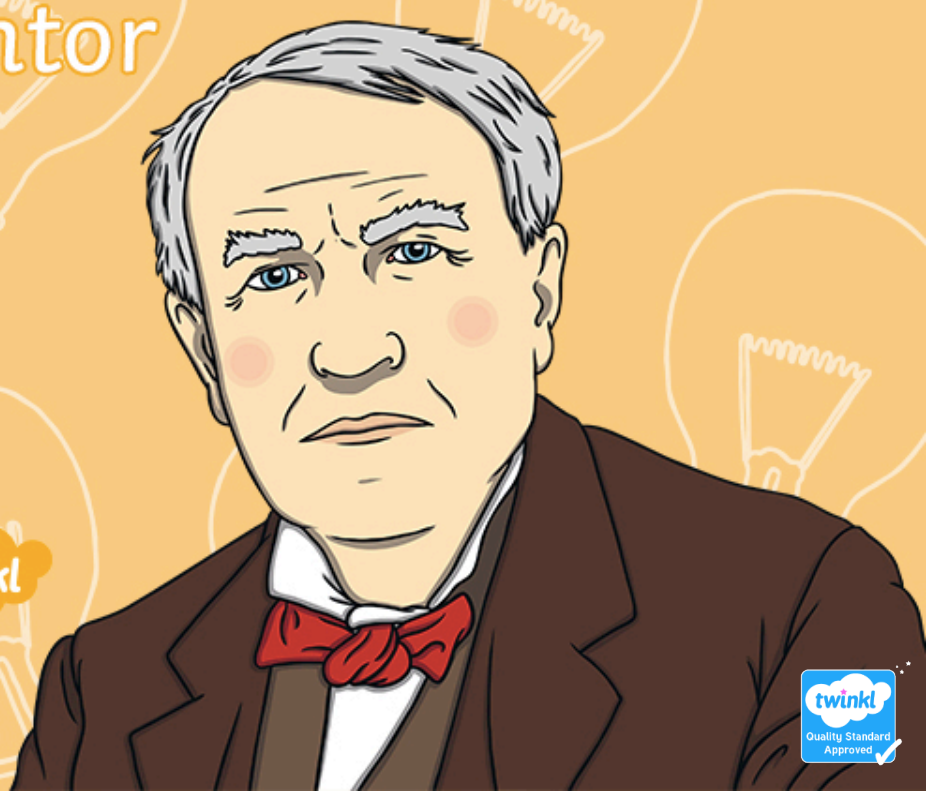
Thomas Edison

Inventor



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His Childhood

Thomas Alva Edison was born in Ohio, America. He was the seventh child of Samuel and Nancy Edison.

As a child, he had hearing problems from the illness scarlet fever. His mother was a teacher, so he did not go to school but was taught at home.

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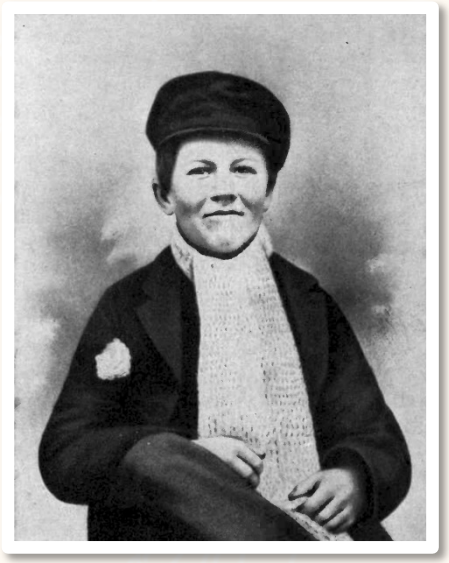
Teenage Years

As a teenager, Edison sold candy and newspapers on trains. Quickly, he became quite a good businessman and, with four assistants, started selling newspapers on the streets.



Did you know…?

Because he didn't have access to books from a school, Thomas got himself a library card for the local library and it is said that he read all the books in there!

