and Imagine

Brainstorm a specific application for hook-and-loop tape that could help solve a problem. (For example, one idea is to use this tape to hold crib bumpers in place on the edge of a baby crib. Another idea is to use a biodegradable and edible type of hook-and-loop tape with food displays and tall, elaborate cakes.)

3. Create a Plan

Create a plan for your product. Consider: (1) What is the purpose of your product? (2) What are benefits to using your product? (3) What are the limitations of your product? Use the Product Planning Graphic Organizer to help you.

4. Design and Create

Consider the following questions and considerations for your product and its design.

- How would incorporating hook-and-loop tape into your design make the product better?
- How would you overcome any limitations or drawbacks caused by using hook-and-loop tape in your design?
- What technologies might need to be developed to create or manufacture this design?
- What are any constraints or drawbacks you can foresee with implementing this design?
- Would there be any safety concerns regarding your product?

Create a sketch of your product design. Make sure your design incorporates your previous research and exploration.

5. Test and Evaluate

Working with your classmates, come up with a way to test your design to see its effectiveness.

6. Revise and Improve

Give your plans to one of your classmates for review. Listen to his or her feedback on your design. What are some ways you can use the input to refine your design? Take some time to revise and make improvements.

Reflect

1. What technologies might need to be developed to create or manufacture this design?
2. What are any constraints or drawbacks you can foresee with implementing this design?
3. Would there be any environmental or human health concerns about this design?

Proposed Product Idea	
Pros (Benefits)	Cons (Limitations)

TEACHER NOTES

VELCRO

ENGINEERING MIMICS NATURE

A Case Study Using the Discovery Engineering Process

Lesson Overview

In this lesson, students explore Velcro and similar products that can be used to keep clothes and other objects fastened together. Velcro was an accidental discovery that has led to a number of new applications and products.

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this case study, students will be able to

- Describe the hook-and-loop system that makes up Velcro.
- Analyze how hook-and-loop tape functions to keep materials together and how it is able to repeatedly open and close.
- Design a new application for hook-and-loop tape.

The Case Study Approach

This lesson uses a case study approach. Explaining the purpose of case studies will encourage your students to relate to the material and engage with the problem. At the heart of each case study in this book is a true story, one that describes how someone in his or her everyday life or during a routine workday made an observation or did a simple experiment that led to a new insight or discovery. Case studies are designed to get students actively engaged in the process of problem solving. The narrative of the case supplies authentic details that place the student in the role of the inventor and provide scaffolds for critical thinking and deep reflection. A case is more than a paragraph to read or a story to analyze but rather a way of framing problems, synthesizing what is known, and thinking creatively about new applications and solutions. In this lesson, students consider how Velcro was discovered and work together to think about new applications for hook-and-loop tape to solve real-life problems.

Use of the Case

Due to the nature of these case studies, teachers may elect to use any section of each case for their instructional needs. The sections are sequenced in order (scaffolded) so students think more deeply about the science involved in the case and develop an understanding of engineering in the context of science.

Curriculum Connections

Related Next Generation Science Standards

PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS

- HS-ETS1-2. Design a solution to a complex real-world problem by breaking it down into smaller, more manageable problems that can be solved through engineering.
- HS-ETS1-3. Evaluate a solution to a complex real-world problem based on prioritized criteria and trade-offs that account for a range of constraints, including cost, safety, reliability, and aesthetics, as well as possible social, cultural, and environmental impacts.

SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING PRACTICES

- Analyzing and Interpreting Data
- Engaging in Argument From Evidence
- Constructing Explanations and Designing Solutions

Related National Academy of Engineering Grand Challenge

- Engineer the Tools of Scientific Discovery

Lesson Preparation

You will need to make copies of the entire student section for the class. Students will need internet access at various points in the lesson. Alternatively, you can project videos or print and distribute copies of online content for the class. For the Investigate section, you will need hook-and-loop tape. Sources for this material include fabric stores, hardware stores, and online shops. Look at the Teaching Organizer (Table 22.1, p. 372) for suggestions on how to organize the lesson.

