

Jack Ma

Pre-Reading

A. Warm-Up Questions

1. What is Jack Ma famous for?
2. Why do you think this Chinese man has an English name?
3. What does the expression 'open sesame' mean?
4. What do you want to learn about Jack Ma?



B. Vocabulary Preview

Match up as many words and meanings as you can.

Check this exercise again after seeing the words in context on page 2.

- | | |
|--|---|
| _____ 1. founder | a) a refusal to accept, hire, or buy |
| _____ 2. born with a silver spoon in one's mouth | b) related to government control of social and economic activity |
| _____ 3. communist | c) a person who starts a company |
| _____ 4. rejection | d) to give money in hopes of increasing its value |
| _____ 5. translation | e) to cause or motivate someone to take an action |
| _____ 6. inspire | f) to provide opportunities |
| _____ 7. e-commerce | g) business that takes place over the internet |
| _____ 8. invest | h) to be born into a wealthy family |
| _____ 9. ambassador | i) the changing of words into a different language |
| _____ 10. open doorways | j) a person who promotes and represents an idea, product, or business |

Reading

1. Jack Ma is the richest man in China. He is the **founder** and chairman of Alibaba, an e-commerce platform. Unlike many other billionaires, Ma wasn't **born with a silver spoon in his mouth**.
2. Jack Ma (born *Ma Yun*) grew up in a poor family in **communist** China. His hometown of Hangzhou became a tourist spot after US President Richard Nixon visited in 1972. Ma used the opportunity to learn English. He visited a nearby hotel every morning and offered tours of the city in exchange for English language lessons. One of the tourists became his pen pal and gave him the nickname 'Jack'.
3. Jack Ma knew that a good education was the ticket to a better life. He failed his university entrance exams twice and received ten **rejections** from Harvard. After graduating from the region's worst school, Ma began looking for a job. He applied for 30 positions but received rejections from all of them.
4. Jack Ma did not give up. Eventually he got a job teaching English at a local university. His first salary was \$10 (about £8) per month. In the mid-1990s, he started a **translation** business. During a business trip to the US in 1994, Ma discovered the internet. He searched for the word 'beer', but no Chinese products came up. This **inspired** Ma to build a Chinese internet company.
5. After two failed tech companies, Jack Ma founded Alibaba, an **e-commerce** platform for Chinese businesses. Ma chose the name Alibaba because it was a globally recognised word with symbolic meaning. The famous tale *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* contains the words 'open sesame', a magical phrase that gets a poor woodcutter into a cave of treasures.
6. Jack Ma hired a small team of 17 friends, and his business began to grow. By 1999, several large companies had **invested** in Alibaba. Jack Ma's employees worked hard, but they also had fun. They exercised their minds and bodies by playing with Silly String and doing handstands on their breaks. They also had an annual talent show.
7. In 2005, Yahoo made a one-billion-dollar investment in Alibaba for 40% of the company. Eight years later, Alibaba went public. Jack Ma became the richest man in China. In 2017, his fortune was valued at 30 billion dollars (about 23 billion pounds).
8. Jack Ma is an **ambassador** for business. He wants to **open doorways** for people and help their businesses become profitable. In the next 20 years, Ma hopes to help create 100 million jobs in countries around the world, including China.

'As a business person, I want the world to share the prosperity together.'

—Jack Ma, Founder of Alibaba

Comprehension

A. Timeline

Place the following in chronological order (1–8).

One item is not mentioned in the reading.

Place a star beside it and guess where it belongs.

- _____ Jack Ma began learning English from tourists.
- _____ Alibaba went public.
- _____ Jack Ma met his wife while teaching English at Hangzhou University.
- _____ Jack Ma became China's richest man.
- _____ President Richard Nixon visited Jack Ma's hometown.
- _____ Jack Ma became a teacher.
- _____ Some of Jack Ma's friends helped him start an internet company.
- _____ Jack Ma discovered the internet and searched for 'beer'.

B. True or False?

Read the statements below. Write T if the statement is true.

Write F if the statement is false and correct the information in your notebook.

- _____ 1. Jack Ma grew up with a silver spoon in his mouth.
- _____ 2. A student gave Ma Yun his English nickname.
- _____ 3. Jack Ma experienced several rejections before getting his first job.
- _____ 4. Jack Ma's first business was a great success.
- _____ 5. *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* was Jack Ma's favourite story, so he chose Alibaba for his company's name.
- _____ 6. At work, Jack Ma is always very serious, and his employees are too.
- _____ 7. Yahoo made a major investment in Alibaba, which helped it grow.
- _____ 8. Jack Ma's top goal is to make China the richest country in the world.

Vocabulary Review

A. Choose the Correct Word

Choose the word or phrase with the closest meaning to the underlined word or phrase in the following sentences.

1. He was in his twenties when he became the founder.
 - a) manager
 - b) operator
 - c) creator
2. Rejection inspired me to improve my writing skills.
 - a) Refusals
 - b) Failed
 - c) Patience
3. My uncle opened doorways for me in the business world.
 - a) works
 - b) provided opportunities
 - c) open sesame
4. We want you to be an ambassador for our new product line.
 - a) a founder
 - b) a success
 - c) a promoter
5. She has never worked for a living. She was born with a silver spoon in her mouth.
 - a) utensil
 - b) wealthy
 - c) poor
6. Amazon is a successful e-commerce site.
 - a) internet provider
 - b) online business
 - c) founder

B. Complete the Sentences

Complete the sentences using vocabulary from page 1. You may need to change the word forms.

1. A _____ dictionary is helpful for travel English.
2. I received another _____ letter in the post today, but I won't give up.
3. _____ some of your money instead of keeping it in your savings account.
4. In a _____ country, the government has strict control of the economy.
5. Knowing a second language will _____ for you in the business world.

Extra Tasks

A. How to Become a Billionaire

Write a list of 5–10 ways to become a billionaire based on Jack Ma's life.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

B. Spoken or Written Response

Record a video or write a paragraph on one of the following topics.

1. Describe a failure or rejection that made you a stronger person.
2. Describe someone who opened a doorway for you.
3. Describe how you got your nickname.
4. Describe an entrepreneur who inspires you.