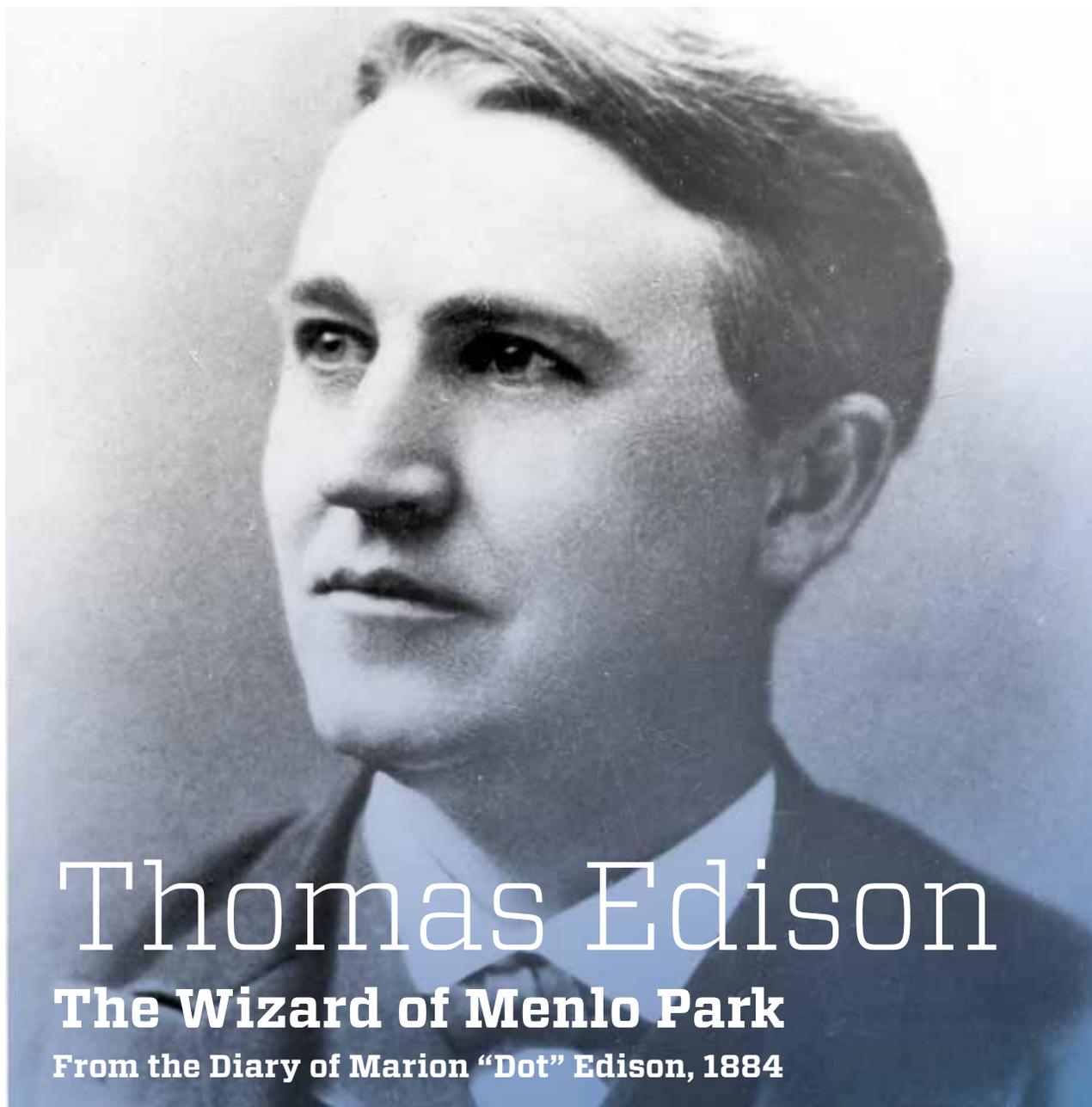




# Building Stories

A creative writing contest  
for students (grades 3-12)



## Thomas Edison

### The Wizard of Menlo Park

From the Diary of Marion "Dot" Edison, 1884

**By Sophie Tsamaidis, Oakland Christian School (Auburn Hills, Michigan)**

Grand Prize Winner of The Henry Ford's 2015 Building Stories Creative Writing Contest

