

# bio.

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## **Bio4Kids: Alexander Graham Bell (1847-1922)**

### Brief Outline

Imagine if you could only talk to far away friends using letters and telegrams. That's what life was like before Alexander Graham Bell changed the world with his invention, the telephone. Bell was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, on March 3, 1847. Like his father, Bell even became a teacher, helping deaf people learn to talk.

In 1870 Bell immigrated to Ontario, and a few years later he moved to Boston to take up a teaching and research post there, pursuing his interest in educating deaf people. While working in Boston, Bell began experimenting to make a better type of telegraph. Then he started to work on sending sound over a wire, through a simple device made only of a wooden stand, a funnel, a cup of acid and some copper wire. His 'electrical speech machine' is what we now call a telephone, a work which derives from the Greek 'tele' meaning from afar and 'phone' meaning voice or voiced sound.

On March 10, 1876, Bell sent the first message over a telephone to Thomas A. Watson, who assisted him in his workshop. His success was because he knew of acoustics, the study of sound, as well of electrics. The first words ever heard on a telephone were "Mr. Watson, come here, I want you!" The next year Bell and Watson, along with some business partners, formed the Bell Telephone Company. Bell made a fortune through his invention and his company. By 1878 Bell had set up the first telephone exchange in New Haven, Connecticut and by 1884 long distance connections were being made between Boston, Massachusetts and New York City.

Controversy does however surround the invention of the telephone. In September 25th 2001 US Congress recognized that the Italian Antonio Meucci's 'telefono' which he demonstrated in New York in 1860, actually made him, and not Bell, the official inventor of the telephone. Bell had access to all of Meucci's materials and took out a patent 16 years later. Even this patent is swathed in intrigue: Bell's application for a patent was filed just hours before his competitor Elisha Gray. At this point neither man had actually built a telephone. Bell achieved his goal three weeks later, using ideas outlined in Gray's Notice of Invention, methods he had not proposed in his own patent.

After creating the telephone, Bell continued experimenting and inventing. He was interested in flight and built a kite that could carry a human being. In his life he was granted 18 patents, 12 of which were shared with collaborators. He also founded the National Geographic Society in 1888. Bell never lost interest in the education of the deaf and he started several organizations to help deaf people learn to speak.

Bell died on August 2, 1922, at his home in Nova Scotia, Canada. A man of extraordinary vision, would he ever have imagined cell phones, or that telephone lines could transmit video images? Much of the modern communications we rely upon today are indebted to the progress made by Alexander Graham Bell and his contemporaries.

### Related Websites

Check out Bell's Canadian home

[http://www.pc.gc.ca/lhn-nhs/ns/grahambell/index\\_e.asp](http://www.pc.gc.ca/lhn-nhs/ns/grahambell/index_e.asp)

Take a look at Bell's phone

<http://www.smithsonian.org/resource/faq/nmah/boxphone.htm>