



Smithsonian Institution

WHAT IS THIS THING?



This is one of the earliest versions of something you have in your home or might have with you right now. One day in **March 1876**, the inventor was tinkering with the machine while his assistant, a man named Thomas A. Watson, was with another machine in another room. The inventor called out, "Mr. Watson, come here! I want to see you!" The inventor was excited. He thought the thing was starting to work. But Watson, in the other room, already knew it was working. He knew it the moment the inventor called to him.

Can you guess what it is?
Try the puzzles for the answer.

CROSSED LINES

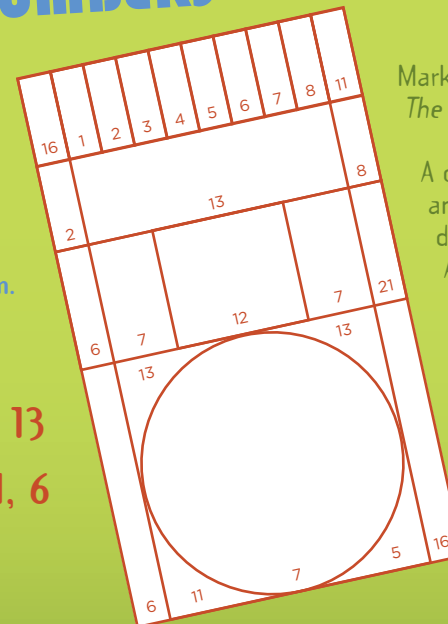
The answers are clues to what the invention is.
The correct letters in the red boxes form the name of the invention.

1. People and parrots do this
2. Singer's musical instrument
3. Postcard's way of traveling
4. Room in a jail
5. One part of a book
6. Opposite of goodbye
7. Opposite of right
8. 1, 2, 3, etc.
9. Something that rings and inventor of something that rings

WRONG NUMBERS

Cross out the number that doesn't belong in each of these three series of numbers. Then find those wrong numbers in the outline at the right. Color only the areas that are marked by the wrong numbers. You will see a modern version of the invention.

- A. 2, 3, 4, 7, 5
B. 6, 8, 10, 12, 13
C. 21, 16, 13, 11, 6

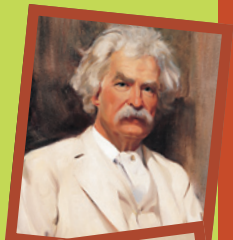


ALSO IN 1876

Mark Twain published *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

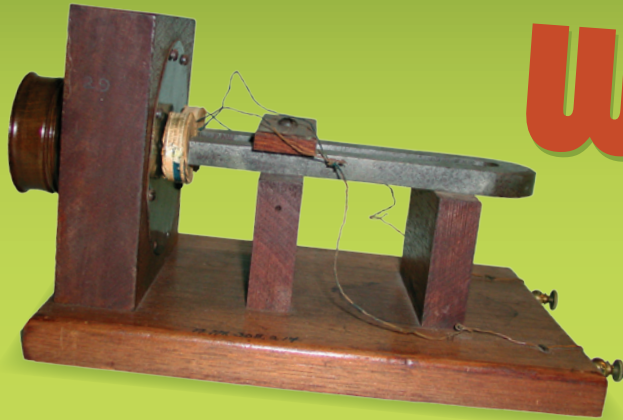
A combined force of Sioux and Northern Cheyenne defeated General George Armstrong Custer and the 7th Cavalry at the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

Baseball's National League was formed. Early National League teams included the St. Louis Brown Stockings, the Boston Beaneaters, and the Brooklyn Bridegrooms.



www.SmithsonianEducation.org/Kids

WHAT IS THIS THING?



The invention is the telephone.
The inventor was Alexander Graham Bell.

The phone in these pictures was an improvement on the very first phone, through which Bell placed a call to Watson in another room. Bell used the phone in these pictures a few months later for a call between Cambridge and Salem, Massachusetts, a distance of sixteen miles.

How did it work? Words spoken into the mouthpiece (on the left side of the big upright wooden block) caused the black metal disc (on the other side of the block) to vibrate. Magnets attached to the disc changed these vibrations, or sound waves, into pulses of electricity. The electricity moved through the wires to the receiving phone. The disc on the receiving phone vibrated in the same way, reproducing the sounds of the words.

Some things haven't changed. When you talk into a phone, your words vibrate a disc in the mouthpiece. If it is a local call on a landline, wires carry the electrical pulses to the receiving phone.

Today, however, some long-distance calls travel in a different way. They are *really* long in distance—the electrical pulses bounce off a satellite in space before they reach the other phone. Cell-phone calls are connected by cellular antennas. Your words travel as radio waves.

There were only two telephones in the world in March 1876. Four years later, there were 60,000. Fourteen years later, there were 6 million. The earliest phone users had to arrange for their own connections between phones and had to invent their own methods of announcing calls. A person might whistle into the phone to let the other person know that someone was calling. But the popularity of the telephone led to the quick growth of a telephone network. Operators at central "exchanges" would connect calls, and phones were soon equipped with a bell that would ring to announce a call.

As someone once said, "Aren't you glad his name wasn't Alexander Graham Siren?"

