**New Pearls**

New Pearls With its deep white luster, the beauty of a pearl is 13

beyond compare. Yet pearls start out as nothing more than tiny bits 25

of matter. A grain of sand gets inside the shell of an oyster or clam. 40

The animal then covers the sand with layers of shell-like material 51

called mother-of-pearl. In time, a beautiful round pearl forms. 62

Oyster pearls are definitely the most popular pearls because of 72

their roundness and deep white color. But other mollusks, animals 82

with shells, also make pearls. In fact, pearls come in a wide variety 95

of shapes, sizes, and colors. The Caribbean conch produces 104

dazzling pink pearls. Blue, black, and yellow pearls are highly 114

prized because they are rare. 119

Some pearls are valued at thousands of dollars. This price reflects 130

how fascinating they are. It also shows how rare it is to find a 144

natural pearl. Pearl divers discover a good pearl only once in about 156

a thousand attempts. 159

But where there is a will, there is a way. Japanese pearl collectors 172

grew tired of depending on fortune alone to find pearls. So, they184 invented a process to encourage oysters to make pearls faster. 194

They deposited a particle into the body of an oyster, and in three to 208

five years, a decent-size cultured pearl was almost sure to form. 220

The invention of cultured pearls opened up a new market for pearls.232 Previously, only very wealthy people could afford a string of natural249 pearls. Now, pearls are available to everyone. Each year some 500260 million cultured pearls are made. They cost less than a natural pearl 272

but are almost as attractive.277