### COMPELLING QUESTION

How can being purposeful help you to promote life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for yourself and others?

### VIRTUE

Purpose

### DEFINITION

Purpose is my answer to the question “why do I exist?” It is the reason for which I exist; it is my goal, that thing to which my actions are directed. It is our answer to the question “what are you for?”

### LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will learn about how John Deere worked with purpose to invent a new plow that made farm work much more efficient. They will use this example to be purposeful in their own lives.

### OBJECTIVES

- Students will analyze John Deere’s purposeful behavior in developing a more efficient plow.
- Students will evaluate the value in acting with purpose.
- Students will apply their knowledge of purpose to their own lives.
BACKGROUND

John Deere was born in Vermont in 1804. When Deere was only four years old, his father, William, left the family to claim an inheritance in England. William never returned, presumed to have perished at sea. Thus, Deere only received a basic education as he needed to work from a young age.

At the age of 17, he apprenticed himself to a blacksmith. In 1836, as the economy stagnated in Vermont, Deere moved to Illinois. There, in Grand Detour, he developed an idea for a self-cleaning plow that would revolutionize agriculture in the Midwest.

VOCABULARY

- Blacksmith
- Fertile
- Prairies
- Oxen
- Indomitable
- Prosperity
- Skeptical
- Recruited
- Foundry
- Franchise
- Smithy

INTRODUCE TEXT

Have students read the background and narrative, keeping the Compelling Question in mind as they read. Then have them answer the remaining questions below.

WALK-IN-THE-SHOES QUESTIONS

- As you read, imagine you are the protagonist.
  - What challenges are you facing?
  - What fears or concerns might you have?
  - What may prevent you from acting in the way you ought?

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

- What was Deere’s purpose in developing the self-polishing plow?
- Why was Deere’s development of the self-polishing plow significant?
- John Deere had many different identities in his life. What identities or roles do you have? Which is most significant to you? Why? Which is most significant to others? Why?
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Discuss the following questions with your students.
- What is the historical context of the narrative?
- What historical circumstances presented a challenge to the protagonist?
- How and why did the individual exhibit a moral and/or civic virtue in facing and overcoming the challenge?
- How did the exercise of the virtue benefit civil society?
- How might exercise of the virtue benefit the protagonist?
- What might the exercise of the virtue cost the protagonist?
- Would you react the same under similar circumstances? Why or why not?
- How can you act similarly in your own life? What obstacles must you overcome in order to do so?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the fertile expanse of the western prairies drew thousands of settlers to the plains of the Mississippi and Ohio River valleys. One of those lured by the possibility of economic prosperity was John Deere, who had heard a friend’s stories of the American West. Deere was skilled as a blacksmith and decided to move west to meet the growing demand for his trade. In 1836, he left his pregnant wife and four children in Vermont and made his way to Grand Detour. He immediately set up a smithy, and within a year his family joined him.

Deere played a key role in his small community. Before his arrival, no one in the area could shoe the oxen needed for plowing, and it was difficult to find new farming tools, horseshoes, knives, or silverware. In the age before mass production, such goods were made on request. Broken tools had to be discarded or taken to the nearest blacksmith for repair. When area settlements spread, and farmlands expanded, Deere’s business grew.

Deere possessed a diligent work ethic and sought to create the best products. A clerk who worked across the street from Deere’s smithy recalled, “I had heard [Deere’s] hammering in the morning, when I was in the store in bed at four o’clock, and at ten o’clock at night; he had such an indomitable determination to do and work what he had in his mind.”

Deere was especially determined to find a solution to a problem that plagued the pioneer farmers and threatened to drive many back east. Those accustomed to the drier, pebbly soil of New England were frustrated by their inability to till their new Midwestern land effectively. When farmers pushed and pulled plows through fields, they had to stop every few feet to clear clumps of soil clogging the cast-iron blades. The progress a single farmer and his team could accomplish in a day was extremely limited.
In 1837, Deere found a solution. He salvaged a broken steel saw blade, cut and molded it, and created the self-cleaning plow. Deere's moldboard design allowed the blade to clean itself as it cut through the soil. The day he tried the plow, skeptical local farmers turned out to watch. They stood in silence as Deere walked the plow up and down a friend's field — without stopping. According to one account, a farmer looked at the blade afterward and exclaimed, “By cracky! She's clean!”

Deere was still not satisfied with the product. He gave the plow to his friend, reportedly saying, “Maybe ways of improving it will occur to me.” He continued to try to refine his work, in the process building a business that would help to bring about a major agricultural revolution.

In the following years, Deere maintained his blacksmith shop and worked on the plow on the side. In 1838, he built and sold three plows. In 1839, he filled orders for 10. By 1842, he produced more than 100 plows a year and exhibited a model with the sign “Self-Polisher” in front of his shop. He began to manufacture his plows in advance and recruited farmers to help advertise his product. These salesmen, known as “travelers,” would go from town to town to sell the plows. Deere brought on a partner to expand his business and together they built a plow factory.

The two continued to use innovative business practices, such as importing rolled, polished steel from England for the first time. They constructed the first foundry in the area; by 1846, the business was producing a thousand plows per year.

In 1847, Deere established a plow factory in Moline, Illinois, on the banks of the Mississippi River. The location made it easy to import steel from Pittsburgh, as well as to increase his distribution range. He set up shop at local fairs, advertised in the Prairie Farmer newspaper, expanded his use of franchise dealers, and gradually became a wealthy man. By 1856, Deere’s Moline Plow Works was the largest plow factory in the region, producing 13,000 plows a year, many of which were taken west in covered wagons.

Over time, Deere’s work ethic became the hallmark of what would become one of the most productive and successful agricultural companies in America. He embodied diligence and customer service in his work, saying, “I will never put my name on a plow that does not have in it the best that is in me.” Deere sought to find a way to help farmers take full advantage of the open prairies of the Midwest. By achieving his purpose, the blacksmith brought prosperity to himself and his family while helping farmers across the country.