Materials

For each group of students:

- 1 in. strip of hook-and-loop tape
- Video microscope or dissecting microscope
- Different samples of fabric such as velvet, wool, and cotton

Safety Note for Students: Do not handle wool if you are allergic to it. Wash your hands with soap and water immediately after completing this activity.

Time Needed

55 minutes

TABLE 22.1

Teaching Organizer

Section	Time Suggested	Materials Needed	Additional Considerations
The Case	5 minutes	Student packet	Could be read in class or as a homework assignment prior to class
Investigate	10 minutes	Student packet, 1-inch strip of hook-and-loop tape, video microscope or dissecting microscope, different samples of fabric such as velvet, wool, and cotton	Recommended as a small-group investigation
Apply and Analyze	10 minutes	Student packet, internet access	Whole-class activity or done individually
Design Challenge	30 minutes	Student packet	Small-group activity

Teacher Background Information

There are a number of resources and videos about hook-and-loop tape available on the internet. You may want to observe the behavior of hook-and-loop tape on sites such as YouTube prior to using the case.

Vocabulary

- biomimicry
- fastener
- cocklebur

Teacher Answer Key*Recognize, Recall, and Reflect*

1. **Why was George de Mestral so fascinated by the cockleburs he and his dog had come across while hunting in the mountains?**

He was intrigued by how effectively these seed pods clung to his pants.

2. **How does Velcro mimic a cocklebur ?**

Part of the fastener has hooks that are modeled after the hooks on a cocklebur.

3. **What words were combined to make the word Velcro?**

Velvet and crochet

Questions for Reflection

1. **What did you observe about hook-and-loop tape?**

Answers will vary.

2. **Is hook-and-loop tape equally effective in sticking to different types of fabric?**

No. Students should note that the tape generally sticks best to fabrics such as wool. It sticks less effectively to fabrics like cotton.

Apply and Analyze

1. **What are the limitations of these types of fasteners when it comes to clothing?**

Answers will vary but may include that the small hooks on hook-and-loop tape can scratch or irritate skin. Also, hook-and-loop tape doesn't close two materials as tightly as other fasteners like buttons. Furthermore, the pressure that is needed to connect the hooks and loops of the fastener sometimes results in wrinkles.

2. **How do you think the cost of using Velcro compares to that of zippers or buttons?**

All three fastener systems can be made of synthetic materials and the cost is similar. Natural buttons or metal zippers could result in a costlier system.

3. Does Velcro last forever? What happens to it over time?

If used over and over again, the hooked side of hook-and-loop tape can become entangled with fibers, hair, and other debris, making it difficult to maintain a tight connection with the looped side of the fastener.

4. What is the advantage of a fastener with mushroom-shaped pins over a fastener with hooks and loops?

Students should note that the pins will not catch other materials (like a hair or fiber) as easily as a hook-and-loop system would.

5. How could you design an experiment that would allow you to measure the strength of each of these fasteners?

Answers will vary, but students might suggest adding weights to pieces of material or fabric held together by the different fasteners to see how quickly each fastener comes undone under the stress of the weight.

Reflect

1. What technologies might need to be developed to create or manufacture this design?

Answers may vary depending on the students' designs.

2. What are any constraints or drawbacks you can foresee with implementing this design?

Answers may vary depending on the students' designs.

3. Would there be any environmental or human health concerns?

Answers may vary depending on the students' designs.

Assessment

The Design Challenge can be assessed using the rubric in the appendix (p. 377).

Extensions

This lesson can be followed with lessons about the elasticity and adhesive properties of different types of glues. You can cover this topic with other cases in this book

as well, including the case study in Chapter 10, “A Sticky Discovery: The Invention of Post-It Notes” (p. 153) and the case study in Chapter 17, “Super Glue: Accidentally Discovered Twice” (p. 269).

