

## Lesson Nine

# I, Pencil

### LESSON IDEA

The free enterprise system works in seemingly miraculous ways, to automatically coordinate the millions of different activities that produce goods and services for us. Consider, for example, what is involved in making something as “simple” as a lead pencil.

### VISUAL AID

Enough standard wooden “lead” (actually graphite) pencils, with erasers, to give one to each family member.

**D**O YOU RECALL the story of “Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp”? It relates the saga of a young boy who found a magical lamp containing a genie with the power to grant the wishes of whomever rubbed the lamp.

This story from *Tales From The Arabian Nights* is mythical, but there is a *real* equivalent of an Aladdin’s Lamp available to us today. It is capable of supplying in abundance virtually any material objects we may desire. Called the free enterprise system, it is capable of coordinating human energy with natural resources in a way that helped lift the United States to the highest standard of living of any country in history

It may seem an exaggeration to imply that the free enterprise system works in a magical way, so let’s take a look at how it produced this seemingly simple device. [Hand each family member a wooden lead pencil.]

Do you believe someone, without help, could make a pencil? [Give everyone an opportunity to express an opinion.] It looks easy at first, doesn’t it? Especially when compared to what it would take to make something more complex, such as a computer or jet airliner. But before we jump to any conclusions, let’s find out what it takes to make an ordinary wooden pencil. If the pencil could talk, here’s the fascinating story it could tell:

**I** AM A lead pencil — the ordinary wooden pencil familiar to all boys and girls and adults who can read and write. Writing is both my vocation and my avocation; it is all I do.

You may wonder why I should tell you about myself. Well, to begin with, my story is interesting. And, next, I am a mystery — more so than a tree or a sunset or even a flash of lightning. But, sadly, I am taken for granted by those who use me.

Simple though I appear to be, I merit your wonder and awe, a claim I shall attempt to prove. In fact, if you can understand me, if you can become aware of the miraculousness which I symbolize, you can help save the freedom mankind is so unhappily losing. I have a profound lesson to teach. And I can teach this lesson better than can an automobile or an airplane or a mechanical dishwasher. Why? Well, because I am seemingly so simple.

Simple? Yet, not a single person on the face of this earth knows how to make me. This sounds fantastic, doesn’t it? Especially when you realize that about one and one-half billion of my brothers and sisters are produced in the U.S.A. each year.

Pick me up and look me over. What do you see? Not much meets the eye — there’s some wood, lacquer, the printed labeling, graphite lead, a bit of metal, and an eraser.

Just as you cannot trace your family tree back very far, so is it impossible for me to name and explain all my antecedents. But I would like to suggest enough of them to impress upon you the richness and complexity of my background.

My family tree begins with what in fact is a tree, a cedar of straight grain that grows in Northern California and Oregon. Now think about all the saws and trucks and rope and the countless other gear used in harvesting and carting the cedar logs to the railroad siding. Think of all the persons and the numberless skills that went into their fabrication: the mining of ore, the making of steel and its refinement into saws, axes, motors;