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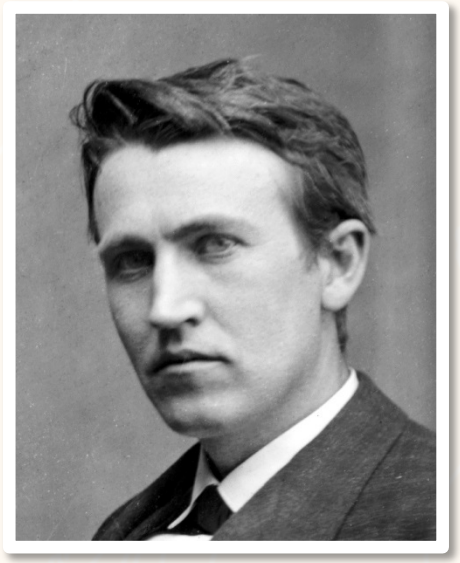
Edison First Job

Thomas Edison got his first job by accident when he saved a 3 year-old boy from being hit by a train. The boy's father was so grateful that he gave Thomas a job as a telegraph operator!



What is it?

A telegraph operator is a person who operates a telephone switchboard.

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Losing His Job

At 19 years of age, Thomas moved to Kentucky to start a new job. He chose to work at night so that he could carry on with his experiments in the daytime.

Unfortunately, he spilt sulfuric acid on the floor and it dripped through the wooden floor boards onto the desk of his boss below.

Thomas Edison was fired!

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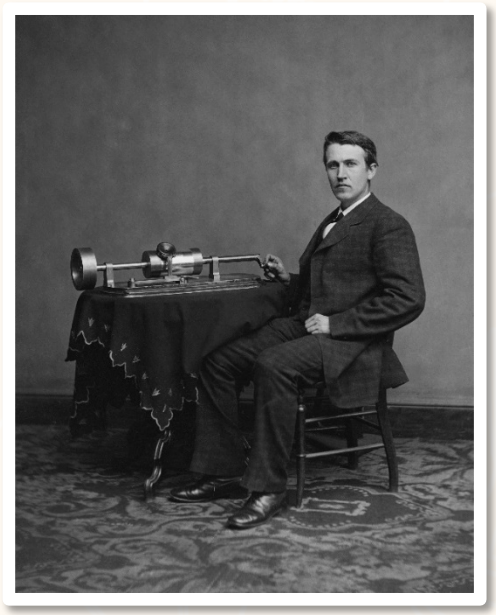
His First Invention

Thomas Edison's first invention was completed in 1877 – the phonograph. This was a machine that could record and replay sound. The sound was played through a large horn.

Edison recorded himself saying the nursery rhyme 'Mary Had a Little Lamb' and was amazed when his invention played it back to him.

Edison's phonograph was based on his work on the telephone and the earlier invention of the phonautograph, the earliest known sound recorder, which was invented by Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville in 1857.



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The First Electric Lightbulb

Thomas began to try to invent a light that did not need oils or gas to be lit. Edison created a lightbulb that would stay lit using electricity for 13 ½ hours!

In 1879, he demonstrated his amazing invention to a group of people in Menlo Park. Because of this, he became known as the 'Wizard of Menlo Park'.

Did you know…?
The first light bulb needed a tiny piece of bamboo to work properly.

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The First Electric Lightbulb

There has been some debate over whether Thomas Edison was the first person to invent the electric lightbulb.

Other inventors had made early versions of electric lamps, including Henry Woodward and Mathew Evans, who later sold their idea to Edison.

In 1850, Joseph Swan, a British inventor, began working on his own version of a lightbulb. In 1879, Swan was able to publically show a working lamp, the same year that Edison's lightbulb was patented.

In order to avoid competing, Edison and Swan joined companies in 1883 to form Edison and Swan Electric Light Company.

