



BEN FRANKLIN STUDY GUIDE

*he wasn't just ahead of his time...
he was ahead of ours.*



The History Channel® presents:

Ben Franklin

Dr. Benjamin Franklin, one of our country's Founding Fathers, was a controversial figure in his own time. A feisty teenager, successful businessman, brilliant inventor, respected diplomat, husband and father, **The History Channel's** *Ben Franklin* is not just the face that graces the hundred dollar bill. On the contrary, he is a dynamic, accessible, and very human character who had his own share of flaws and shortcomings. The epitome of a "Renaissance man," Franklin is seen here as the visionary man who tamed lightning, helped edit the Declaration of Independence, and brokered the American alliance with France. He is also presented as a deeply conflicted man, a ruthless competitor, and a figure of serious contradictions. Propelled by a conversational narrative, the program *Ben Franklin* invites students to consider how this intriguing American icon has affected the values, principles, and everyday lives of people today.

Objectives

After viewing the program, students should be able to discuss the life of this famous figure and make connections between Franklin's life and innovations and their own communities. They should consider his experience as a businessman, his inventions and contributions to public life, and his role in the creation of the United States.

Curriculum Links

Ben Franklin would be useful for classes on American history, civics, and inventions and engineering. This program is appropriate for 8th grade and above. It contains some sexual content and we therefore would recommend that teachers view the program before showing it to students. It fulfills the following standards as outlined by the National Council for History Education: Patterns of Social and Political Interaction, and Comparative History of Major Developments.

Pre-viewing Activity

Benjamin Franklin was born in Boston in 1706 and died in Philadelphia in 1790. What were some of the events that happened during his lifetime? Make a timeline covering this period.



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Vocabulary:

almanac:	a usually annual publication containing statistical and general information
despondency:	hopelessness; the state of feeling discouraged, dejected, or depressed
elusive:	tending to evade grasp or pursuit; hard to comprehend or define
enigmatic:	mysterious, obscure; hard to understand or explain
fugitive:	running away or intending flight; a person who flees or tries to escape
icon:	an emblem or symbol; an object of uncritical devotion
introspective:	a reflective looking inward, an examination of one's own thoughts and feelings
opulent:	wealthy; exhibiting or characterized by opulence
paradoxical:	seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense, yet perhaps true
persona:	the personality a person projects in public; a character in a fictional presentation
pseudonym:	a fictitious name, a pen name
subterfuge:	deception in order to evade; a deceptive device or stratagem
temperance:	moderation in action, thought, or feeling; restraint

Discussion Questions:

1. The historians in the film describe Benjamin Franklin as a juvenile delinquent, a fugitive from justice, someone who engaged in "dirty tricks." Yet he is remembered as a great figure of American history. Can you think of other public figures who might have "spotty pasts"? What can we learn from the challenges faced by others?
2. As publisher of *Poor Richard's Almanack* and *The Philadelphia Gazette*, Franklin built a "media empire." What does that mean, and what kinds of effort did it require? Who has such "empires" today?
3. One historian describes Franklin as the most modern of the "Founding Fathers," someone whom we can imagine as living in the present day. Why is this? Why does this historian believe it is easier to imagine Franklin in our present world than someone like George Washington?
4. Franklin is remembered for establishing the first lending library and the first fire company in America. How might these have changed early American society?
5. As a publisher and public figure, Franklin had to navigate among various social groups, including different religious congregations. What were some of these religious denominations? What were (and often continue to be) their core beliefs? What ideas did they share, and how did they disagree with each other? How did Franklin engage with some of these groups?
6. What is the Gulf Stream, and how did Franklin "discover" it?



