

THE HISTORY OF THE TELEPHONE

Activity Items

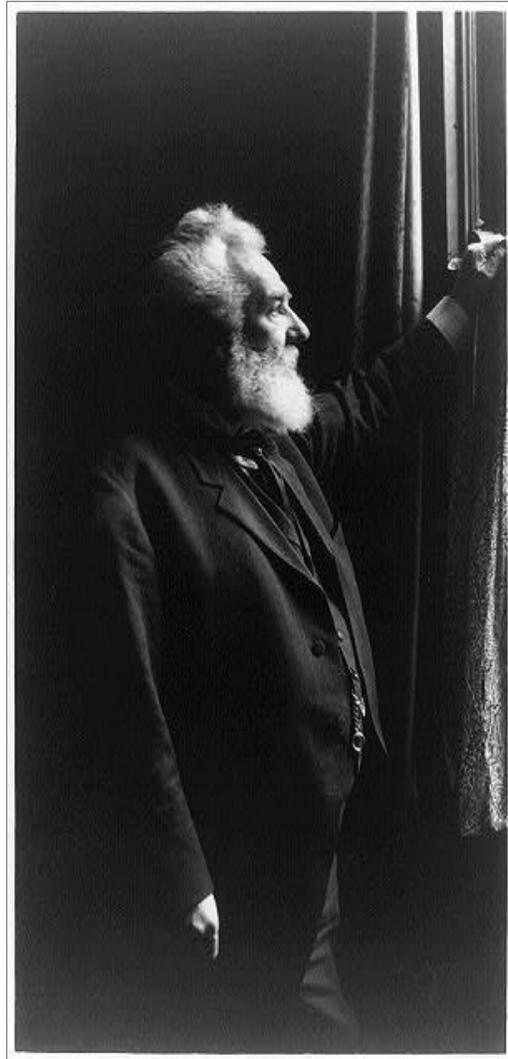
There are no separate items for this activity.

Student Learning Objectives

- I will be able to name who invented the telephone and say why that invention is important.
- I will be able to explain how phones have changed over time.

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

The telephone is one of the most important inventions. It lets people talk to each other at the same time across long distances, changing the way we communicate today.



Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone

1. Like many inventions, the telephone was likely thought of many years before it was invented, and by many people. But it wasn't until 1876 when a man named Alexander Graham Bell, pictured on the previous page, patented the telephone and was allowed to start selling it.

Can you guess what "patented" means?

2. The picture below, from over 100 years ago, shows Alexander Graham Bell using one of his first telephones to make a call from New York to Chicago.



Alexander Graham Bell making a telephone call from New York to Chicago in 1892

Why do you think it was important that someone in New York could use the telephone to talk to someone in Chicago?

3. Today, millions of people make phone calls each day, and many people have a cellphone. But long ago, when the telephone was first introduced to the American public, few people had a phone in their house!

When the U.S. Census Bureau counted the number of homes with telephones for the first time, in 1889, how many homes do you think had a phone?

4. One of the first types of telephones to become popular in the 1890s looked like the one in the picture below. There were two main pieces: the speaker, which you would hold up to your ear to hear, and the mouthpiece, which you would hold up to your mouth to talk into. People would move the little wheel at the bottom to dial a phone number.



Popular phone in the 1890s

Can you guess the name of this type of phone? (Clue: It shares its name with something that people used to use to help them see in the dark. It is also the name of something that is put on top of a birthday cake!)

5. Another version of the telephone, from the 1920s, is the French-style handle phone, pictured below. You'll see it looks different from the phone used in the 1890s.



Handle phone (1920s)

Describe how the handle phone looks different and how this new design could have changed the way people used the phone.

6. Next came the telephone with buttons. This allowed people to dial a number on the phone more quickly than with the wheel design used on older phones. Then came the cordless phone, pictured below.



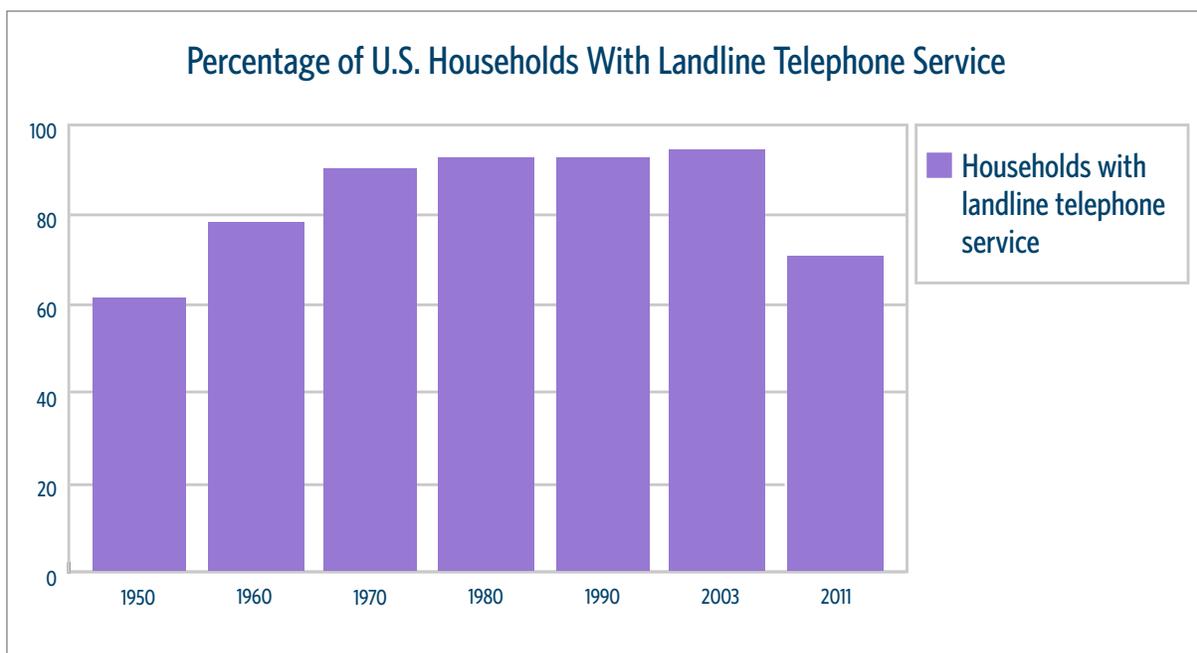
Cordless phone (1990s)

Can you guess how the cordless phone got its name?

7. What do you think people could do in their home with the cordless phone that they couldn't do before then?

- As phones changed through the years, they became less expensive to make and buy and they let more and more people talk to each other in easier ways.

Looking at the following graph, which shows the percentage of houses that had landline telephone service between 1950 and 2011, what do you think happened during this time? Did more people get landline telephones?



Source for 1950–1990 data: U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1999*.

Source for 2003 and 2011 data: U.S. Census Bureau, *Extended Measures of Well-Being: Living Conditions in the United States: 2011*.

9. The last bar on the graph looks smaller than the others. That bar shows the percentage of houses with landline telephone service in 2011.

Can you guess why that bar was smaller in 2011?

10. After the cordless phone came the cellphone, which lets people make phone calls from many places around the world. Cellphones used to be larger and look more similar to cordless phones, but they eventually got smaller and changed in design. See the photo below for a cellphone from the early 1990s.



Motorola cellphone (early 1990s)

What are some good things about having a cellphone? What are some bad things?

11. Alexander Graham Bell's invention changed the world. If it weren't for the telephone, the world would be a much different place. Name one type of phone — not a cellphone — that you learned about today and describe it.