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Index

Note: Page references in **boldface** indicate information contained in figures or tables.

A

- acid, 38
- Acinetobacter baumannii*, **61**
- adhesion, 166
- adhesive, 85, 166, 283
- Advance Health Informatics (Grand Challenge)
 - memory wire, 20
 - Vaseline, 319
- alloy, 22, 266
- ammonia, 195
- Analyzing and Interpreting Data
 - artificial dye, 52
 - corn flakes, 119
 - gecko feet adhesives, 83
 - matches, 133
 - memory wire, 20
 - plastic, 147
 - Post-it notes, invention of, 162
 - saccharin sweetener, 193
 - safety glass, 209
 - saris, and cholera, 229
 - seahorse tails, 39
 - Silly Putty, discovery of, 179
 - Slinky, the, 247
 - stainless steel, 263
 - Super Glue, 281
 - Teflon, 303
 - Vaseline, 318
 - Velcro, 373
 - vulcanized rubber, 334
 - x-rays, discovery of, 356
- aneurysm, 283
- annealed, 212
- anode, 358
- antimicrobial, 195
- articulated, 102
- artificial dye (case study)
 - apply and analyze, 46–47
 - assessment, 56
 - case, 43–44, **44**
 - curriculum connections, 52
 - design challenge, **47**, 47–49
 - extensions, 56
 - introduction, 43
 - investigate, 45–46, **46**
 - lesson integration, 52
 - lesson objectives, 43, 51
 - lesson overview, 51
 - lesson preparation, 53–54, **54**
 - related National Academy of Engineering Grand Challenge, 52
 - related *Next Generation Science Standards*, 52
 - resources and references, 56
 - teacher answer key, 55–56
 - teacher notes, 51–55
- artificial sweetener, 195
- Asking Questions and Defining Problems
 - safety glass, 209
 - shark skin and bacteria, 68
 - Vaseline, 318
 - x-rays, discovery of, 356
- assessment rubric, 377–378
- atomic forces, 85
- atomic number, 358

atoms, 22, 306, 358

B

bacteria, 230

Baekeland, Leo, 139–140

Bakelite, 140

base, 38

Benedictus, Edouard, 200

benzoic sulfimide, 195

biology case studies, 10

biomimetics, 102, 373

blue morpho butterfly, 26, 29

bond, 306

bonding, 85

Brearley, Harry, 254

Brennan, Anthony, 58

Buehler, William, 12, 14

C

Cambrian explosion, 29

casein, 306

case study approach, 2–4

cathode, 358

Cause and Effect (crosscutting concept)

matches, 133

safety glass, 210

seahorse tails, 99

structural color and iridescence, 37

Vaseline, 319

vulcanized rubber, 335

x-rays, discovery of, 356

cellulose, 38

cellulose nitrate, 212

cereal grain, 120

chemistry case studies, 10

Chesebrough, Robert Augustus, 310

cholera, 217, 218–219, 222, 222–223, 230. *See also* saris, and cholera (case study)

chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), 250

cocklebur, 363, 373

cohesion, 166

coil spring, 249

Colwell, Rita, 218–219

compound, 166

Constructing Explanations and Designing Solutions

artificial dye, 52

corn flakes, 119

gecko feet adhesives, 83

matches, 133

memory wire, 20

plastic, 147

Post-it notes, invention of, 162

saccharin sweetener, 193

safety glass, 209

saris, and cholera, 229

seahorse tails, 99

Silly Putty, discovery of, 179

Slinky, the, 247

stainless steel, 263

structural color and iridescence, 36

Super Glue, 281

Teflon, 303

Vaseline, 319

Velcro, 373

vulcanized rubber, 334

x-rays, discovery of, 356

converted, 306

Coover, Harry, 270

copepod, 230

corn flakes (case study)