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- Franklin invented some new letters of the alphabet, which he called his “phonetic alphabet.” What were those letters, and which sounds did they represent? Why were they potentially useful? Why do you think he stopped using them?
- What is the “single fluid” theory of electricity? How did Franklin demonstrate this theory?
- What was the Stamp Act? How did many American colonists feel about it? Why?
- What were the Boston Massacre and the Boston Tea Party? How did they shape Franklin’s political beliefs?
- How did Franklin convince Louis XVI, the king of France, to support the American uprising? What were the French political interests at this time, and what did they provide to the Americans?
- How would you compare Franklin’s relationship with his wife Debbie and daughter Sally to his rapport with his son William? Why does his relationship with William change?
- Franklin drew what is considered to be the first political cartoon in American history. What does it portray? What is its message?
- How did Franklin’s edits to the first draft of the Declaration of Independence express his thoughts on the relationship between religion and government?
- While a delegate to the Constitutional Convention, which problems did Franklin address? What were his suggestions? Were they implemented?

Extended Activities:

- Benjamin Franklin is known for publishing “aphorisms,” or sayings, in his *Poor Richard’s Almanack*. We are familiar with many of them today, including “A penny saved is a penny earned.” Make a list of your own aphorisms that apply to issues in present-day life.
- Franklin wrote an autobiography in which he told the story of his life. How would you want people to remember you? Write the first chapter of *your* autobiography.
- What is your favorite of Franklin’s inventions? Why? Write an essay describing this invention, how it works, why Franklin was interested in it, and how it might be useful in our current world.
- What kind of inventions would *you* like to design? Think of a problem you would like to solve. What would you invent to solve that problem? Draw a picture of your invention and explain how it would work.



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Primary Documents:

Below are two documents produced by Benjamin Franklin. The first is his *Table of Virtues* listing the attributes he desired as a young man in his attempt to find perfection. Later in his life he published the list in *Poor Richard's Almanack*. The second document is the *Albany Plan of Union*, a proposal to unite the colonies to defend their common interests when war with France seemed imminent. Both documents contain the original spellings, which will look incorrect, and you will see the word *quitrent*, which is a type of tax on land. Following each document are some questions.

Table of Virtues:

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 1. TEMPERANCE. | Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation. |
| 2. SILENCE. | Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation. |
| 3. ORDER. | Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time. |
| 4. RESOLUTION. | Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve. |
| 5. FRUGALITY. | Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing. |
| 6. INDUSTRY. | Lose no time; be always employ'd in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions. |
| 7. SINCERITY. | Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you speak, speak accordingly. |
| 8. JUSTICE. | Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty. |
| 9. MODERATION. | Avoid extreams; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve. |
| 10. CLEANLINESS. | Tolerate no uncleanness in body, cloaths, or habitation. |
| 11. TRANQUILLITY. | Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable. |
| 12. CHASTITY. | Rarely use venery but for health or offspring, never to dulness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation. |
| 13. HUMILITY. | Imitate Jesus and Socrates. |



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Questions for the Table of Virtues:

1. Do you agree that these are admirable virtues? Why or why not?
2. Do you think Franklin's virtues are as important today as they were more than two hundred years ago? Why or why not? Do admirable traits change in popularity, or are they consistent over time?
3. Do you think Franklin was realistic? Is it possible for human beings to reach perfection? If not, what is the best we can hope for? If some virtues are ultimately unattainable, is it still worth the effort to try to reach higher standards?
4. What does this list of traits say about Franklin as a person?
5. Which of the above items do you possibly possess? Which would you like to develop?
6. Try making your own chart of virtues. Which will you include? Why? How would you try to meet each goal?

The Albany Plan of Union, 1754

It is proposed that humble application be made for an act of Parliament of Great Britain, by virtue of which one general government may be formed in America, including all the said colonies, within and under which government each colony may retain its present constitution, except in the particulars wherein a change may be directed by the said act, as hereafter follows.

1. That the said general government be administered by a President-General, to be appointed and supported by the crown; and a Grand Council, to be chosen by the representatives of the people of the several Colonies met in their respective assemblies.
2. That within months after the passing such act, the House of Representatives that happen to be sitting within that time, or that shall especially for that purpose convened, may and shall choose members for the Grand Council, in the following proportion, that is to say,

Massachusetts Bay	7	New Hampshire	2	New Jersey	3	Pennsylvania	6
Rhode Island	2	New York	4	North Carolina	4	South Carolina	4
Maryland	4	Virginia	7	Connecticut	5	-----	
						Total	48

3. Who shall meet for the first time at the city of Philadelphia, being called by the President-General as soon as conveniently may be after his appointment.
4. That there shall be a new election of the members of the Grand Council every three years; and, on the death or resignation of any member, his place should be supplied by a new choice at the next sitting of the Assembly of the Colony he represented.



