Great Inventions: The Paper Clip

Ever wonder about where the simple things that you take for granted came from? Take, for example, the paper clip. As long as people have been using paper they have needed a way to fasten papers together. In the 13th century people used to cut a slit in the top left hand corners of a sheaf of papers and hold them together by threading a ribbon through the parallel slits. At some point people started first dipping the ribbon in wax before threading the papers together, to make the ribbon stronger. People held papers together by this method for about six hundred years. When the straight pin was invented in 1835, it became a popular way to hold papers together, although they were actually designed to hold fabric together temporarily while it was being sewn. It was over sixty years later before the Norwegian inventor Johan Vaaler invented the paper clip in 1899. Since Norway had no patent laws at that time, he patented his idea in Germany, and again in America in 1901. His original idea didn’t look exactly like our paper clips look today but were a "rectangular, triangular, or otherwise shaped hoop, the end parts of which wire piece form members or tongues lying side by side in contrary directions." Though Johan Vaaler was the first person to patent a paperclip design, other unpatented designs may have predated it.

1. How did people hold together papers in the 13th century?
   A. the straight pin
   B. threading a ribbon through a slit in the paper
   C. the paper clip

2. Why did people dip ribbons in wax before using them to thread papers together?
   A. to keep the ribbon from shredding
   B. to make the ribbon longer
   C. to make the ribbon stronger