apply and analyze, 114

assessment, 122

case, 106–107

Create Your Own Cereal, 111–113

curriculum connections, 119

design challenge, 114–116

design improvement chart, 110

extensions, 122

introduction, 105–106

investigate, 107–109, **108–109**

lesson objectives, 106, 118

lesson overview, 118

lesson preparation, 120

related National Academy of Engineering Grand Challenge, 119

related *Next Generation Science Standards*, 119

resources and references, 122–123

teacher answer key, 121–122

teacher notes, 118–123
corrosive, 306
covalent, 85
Crosby, Alfred, 74
cross section, 102
crystal, 22
current, 358
cyanoacrylate, 283

D

de Mestral, George, 1, 364
desiccant, 266
design challenges assessment rubric, 377–378
Developing and Using Models
seahorse tails, 99
shark skin and bacteria, 68
x-rays, discovery of, 356
diffract, 358
diffraction pattern, 358
discovery engineering
about, 1–2, 8
dissociate, 266

E

Earth/space science case studies, 10
elasticity, 166
electrode, 358
electrolyte, 266
electromagnetic radiation, 358
electron, 358
electronegativity, 195
electrostatic attraction, 166
energy, 249
Energy and Matter (crosscutting concept)
corn flakes, 119
matches, 133
Slinky, the, 247
energy level, 358
Engaging in Argument From Evidence
corn flakes, 119
gecko feet adhesives, 83
memory wire, 20
Post-it notes, invention of, 162
saccharin sweetener, 193
safety glass, 209

saris, and cholera, 229
seahorse tails, 99
Silly Putty, discovery of, 179
Slinky, the, 247
stainless steel, 263
structural color and iridescence, 36
Super Glue, 281
Vaseline, 319
Velcro, 373
vulcanized rubber, 334
x-rays, discovery of, 356
Engineer Better Medicines (Grand Challenge)
memory wire, 20
Vaseline, 319
engineering controls, 9
engineering design process, 6, 7, 79
Engineer the Tools of Scientific Discovery (Grand Challenge)
artificial dye, 52
corn flakes, 119
gecko feet adhesives, 84
matches, 133
memory wire, 20
plastic, 147
Post-it notes, invention of, 162
saccharin sweetener, 194
safety glass, 210
Silly Putty, discovery of, 179
Slinky, the, 247
stainless steel, 264
structural color and iridescence, 37
Super Glue, 281
Teflon, 303
Vaseline, 319
Velcro, 373
vulcanized rubber, 335
erode, 306
evaporative cooling, 306

F

Fahlberg, Constantin, 186
Fallgatter, Ruth, 168
fastener, 373
flavin, 38
fluorescent/fluoresce, 358

fluorocarbon, 306
Ford Model A, **201**
formaldehyde, 149
Franklin, Rosalind, 349, 360
Fry, Arthur, 154

G

gecko feet adhesives (case study)
 Adhesive Testing Chart, 77
 apply and analyze, 78
 assessment, 87
 case, 74–75
 curriculum connections, 83–84
 design challenge, 78–80
 extensions, 87
 introduction, 73
 investigate, 75–78
 lesson objectives, 73, 82
 lesson overview, 82
 lesson preparation, 84–85, **85**
 related National Academy of
 Engineering Grand Challenge,
 84
 related *Next Generation Science
 Standards*, 83
 resources and references, 88
 teacher answer key, 86–87
Goodyear, Charles, 326–327
Grand Challenges for Engineering for
 the 21st century
 about, 7–8

H

helical spring, 249
heterogeneous, 181
Hodgson, Peter, 168
Hoskissen, Kirsten, 114
hydrophobic, 306, 321

I

indicator, 54
infections, common healthcare-
 associated, **61**
ionic, 85
iridescence/iridescent, 38
Irschick, Duncan, 74
isomer, 195

