

The Family Heritage Series

A weekly discussion of Americanist truths and traditions for those "heirs of all the ages" who will have to preserve that most important inheritance of all – freedom.
Produced by the Movement To Restore Decency.



Volume II

Lesson Eighty-Three

I, Pencil

LESSON IDEA

To show how the free enterprise system works in an almost miraculous way, coordinating thousands of different activities, to produce goods and services for us.

PREPARATION

Have on hand enough wooden lead pencils, with erasers, to give one to each family member.

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DO YOU RECALL the story of "Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp"? If so, you will remember that it tells of a young boy who found a magical lamp containing a genie with the power to grant the wish of whoever rubbed the lamp.

This story from *The Arabian Nights* is, of course, mythical. But the fact is that we in America today have access to a *real* Aladdin's Lamp, which is also capable of supplying in abundance just about any material desire we may have. It is called the "free enterprise system," and it has proven itself magically capable of coordinating human energy with natural resources in a manner which has given our nation the highest standard of living of any country in the history of the world.

At first, it may seem an exaggeration to imply that the free enterprise system works in a magical way. But it is not, as we shall now see. [*At this point, hand everyone in the family a wooden lead pencil.*]

Do you believe any man or woman could make a pencil? [*Give everyone an opportunity to express an*

opinion.] At first, it would seem rather easy, wouldn't it? Especially when compared with what it would take to make something more complex, such as a television set or refrigerator. But before we jump to any conclusions, let's get a pencil's-eye view of what is involved.

If this pencil could tell us about itself, here is what it would say.

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 miracle 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? Precisely because I do seem to be so simple.

Simple? Yet, *not a single person on the face of this earth knows how to make me.* That sounds fantastic, doesn't it? Especially when you realize that about one and one-half billion of my brothers

FOR YOUNGER AMERICANS

The point of tonight's lesson, of course, is that no system in history has ever been as successful as free enterprise in combining thousands of different activities, and the labor of millions of different workers, to produce goods and services.

Your children will probably enjoy tracing the "ancestry" of other items in your home, as we did in "I, Pencil." This will stretch their imaginations, while reinforcing the message of the lesson. For example, see how many different steps they can think of for the following:

1. To get a banana from South America to your breakfast table.
2. To make a bicycle.
3. To get a bouquet of flowers to the florist.

To conclude the lesson, look through a newspaper or mail-order catalog, to remind them of how many different goods are available to us. And point out that this marvelous system of production and distribution works, not because of government planning, but because of freedom.

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, 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 skills that went into their fabrication: the mining of ore, the making of steel and its refinement into saws, axes, motors; the growing of hemp and bringing it through all the stages to heavy and strong rope; the logging camps with their beds and mess halls, the raising and cooking of all the food. Why, untold thousands of persons helped supply every cup of coffee the loggers drink!

The logs are shipped to a mill in California. Imagine the individuals who make flat cars and rails and railroad engines and who construct and install all the communication systems these require. They are essential to my production, even though they do not realize it themselves.

Now consider the millwork in California. The cedar logs are cut into small, pencil-length slats less than one-fourth of an inch thick. These are kiln dried and then they are tinted. My wood is colored for the same reason women use cosmetics; people prefer that I look pretty, not a pallid white. The slats are waxed and kiln dried again. How many skills went into the making of the tint and the kilns, into supplying the heat, the light and power, the belts, motors, and all the other things a mill requires? Even the sweepers in the mill help produce me. Yes, and included are the men who poured the concrete for the dam of an electric company's hydroplant which supplies the mill's power!

And don't overlook the ancestors present and distant who have a hand in transporting sixty carloads of pencil slats across the nation from California to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

Once in the pencil factory — four million dollars worth of machinery and building, all capital accumulated by thrifty and saving progenitors of mine — each slat is given eight grooves by a complex machine, after which another machine lays lead in half the slats, applies glue, and places the other slats atop — making lead sandwiches, so to speak. Then seven brothers and I are carved from each "wood-clinched" sandwich.

NOW LET'S TALK about my "lead." Did you know that we pencils contain no lead at all? Basically, we write with graphite, mined in Ceylon. Consider miners and those who make their many tools and the makers of the paper sacks in which the graphite is shipped and those who make the string that ties the sacks and those who put them aboard ships and those who make the ships. Even the lighthouse keepers and the harbor pilots along the way assisted in my "birth."

The graphite is mixed with clay from Mississippi in which ammonium hydroxide is used in the refining process. Then wetting agents are added and after passing through numerous machines, the mixture finally appears like sausage from a grinder and is cut to size, dried, and baked for several hours at 1,850 degrees Fahrenheit.

My cedar receives six coats of lacquer. Do you know all of the ingredients of lacquer? Who would think that the growers of castor beans and the