Did You Know…?
Joseph Swan's house in Gateshead, 'Underhill', was the first house to have working lightbulbs installed.

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Making Friends

Soon, the car maker Henry Ford asked Thomas Edison to design a battery for a car to start itself. Edison did this, and Ford and Edison became great friends.

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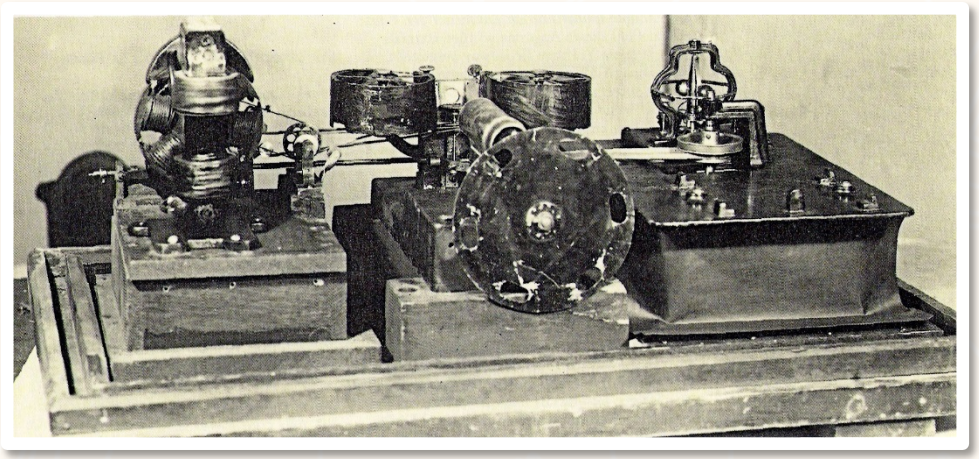
Other Inventions

Edison invented a machine called a kinetograph that could crush rocks that had been brought up from the mines.

He also developed the carbon transmitter that improved the sound heard down a telephone line.



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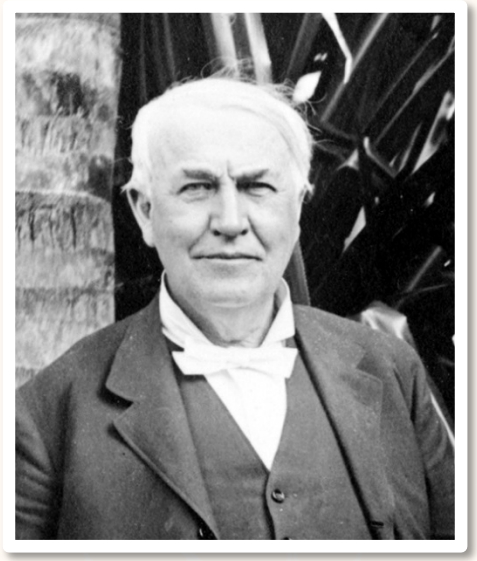
A Super Inventor

Thomas Edison was a very careful worker, who is now known as one of the most important inventors in history.

He managed to encourage very important people to support his inventions and put money into them, so that he had the time to work on them properly.



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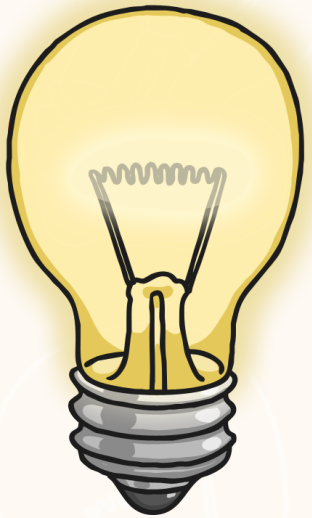
The End of an Inventor

Thomas Edison died in 1931 from problems with diabetes. He was 84 years-old.

Almost everyone in the world has used at least one of his inventions: the electric lightbulb. We are still using them today, over 100 years later!