J

James, Richard, 236
Jones, Samuel, 126
Joyner, Fred, 270

K

Kellogg family, 106–107
kinetic energy, 249
Klebsiella pneumoniae, **61**

L

lab safety, 9
laminated, 212
latex, 337
Lawes's parotia bird, **30**
Lundstrom, Johan Edvard, 126

M

maize, 120
malt, 120
matches (case study)
 apply and analyze, 128
 case, 126, **126**
 design challenges, 128–130
 introduction, 125
 investigate, **127**, 127–128
 lesson objectives, 125, 132
 lesson overview, 132
 related National Academy of
 Engineering Grand Challenge,
 133
 related *Next Generation Science
 Standards*, 133
 teacher notes, 131–137
memory wire (case study)
 apply and analyze, 14–15
 assessment, 24
 case, 11
 crosscutting concept, 20
 curriculum connections, 20
 design challenge, 15–17, **16**
 extensions, 24
 introduction, 11
 investigate, 13–14
 lesson integration, 20
 lesson objectives, 11, 19
 lesson overview, 19
 lesson preparation, 21–22, **22**

- related National Academy of Engineering Grand Challenges, 20
- related *Next Generation Science Standards*, 20
- resources and references, 24
- science and engineering practices, 20
- teacher answer key, 23–24
- teacher notes, 19–24
- metal, 22
- metallic elements, 195
- metallurgist, 22
- metals, properties of, 22
- milled corn, 120
- mixture, 181
- molecule, 166
- monomer, 306
- Muzzey, David S., 12
- Mycobacterium abscessus*, 61
- N**
- nano-, 38
- nanoparticles, 7
- Next Generation Science Standards* (NGSS), 4–7, 5
- Nitinol wire, 22
- nonmetallic elements, 195
- non-Newtonian fluid, 181
- non-nutritive, 195
- nonstick coating, 306
- Norovirus, 61
- O**
- octet rule, 195
- opaque/opacity, 358
- orbital, 358
- oxidation, 195, 266
- P**
- Panati, Charles, 310
- Pasch, Gustaf Erik, 126
- Patterns (crosscutting concept)
 - matches, 133
 - Vaseline, 319
- Perkins, William, 43, 44
- personal protective equipment, 9
- petroleum, 321
- petroleum jelly, 309. *See also* Vaseline (case study)
- pH, 38
- phase change, 22
- phenol, 149
- phosphorus chloride, 195
- physics case studies, 10
- phytoplankton, 230
- pigment, 38
- plankton, 230
- Planning and Carrying Out Investigations
 - x-rays, discovery of, 356
- plastic, 306
- plastic (case study)
 - apply and analyze, 142
 - assessment, 151
 - case, 139–140
 - curriculum connections, 147
 - design challenge, 142–144, 143
 - extensions, 151
 - introduction, 139
 - investigate, 141–142
 - lesson integration, 147
 - lesson objectives, 139, 146
 - lesson overview, 146
 - lesson preparation, 148–149, 149
 - related National Academy of Engineering Grand Challenges, 147
 - related *Next Generation Science Standards*, 147
 - resources and references, 151
 - teacher answer key, 150–151
 - teacher notes, 146–151
- plastic polymer, 306
- Plunkett, Roy, 288
- Polli condensation*, 26, 27
- polymer, 149, 283, 306, 337
- polyvinyl butyral (PVB), 212
- Post-it notes, invention of (case study)
 - apply and analyze, 155–157
 - assessment, 165
 - case, 153–154
 - curriculum connections, 162
 - design challenge, 157–159
 - extensions, 166
 - introduction, 153

investigate, 154–155, **155**
 lesson integration, 162
 lesson objectives, 153, 161
 lesson overview, 161
 lesson preparation, **163**, 163–164
 product planner graphic organizer, 160
 related National Academy of Engineering Grand Challenge, 162
 related *Next Generation Science Standards*, 162
 resources and references, 166
 teacher answer key, 164–165
 teacher notes, 161–166
 potential energy, 249
 prehensile, 102
 Provide Access to Clean Water (Grand Challenge)
 saris, and cholera, 229
Pseudomonas aeruginosa, **61**