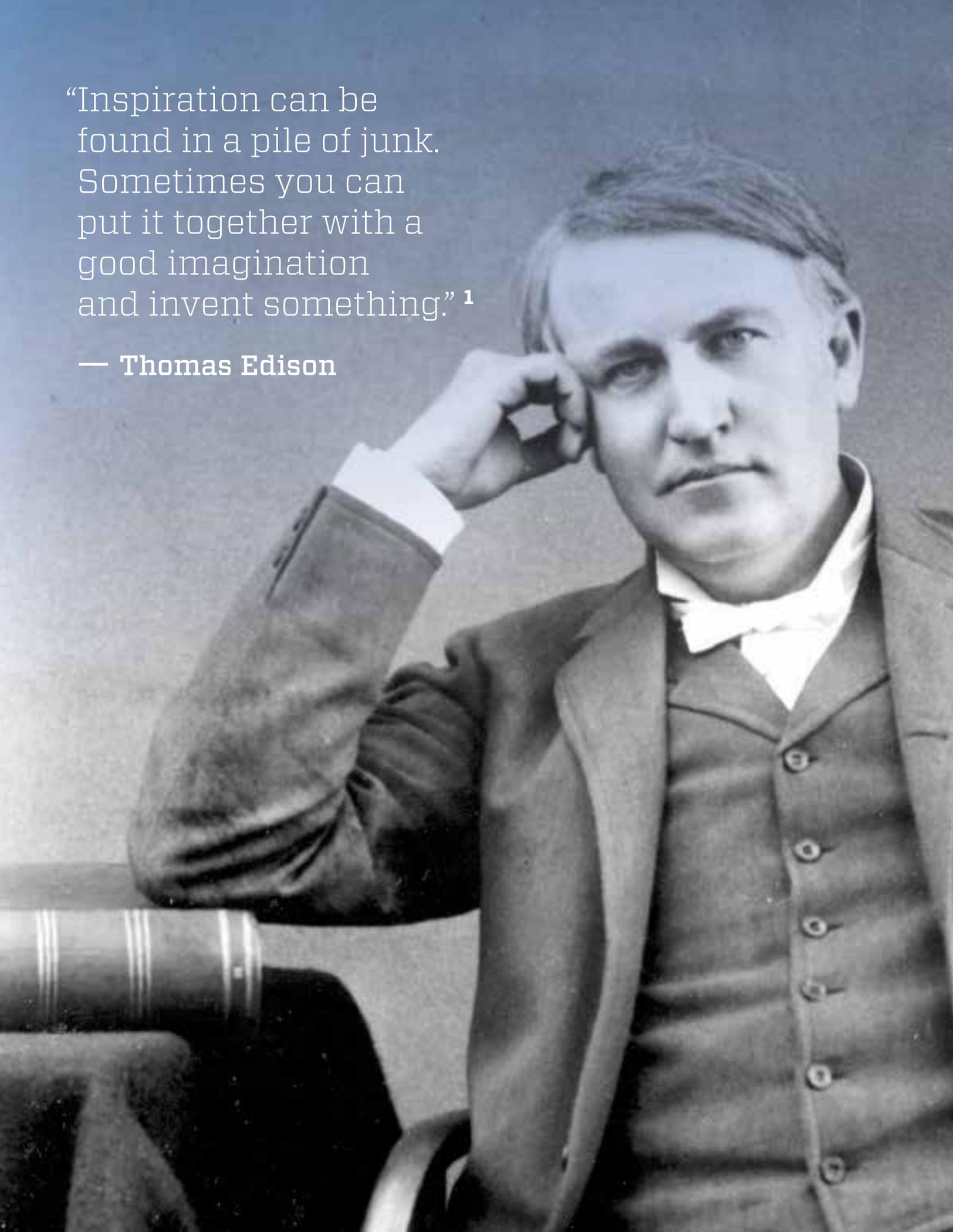
## 2015 Building Stories Grand Prize Winner **Sophie Tsamaidis**



**LEFT:** Sophie Tsamaidis pictured with Christian Øverland, executive vice president of The Henry Ford, and Paula Gangopadhyay, chief learning officer of The Henry Ford. **RIGHT:** Sophie Tsamaidis with teacher Emma Garner of Oakland Christian School outside Edison's Menlo Park Laboratory in Greenfield Village.

