

Lesson Forty-One

Thomas Alva Edison

LESSON IDEA

To demonstrate the creative genius of Thomas Edison, and to describe the development and character of this great inventor.

PREPARATION

Read the "During The Week" section and prepare the suggested wall chart.

"THE BOY IS ADDLED," the teacher barked sourly. "He's not worth keeping in school any longer."

When Thomas Alva Edison overheard that brutal pronouncement, he raced for home with his pride crushed and his eyes blinded by tears.

"Then I found out what a good thing a good mother was!" the famous inventor recalled years later. "She took me back to school and angrily told the teacher that he didn't know what he was talking about. She was the most enthusiastic champion a boy ever had, and I determined right then that I would be worthy of her, and show her that her confidence had not been misplaced."

The proud mother, herself a former teacher, enrolled her son in a new school that very day: the Edison "classroom-for-one" in the family home at Port Huron, Michigan. The budding homeschooled scholar, then known as Al, quickly developed a thirst for knowledge.

By the age of ten (he was born on February 11, 1847), Al had read such works as Gibbon's *Decline and Fall Of The Roman Empire*, Hume's *History Of England*, Sear's *History of the World*, Burton's *Anatomy Of Melancholy*, and the *Dictionary of Sciences*. And he had already begun copying simple scientific experiments from his textbooks.

By his 12th birthday he was urging his parents to let him organize a newspaper business on the new railroad line which ran from Port Huron to Detroit. He planned to sell newspapers and snacks to passengers, at his own risk and for his own profit. The family did not need the extra money, but Al did (for books, chemicals, and laboratory equipment). Railroad officials and his parents were hesitant, but they eventually relented and young Edison was soon in business.

"Peanuts, popcorn, chewing gum, candy!" was his familiar cry. "'Honest Abe' Elected President! Southern States Form Confederacy! Get your *Free Press!* Read all about it!"

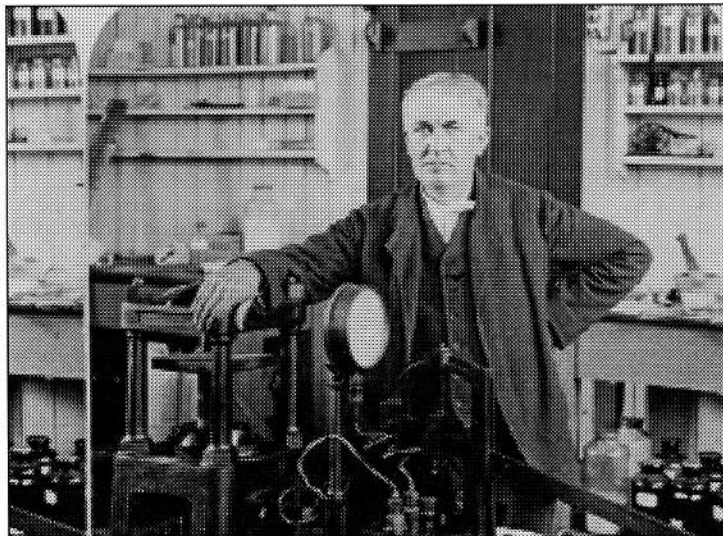
When the railroad added more trains, Al hired some assistants (newsboys and street hawkers) who sold whatever papers remained after the trains arrived. As business increased, so did Al's ideas. He was soon buying fancy vegetables in Detroit to sell in Port Huron, and fresh butter and

fruit from farmers in Port Huron to sell in Detroit. He rented a stall in his home city, and hired an assistant to sell the Detroit produce. In Detroit, he sold to established shopkeepers.

The earnings from his growing enterprise often amounted to several dollars a day, which was good pay at the time for an adult, much less a young boy. One dollar of each day's profit went to his

mother; the rest he spent on equipment and books for his experiments.

How do Edison's study and work habits compare to those of your friends today? How many are willing to work as hard to achieve their goals? How many expect, and receive, handouts from



Thomas Edison in his laboratory

