

Samuel Morse (1791-1872)

Samuel Morse was an art professor and a portrait painter. He was also the inventor of the first practical **telegraph system** (tele = far away; graph = write), a way of communicating through wires over long distances. His telegraph used a switch to send messages. When the switch was pushed, a pulse of electricity was sent down a wire to a distant receiver. Messages were sent as dots and dashes, known as Morse code, which are symbols for all the letters of our alphabet. A dot is a short electrical pulse; a dash is a long electrical pulse.

By 1843, forty miles of telegraph wire existed between Washington, DC, and Baltimore, Maryland. On May 24, 1844, Morse sent the first telegraphic message: "What hath God wrought?" Telegraphy spread rapidly, and transatlantic cable was laid in 1858 between England and the United States. By the end of the 1800s, most of the world was connected by telegraph lines.

People first used telegraphs to report positions of ships and trains, then later to send private messages through telegraph offices. Morse code was used for sending messages and led to code words like SOS, which was used for the first time by the *Titanic* as it was sinking. In Morse code, SOS is •••----•••.

| MORSE CODE | | | |
|------------|-------|---|-------|
| A | •- | N | --• |
| B | --••• | O | --- |
| C | -•-• | P | •---• |
| D | -•• | Q | --•- |
| E | • | R | •-• |
| F | ••-• | S | ••• |
| G | --• | T | - |
| H | •••• | U | ••- |
| I | •• | V | •••- |
| J | •--- | W | •-- |
| K | -•- | X | -••- |
| L | •-•• | Y | -•--- |
| M | -- | Z | --•• |

Exercise:

1. What does the word "telegraph" mean? _____

2. Throughout history, wars have ended, but soldiers keep fighting (and dying) until news reaches the battlefield that the war is over. How did the telegraph help save the lives of soldiers after a war ended? _____

3. Why do you think the telegraph is no longer used for regular communication? _____

4. Using Morse code, write your first name: _____