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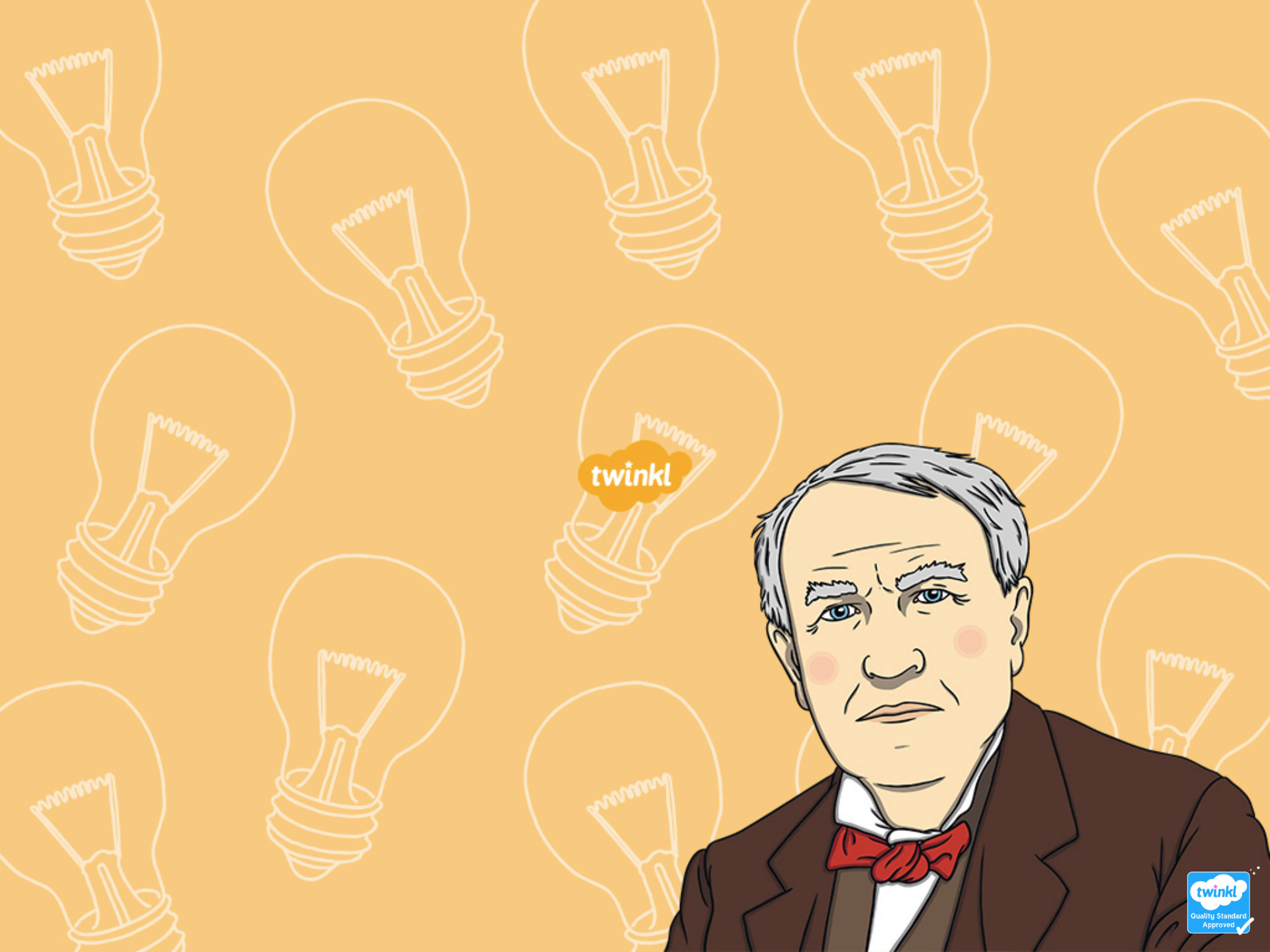
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