R

radiograph, 358
 radiological density, 358
 redox, 195
 reduction, 195, 266
 refrigerant, 306
 Remsen, Ira, 186
 resin, 149
 Restore and Improve Urban Infrastructure (Grand Challenge)
 safety glass, 210
 vulcanized rubber, 335
 reverse engineering, 1–2
 roller, 120
 Röntgen, Wilhelm Conrad, 342–344, **343**, **344**

S

saccharin sweetener (case study)
 apply and analyze, **189**, 189–190
 assessment, 197
 case, 186
 curriculum connections, 193–194
 design challenge, 190–191
 extensions, 197
 introduction, 185–186

investigate, 187–189
 lesson integration, 193
 lesson objectives, 186, 192
 lesson overview, 192
 lesson preparation, 194–195, **195**
 related National Academy of Engineering Grand Challenge, 194
 related *Next Generation Science Standards*, 193–194
 resources and references, 197–198
 teacher answer key, 196–197
 teacher notes, 192–198
 safety glass (case study)
 apply and analyze, 202–204, **203**, **204**
 assessment, 215
 case, 200–201, **201**
 curriculum connections, 209–210
 design challenge, 204–206
 extensions, 215
 introduction, 199
 investigate, 201–202
 lesson integration, 209
 lesson objectives, 199–200, 208
 lesson overview, 208
 lesson preparation, 210–212, **211**
 related National Academy of Engineering Grand Challenges, 210
 related *Next Generation Science Standards*, 209–210
 resources and references, 216
 teacher answer key, 213–215
 teacher notes, 208–216
 safety practices, 9
 saris, and cholera (case study)
 apply and analyze, **222**, 222–223
 assessment, 232
 case, 218–219
 characteristics of fabrics chart, 221
 curriculum connections, 228–229
 design challenge, 223–225
 extensions, 232
 introduction, 217, **217**
 investigate, 219–222, **220**
 lesson integration, 228
 lesson objectives, 218, 227

- lesson overview, 227
 - lesson preparation, 229–230, **230**
 - related National Academy of Engineering Grand Challenge, 229
 - related *Next Generation Science Standards*, 228–229
 - resources and references, 232–233
 - teacher answer key, 231–232
 - teacher notes, 227–233
- Scale, Proportion, and Quantity (crosscutting concept)
 - structural color and iridescence, 37
 - x-rays, discovery of, 356
- scientific method, 5–6, **6**
- seahorse tails (case study)
 - apply and analyze, 93–94
 - assessment, 103
 - case, 90–92, **91**
 - curriculum connections, 99
 - design challenge, **94**, 94–96
 - extensions, 104
 - introduction, 89
 - investigate, 92–93
 - lesson objectives, 90, 98
 - lesson overview, 98
 - lesson preparation, 100–102, **101**
 - related *Next Generation Science Standards*, 99
 - resources and references, 104
 - teacher answer key, 102–103
- setae, 85
- sharklet material, 58, **59**
- shark skin and bacteria (case study)
 - apply and analyze, 60–62, **61**
 - assessment, 71–72
 - Business Plan Form, 65
 - case, 58–59, **59**
 - curriculum connections, 68
 - design challenge, **62**, 62–64
 - extensions, 72
 - introduction, 57
 - investigate, 59–60, **60**
 - lesson integration, 68
 - lesson objectives, 57, 67
 - lesson overview, 67
 - lesson preparation, 68–70, **69**
- New Product Evaluation Form, 66
- related *Next Generation Science Standards*, 68
- resources and references, 72
- teacher answer key, 70–71
- teacher notes, 67–72
- shellac, 139–140
- Silly Putty, discovery of (case study)
 - apply and analyze, 171–172
 - assessment, 183
 - case, 168
 - curriculum connections, 178–179
 - design challenge, 172–175
 - extensions, 183
 - introduction, 167
 - investigate, 169
 - lesson integration, 178
 - lesson objectives, 167, 177
 - lesson overview, 177
 - lesson preparation, 179–181, **181**
 - make your own putty, 169–171
 - related National Academy of Engineering Grand Challenge, 179
 - related *Next Generation Science Standards*, 178–179
 - resources and references, 183–184
 - teacher answer key, 182–183
 - teacher notes, 177–184
- Silver, Spencer, 153–154
- Slinky, the (case study)
 - apply and analyze, 242
 - assessment, 251
 - case, 236
 - crosscutting concepts, 247
 - curriculum connections, 247–248
 - design challenge, 242–244
 - extensions, 251
 - introduction, 235
 - investigate, **237**, 237–242, **240–241**
 - lesson integration, 247
 - lesson objectives, 236, 246
 - lesson overview, 246
 - lesson preparation, 248–249, **249**
 - related National Academy of Engineering Grand Challenge, 248

