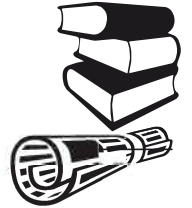# Primary Sources: Thomas Edison

Primary sources are often the best way to learn about a person or an event. Primary sources are from the time period when the person lived or the event happened. Reading a primary source is like stepping into the person's shoes or into the event as it occurs.

A census is a primary source. The U.S. census is taken every 10 years. Census workers travel from home to home to list all the people living in the home, or household. Often the people in a household are family members, but sometimes they are visitors, employees or roommates.

Below is the 1920 U.S. Census for the famous inventor, Thomas Edison. Read the census and see what you can discover about his household.

1920 U.S. Census,
Essex County, New Jersey

Here's what the handwriting says:

Name	Relationship	Sex	Race	Age	Marriage Status	Birthplace
Edison, Thomas A.	Head	M	W	72	M (Married)	Ohio
Edison, Mina M.	Wife of head	F	W	54	M (Married)	Ohio
Edison, Theodore M.	Son	M	W	21	S (Single)	New Jersey
McMahon, Mary	Cook	F	W	50	S (Single)	England
Doyle, Helena T.	Maid	F	W	54	W (Widowed)	Ireland
Flattery, Joseph P.	Houseman	M	W	32	S (Single)	Maine

Q&A: Answer the following questions based on the information in the census

How was Theodore M. Edison related to Thomas A. Edison?

Theodore Edison was Thomas Edison's son.

What was Helena T. Doyle's role in Edison's household?

Helena T. Doyle worked as a maid.

Was Joseph P. Flattery a guest, employee or roommate in Edison's household?

Joseph P. Flattery was an employee.

Based on your previous answers, what does that tell you about Edison's household?

Example Answer:

Thomas Edison must have been wealthy because he had three employees living in his household.