“Inspiration can be found in a pile of junk. Sometimes you can put it together with a good imagination and invent something.” <sup>1</sup>

— **Thomas Edison**





September 1, 1884

## Dots, Dashes and the Morse Code Hero

Dear Diary,

Let me introduce myself. I am 12 years old. My real name is Marion Estelle Edison, but my father calls me “Dot.” Dots and dashes — that’s Morse Code! My father loves Morse Code. He first studied it because it made the telegraph a more efficient means of communication. <sup>4</sup> Father said this journal would help me organize my thoughts. Back in 1862, when my father was a boy, he had a job selling newspapers and candy on the train from Detroit to Port Huron. My father took advantage of this thriving community hub to make some money, mostly to fund his scientific research. People would come to the depot to send and receive packages and telegrams and catch up on the news and gossip. Father was quite the entrepreneur! <sup>5</sup> James Mackenzie was one of the station agents, and he is a good friend of my father. At that time, father was keen to learn about telegraphy, and he had often observed Mr. Mackenzie at work. One day, Mr. Mackenzie’s 3-year-old son was playing on the tracks when out of the blue a freight train approached. Father leapt onto the tracks, grabbed the boy and rolled him off the track to safety. As father’s reward, Mr. Mackenzie agreed to teach father telegraphy. That is how father learned Morse Code. I like to think of him as the “Morse Code Hero.” Father practiced telegraphy for hours on end. Eventually, he became a part-time telegrapher at Port Huron. His interest in telegraphy and related inventions was sparked. <sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Baxter, Roberta, *Illuminated Progress: The Story of Thomas Edison*, 2009, Morgan Reynolds Publishing, p. 25-26.

<sup>5</sup> The Henry Ford Building Stories *Foundational Materials, Section 1 Edison’s Youth, Source 2 Portrait of Thomas Edison as a Teenager*, circa 1865.

<sup>6</sup> The Henry Ford Building Stories *Foundational Materials Section 1 Edison’s Youth, Source 3 Smiths Creek Depot*. Adkins, Jan, *DK Biography: Thomas Edison*, 2009, DK Publishing, p. 24-25.

August 23, 1884

## Tough Times: The Wizard Has Lost His Magic

Dear Diary,

Mama is dead. <sup>2</sup> She was so very sick. My father, Tom Edison, is an inventor. He studied books and the teachings of many doctors, but mother’s illness affected her so completely, the headaches, the fever, the many ups and downs. It was a puzzle not even the “Wizard of Menlo Park” could solve. I will never forget the night I found my father shaking with grief, weeping and sobbing so hard he couldn’t even tell me that my mama died that night. <sup>3</sup> Father has sent my brothers away. It is devastating. Why? WHY? William and Thomas, my younger brothers, now live with my aunt and uncle. I feel so alone. I am working hard to please father. He seems so sad and desolate. I have a constant stream of chores: wash the dishes, wash the floors and wash the dirty clothes. I am used to it though — when mama got sick, I had to help with the chores. All this hard work and father hardly looks up from his books. Mama — why did you have to leave me now? Life is so hard. When will there be joy?

<sup>2</sup> Adkins, Jan, *DK Biography: Thomas Edison*, 2009, DK Publishing, p. 95. Mary Edison, first wife of Thomas Edison, died on August 9, 1884.

<sup>3</sup> Baxter, Roberta, *Illuminated Progress: The Story of Thomas Edison*, 2009, Morgan Reynolds Publishing, p. 94. “Marion remembered that she found her father shaking with grief, weeping and sobbing so he could hardly tell me that mother had died that night.”



**COVER:** Portrait of Thomas Edison, circa 1885 (THF116813); **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Portrait of Thomas Edison, circa 1889 (THF37612); **TOP LEFT:** Portrait of Marion Estelle Edison, circa 1880; **ABOVE:** Smiths Creek Depot, now in Greenfield Village (THF2018).



Portrait of Thomas Edison as a Teenager, circa 1865 (THF116791).

**October 1, 1884**

## The Road to Recovery: The Wizard Makes Progress

Dear Diary,

Father and I grow closer every day. We have to take care of each other now that mama is gone. I drive father around the countryside in a pony cart. <sup>7</sup> He loves getting fresh air; it reminds him of when he was a boy, especially the times he spent with his mother, my grandmother. Sometimes I join him in the Menlo Park lab, I go to board meetings and he even takes me to Delmonico's, the elegant restaurant in New York. The food is delicious. I enjoy the lemon meringue pie the most. It reminds me of mama's homemade pie, although mama's pie was sweeter than this one. I think dad enjoys the pie too. He often looks so sad, like his mind is elsewhere. But not today! Today he was just like his old self. There was a little twinkle in his eye. We reminisced about the first days at Menlo Park where he made his most favorite invention. <sup>8</sup>

Some of the best times he knew were at Menlo Park back in 1877. Menlo Park is where my father tinkers and invents new things. Test tubes are everywhere, nothing is in place <sup>9</sup> and I am never able to get out of that place without stubbing my toe! Father's favorite invention is the phonograph. <sup>10</sup> He had a large team of scientific researchers, machinists,

bookkeepers, glassblowers and apprentices to help him with his many important projects. <sup>11</sup> It was at the Menlo Park laboratory that father devised the tin foil phonograph, which was able to record the human voice and play it back.