- related *Next Generation Science Standards*, 247
- resources and references, 251–252
- teacher answer key, 249–251
- teacher notes, 246–252
- solution, 38
- square prism, 102
- Stability and Change (crosscutting concept)
 - Teflon, 303
- stabilizer, 337
- stainless steel (case study)
 - apply and analyze, 258
 - assessment, 268
 - case, 254–255
 - curriculum connections, 263–264
 - design challenge, 258–260
 - extensions, 268
 - introduction, 253
 - investigate, 255, 255–258
 - lesson integration, 263
 - lesson objectives, 253–254, 262
 - lesson overview, 262
 - lesson preparation, 264, 264–266, 266
 - related National Academy of Engineering Grand Challenge, 264
 - related *Next Generation Science Standards*, 263
 - resources and references, 268
 - teacher answer key, 266–268
 - teacher notes, 262–268
- Staphylococcus aureus*, 61
- staple, 120
- states of matter, 181
- structural color and iridescence (case study)
 - apply and analyze, 29–30, 30
 - assessment, 41
 - case, 26, 26–27
 - crosscutting concepts, 37
 - curriculum connections, 36–37
 - design challenge, 31, 31–33
 - extensions, 41
 - introduction, 25, 26
 - investigate, 27–29
 - lesson integration, 36
 - lesson objectives, 25, 35
 - lesson overview, 35
 - lesson preparation, 37, 37–38
 - related National Academy of Engineering Grand Challenge, 37
 - related *Next Generation Science Standards*, 36
 - resources and references, 41
 - science and engineering practices, 36
 - teacher answer key, 39–40
 - teacher notes, 35–41
- Structure and Function (crosscutting concept)
 - artificial dye, 52
 - corn flakes, 119
 - gecko feet adhesives, 83
 - memory wire, 20
 - plastic, 147
 - saccharin sweetener, 194
 - safety glass, 210
 - seahorse tails, 99
 - Silly Putty, discovery of, 179
 - Slinky, the, 247
 - stainless steel, 263
 - structural color and iridescence, 37
 - Super Glue, 281
 - Teflon, 303
 - Vaseline, 319
 - x-rays, discovery of, 356
- sucrose, 195
- sulfobenzoic acid, 195
- sulfobenzoic compounds, 195
- Super Glue (case study)
 - apply and analyze, 276
 - assessment, 285
 - case, 270
 - curriculum connections, 281
 - design challenge, 276–278
 - extensions, 285
 - introduction, 269, 269
 - investigate, 270–276, 272, 274–275
 - lesson integration, 281
 - lesson objectives, 269–270, 280
 - lesson overview, 280
 - lesson preparation, 282–283

