

## **The Polio Vaccine**

**(Story words: learning, discovery)**

Janet had an interesting project to complete for her seventh-grade science class. Class members were allowed to choose the scientist that most interested them and create a slideshow about that person.

Janet was interested in learning more about vaccines, a subject she had heard discussed so often during the year. She came across the name “Jonas Salk” who was the leading scientist in the discovery of the polio vaccine.

There was a time when the poliovirus provoked fear in everyone. Before the vaccine was created in the 1950s, there were more than 15,000 cases of polio per year. The virus could infect a person’s spinal cord and result in lifelong paralysis. Parents were afraid to let their children play outside or go to swimming pools, especially in the summertime when it seemed like cases were peaking.

Jonas Salk was the leading inventor of a vaccine that used inactivated poliovirus. In 1955, he announced that his vaccine was safe and successful. People were injected with inactivated poliovirus, which prompted their bodies to create antibodies to fight the virus. Producing those antibodies protected them from getting really sick from live poliovirus out in the world.

Other vaccines, such as the smallpox vaccine and the flu vaccine, are based on a similar concept. A small bit of a virus is put in people's bodies so that their bodies will produce antibodies to fight it.

Jonas Salk never tried to patent the vaccine or profit from it. He felt that the vaccine was his gift to the children of the world, and he wanted children (and people) to be vaccinated as quickly as possible. By 1959, ninety countries were vaccinating people against the poliovirus, and parents in many places no longer feared that their children would get the polio disease.

Salk became a celebrity and was treated as a hero for the rest of his life. When Janet began to create her slideshow, she decided that Salk was lucky to be such a successful scientist. She even felt inspired to continue studying science so that she could someday invent something as necessary and wonderful as the polio vaccine.