



Thomas A. Edison/ Invention

I. SYNOPSIS

Thomas Alva Edison's laboratory in West Orange was called an invention factory for good reason. Edison assembled a team of workers who helped him produce inventions on a regular schedule and for the purpose of making a profit.

Today Edison's West Orange laboratory is a national park. Ranger Ben Bolger takes a class on a tour of the site. He explains the steps in the invention process as the class visits Edison's library, storeroom and machine shop.

We learn about three of Edison's most important inventions -- the electric light, the phonograph and the motion picture camera. Charley Hummel demonstrates the workings of the early tinfoil phonograph. Ben Bolger shows how Edison improved the phonograph to make it more profitable. In order to profit from his motion-picture camera, Edison made movies and built the kinoscope arcades in which to show them.

Finally, we learn how Edison's inventions changed the way we live, work and play, as students give their own answers to the question which of Thomas Edison's inventions was the most important?

II. KEY WORDS

Invention - a device produced for the first time

Factory - a building in which products are manufactured in great number

Patent - a grant from the United States government of the exclusive right to make, use and sell an invention for seventeen years

Profit - the amount of money made from sales of a product minus the expenses of making and selling it

Filament - a wire within an electric light bulb that glows and thus produces light

III. SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

A. THE INVENTION PROCESS

1. Objective

Students will recall the steps of the invention process.

2. Before Viewing the Program

Explain to the students that one of the themes of the following program is the steps Thomas Edison used in inventing. Ask the students to pay attention to these steps and to look for examples of them in particular inventions mentioned in the program.

3. After Viewing the Program

Download and reproduce the Invention Process Question Sheet and distribute it to the class. Ask the students to fill out the questions and then discuss their answers together.

B. CHANGING OUR LIVES

1. Objective

Students will analyze the ways that Edison's inventions changed our lives and judge which inventions were the most important.

2. Before Viewing the Program

Ask the students to name some of Thomas Edison's inventions. Explain that the following program shows three of his most important inventions and how they changed our lives. Ask them to pay attention to this theme and try to answer for themselves which of these inventions was the most important.

3. After Viewing the Program

Download and reproduce the "Edison Inventions" Question Sheet. Ask the students to fill out the sheet, and go over the answers in a class discussion.

C. EDISON'S PHILOSOPHY

1. Objective

Students will infer attitudes from sayings and construct their own sayings to express their attitudes.

2. After Viewing the Program

Download and reproduce and distribute the document titled "The Sayings of Thomas Edison." Distribute the document to the class. Ask the students to discuss the meaning of each. Then ask them to compose sayings that express their own attitudes towards studying, playing, and obeying their parents.

IV. SUGGESTED READINGS

Friedel, Robert and Paul Israel. *Edison's Electric Light: Biography of an Invention*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986.

NEW JERSEY HISTORY PARTNERSHIP PROJECT (website)

www.nj-history.org

Click on "Progressive Era"

Click on "Mass Entertainment"

Or click on "Special Feature: New Jersey and Mass Entertainment"

THE EDISON NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE (website)

<http://www.nps.gov/edis/>

THE THOMAS A. EDISON PAPERS

<http://edison.rutgers.edu/>