As part of the inventing process, father even made me a mechanical paper doll. If I shouted into a funnel, the doll would saw a paper log. <sup>12</sup> The first thing the phonograph played was "Mary Had a Little Lamb"— my favorite song as a girl. Father took the phonograph to the offices of Scientific American. He proved the phonograph worked by having a conversation inquiring after the editor's health and asking him if he liked the phonograph. The phonograph then played back exactly what he said. Everyone loved his new invention. That day father made history. <sup>13</sup> Father always said that "I never perfected an invention that I did not think about in terms of the service it might give others... I find out what the world needs, then I proceed to invent..." <sup>14</sup> He had a great vision about what the phonograph could lead to in terms of helping others. For example, phonographic books for blind people, clocks that could announce the hour and a family record that would record the words of dying family members, forever preserving their voice. <sup>15</sup>

I will always remember this special time with my father and treasure the stories and memories we shared together. I know he is not just my father but a great inventor who will change history.

<sup>7</sup> Adkins, Jan, *DK Biography: Thomas Edison*, 2009, DK Publishing, p. 95 "The boys were whisked away to live with relatives, but 12 year old Dot became Papa's constant companion."

<sup>8</sup> The Henry Ford Building Stories *Foundational Materials, The Wizard of Menlo Park, Source 1 Menlo Park Laboratory & 2 Interior of Thomas Edison's Menlo Park Laboratory in Greenfield Village*, circa 1988.

<sup>9</sup> Baxter, Roberta, *Illuminated Progress: The Story of Thomas Edison*, 2009, Morgan Reynolds Publishing, p. 51-52.

"The first floor contained a library, drafting room, office and machine shop. The second was a large laboratory described by the writer for Popular Science Monthly. "The walls are covered with shelves full of bottles containing all sorts of chemicals. Scattered through the rooms are tables covered with electrical instruments...microscopes, spectrosopes, etc."

<sup>10</sup> <http://thomasedison.com/quotes.html>. "Of all my inventions, I liked the phonograph best...."

<sup>11</sup> The Henry Ford Building Stories *Foundational Materials The Wizard of Menlo Park, Source 3 Thomas Edison and Employees Outside Menlo Park Laboratory in New Jersey*, 1880.

<sup>12</sup> Adkins, Jan, *DK Biography Thomas Edison*, 2009, DK Publishing, p. 66 "He even made a mechanical paper doll for his daughter Dot. When she shouted down a funnel, the sound waves made the little doll saw a paper log"

<sup>13</sup> Adkins, Jan, *DK Biography Thomas Edison*, 2009, DK Publishing, p. 68-69. "On December 7th, 1877, Tom Edison walked into the offices of Scientific American in New York with a package. He unwrapped it and described what he was about to do. He recorded his voice, and played it back."

<sup>14</sup> <http://thomasedison.com/quotes.html>. "I never perfected an invention that I did not think about in terms of the service it might give others... I find out what the world needs, then I proceed to invent..."

<sup>15</sup> Adkins, Jan, *DK Biography Thomas Edison*, 2009, DK Publishing, p. 72 "In June 1878, Edison wrote a magazine article suggesting possible uses for his invention. Many are realities today"



**TOP:** Thomas Edison and Employees in Menlo Park Laboratory, Edison, New Jersey, February 22, 1880 (THF116541); **BOTTOM LEFT:** Thomas Edison and Employees Outside Menlo Park Laboratory in New Jersey, 1880 (THF115621); **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Menlo Park Laboratory, now in Greenfield Village (THF1973).

“ Dream big.  
Don't quit. ”

— **Mo Rocca**

Host of *The Henry Ford's  
Innovation Nation* TV show



# **Building Stories**

A creative writing contest

Building Stories is a creative writing contest that is designed to inspire students in grades 3-12 to write original stories utilizing primary sources from The Henry Ford's collections along with independent research. The contest provides a unique opportunity for students to apply and meet Common Core State Standards and other interdisciplinary curricular goals. See official rules, contest details and prize information at [www.thehenryford.org/BuildingStories](http://www.thehenryford.org/BuildingStories).