*John Deere, That’s Who*

by Tracy Nelson Maurer

Discussion Questions:

1. John Deere lived over 200 years ago. Tools and technology were a lot different back then. What kind of transportation did he use to travel out west? [He traveled in a wagon pulled by a horse. There were no cars, trucks, trains, planes or TRACTORS.]
2. Work is any activity we do for which someone will pay us. What sort of work did John Deere do? [He was a blacksmith, someone who makes and repairs things made of iron.]
3. John Deere was a blacksmith. He was a human resource. What service did he provide? [He repaired broken pots, pans, horseshoes, pitchforks, shovels, and plows.]
4. What is the name of the place a blacksmith works? [A blacksmith’s place of business is called a forge.]
5. John Deere used capital resources in his forge. What were some of these capital resources (or tools)? [The illustration on page 12 depicts an anvil, hammers, chisels, and thongs.]
6. What were the disasters that caused John Deere to run out of money? [His forge burned to the ground, twice!]
7. Because of the fires and sometimes he did not get paid by his customers, John Deer was in debt. What is debt? [The glossary in the back of the book defines debt as *money owed to someone or the bank*. He owed a lot of money and could not pay his bills.]
8. Every choice involves an opportunity cost—the thing we give up to get the thing we want more. When John Deere chose to travel west to start a new business, what is his opportunity cost? [His opportunity cost was not being able to be with his family. He wanted to get a business going before he sent for them.]
9. All choices have costs (negatives) and benefits (positives). What are some of John Deere’s costs in moving from Vermont to Illinois? [His costs include the time and effort it took to build a forge and start a new business, living without his family, and facing the possibility of farmers not being able to till the land.]
10. What benefits did John Deere incur by moving out west and setting up a new business? [He was able to see first hand the problems the farmers were having with their old plows and discover a solution. He earned enough money to get out of debt, send for his family, and expand his business.]
11. What was John Deere’s incentive to make a better plow? [He wanted to help the farmers be more productive. By doing this he would not lose his customers and make more money.]
12. John Deere was an inventor and an entrepreneur. What is an inventor? [A person who is first to think of or make something.] What is an entrepreneur?

[An entrepreneur is someone who takes a risk to start a new business or bring a new product to market in hopes of earning a profit. John Deere took a risk that enough farmers would find merit in his new plow and buy it covering his expenses and allowing him to pay off his debt and save enough money to bring his family to join him in Illinois.]

1. Is an inventor always an entrepreneur? [No. Inventors aren’t entrepreneurs unless they are also the person who takes some or all of the risk to sell their invention in the marketplace.]
2. Why did John Deere want his company near the Mississippi River? [Being near the river helped with harnessing water power to run the factory and made deliveries easier by using boats for transportation.]
3. How did John Deere help the prairies in the middle of the continent become America’s breadbasket? [Farmers were able to plow prairie soil faster and therefore were able to plant more. They had enough to feed their families and sold the extra crops. Farming became a business.]

Extension:

“Dig into More Facts About John Deere and His Company” can be found in the back of this book. Share this information with the students. Ask them which of the listed facts they found the most interesting.