- related National Academy of Engineering Grand Challenge, 281
 - related *Next Generation Science Standards*, 281
 - resources and references, 285
 - teacher answer key, 283–285
 - teacher notes, 280–285
 - suspension, 181
 - synthetic, 149
 - Systems and System Models (crosscutting concept)
 - Slinky, the, 247
- T**
- tack, 85
 - Teflon (case study)
 - apply and analyze, 297
 - assessment, 307
 - case, 288
 - curriculum connections, 302–303
 - design challenge, 297–299
 - dive deeper, 289–292, **290–291, 293**
 - extensions, 307
 - introduction, **287**, 287–288
 - investigate, 294–295, **296**
 - lesson integration, 302
 - lesson objectives, 288, 301
 - lesson overview, 301
 - lesson preparation, 303–306, **305**
 - related *Next Generation Science Standards*, 302–303
 - resources and references, 308
 - teacher answer key, 306–307
 - teacher notes, 301–308
 - tempered, 212
 - thermoset, 149
 - thin film, 38
 - Thomson, J.J., 344
- V**
- valence, 195
 - van der Waals forces, 85, 166
 - Vaseline (case study)
 - apply and analyze, 313
 - assessment, 323
 - case, **310**, 310–311
 - crosscutting concepts, 319
 - curriculum connections, 318–319
 - design challenge, 313–315
 - extensions, 323
 - introduction, 309
 - investigate, 311–313
 - lesson integration, 318
 - lesson objectives, 309, 317
 - lesson overview, 317
 - lesson preparation, 319–321, **320**
 - related National Academy of Engineering Grand Challenge, 319
 - related *Next Generation Science Standards*, 318–319
 - resources and references, 323
 - teacher answer key, 321–323
 - teacher notes, 317–323
 - vegetarian, 120
 - Velcro, 1
 - Velcro (case study)
 - apply and analyze, 366
 - assessment, 374
 - case, **364**, 364–365
 - curriculum connections, 371
 - design challenge, 366–368, **367**
 - extensions, 374–375
 - introduction, 363, **363**
 - investigate, 365
 - lesson objectives, 364, 370
 - lesson overview, 370
 - lesson preparation, 371–373, **372**
 - related National Academy of Engineering Grand Challenge, 371
 - related *Next Generation Science Standards*, 371
 - resources and references, 375
 - teacher answer key, 373–374
 - teacher notes, 370–375
 - Vignolini, Silvia, 26–27
 - viscosity, 181
 - von Laue, Max, 348
 - vulcanized rubber (case study)
 - apply and analyze, 328–329
 - assessment, 338
 - case, 326–327
 - curriculum connections, 334–335
 - design challenge, 329–331

extensions, 339
introduction, 325
investigate, 327–328
lesson integration, 334
lesson objectives, 325, 333
lesson overview, 333
lesson preparation, 335–337, **336**
related National Academy of
Engineering Grand Challenges,
335
related *Next Generation Science
Standards*, 334–335
resources and references, 339
teacher answer key, 337–338
teacher notes, 333–339

W

Walker, John, 126
water-soluble, 195
wavelength, 38
Wright, James, 168

X

x-rays, discovery of (case study)
apply and analyze, 348–349

assessment, 361
case, **342**, 342–344, **343**
crosscutting concepts, 356
curriculum connections, 355–356
design challenge, 349–351, **353**
dive deeper, 344–345
extensions, 361
introduction, 341
investigate, 345–348, **347**
lesson integration, 355
lesson objectives, 341, 354
lesson overview, 354
lesson preparation, 356–358, **357**
related National Academy of
Engineering Grand Challenges,
356
related *Next Generation Science
Standards*, 355–356
resources and references, 361
teacher answer key, 358–360

Z

zooplankton, 230

"A number of amazing innovations have resulted from someone making an observation of a phenomenon or trying an experiment just to 'see what will happen.'"

—From the introduction to *Discovery Engineering in Physical Science*

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