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5. That after the first three years, when the proportion of money arising out of each Colony to the general treasury can be known, the number of members to be chosen for each Colony shall, from time to time, in all ensuing elections, be regulated by that proportion, yet so as that the number to be chosen by any one Province be not more than seven, nor less than two.
6. That the Grand Council shall meet once in every year, and oftener if occasion require, at such time and place as they shall adjourn to at the last preceding meeting, or as they shall be called to meet at by the President-General on any emergency; he having first obtained in writing the consent of seven of the members to such call, and sent duly and timely notice to the whole.
7. That the Grand Council have power to choose their speaker; and shall neither be dissolved, prorogued, nor continued sitting longer than six weeks at one time, without their own consent or the special command of the crown.
8. That the members of the Grand Council shall be allowed for their service ten shillings sterling per diem, during their session and journey to and from the place of meeting; twenty miles to be reckoned a day's journey.
9. That the assent of the President-General be requisite to all acts of the Grand Council, and that it be his office and duty to cause them to be carried into execution.
10. That the President-General, with the advice of the Grand Council, hold or direct all Indian treaties, in which the general interest of the Colonies may be concerned; and make peace or declare war with Indian nations.
11. That they make such laws as they judge necessary for regulating all Indian trade.
12. That they make all purchases from Indians, for the crown, of lands not now within the bounds of particular Colonies, or that shall not be within their bounds when some of them are reduced to more convenient dimensions
13. That they make new settlements on such purchases, by granting lands in the King's name, reserving a quitrent to the crown for the use of the general treasury.
14. That they make laws for regulating and governing such new settlements, till the crown shall think fit to form them into particular governments.
15. That they raise and pay soldiers and build forts for the defence of any of the Colonies, and equip vessels of force to guard the coasts and protect the trade on the ocean, lakes, or great rivers; but they shall not impress men in any Colony, without the consent of the Legislature.
16. That for these purposes they have power to make laws, and lay and levy such general duties, imposts, or taxes, as to them shall appear most equal and just (considering the ability and other circumstances of the inhabitants in the several Colonies), and such as may be collected with the least inconvenience to the people; rather discouraging luxury, than loading industry with unnecessary burdens.
17. That they may appoint a General Treasurer and Particular Treasurer in each government when necessary; and, from time to time, may order the sums in the treasuries of each government into the general treasury; or draw on them for special payments, as they find most convenient.



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18. Yet no money to issue but by joint orders of the President-General and Grand Council; except where sums have been appropriated to particular purposes, and the President-General is previously empowered by an act to draw such sums.
19. That the general accounts shall be yearly settled and reported to the several Assemblies.
20. That a quorum of the Grand Council, empowered to act with the President-General, do consist of twenty-five members; among whom there shall be one or more from a majority of the Colonies.
21. That the laws made by them for the purposes aforesaid shall not be repugnant, but, as near as may be, agreeable to the laws of England, and shall be transmitted to the King in Council for approbation, as soon as may be after their passing; and if not disapproved within three years after presentation, to remain in force.
22. That, in case of the death of the President-General, the Speaker of the Grand Council for the time being shall succeed, and be vested with the same powers and authorities, to continue till the King's pleasure be known.
23. That all military commission officers, whether for land or sea service, to act under this general constitution, shall be nominated by the President-General; but the approbation of the Grand Council is to be obtained, before they receive their commissions. And all civil officers are to be nominated by the Grand Council, and to receive the President-General's approbation before they officiate.
24. But, in case of vacancy by death or removal of any officer, civil or military, under this constitution, the Governor of the Province in which such vacancy happens may appoint, till the pleasure of the President-General and Grand Council can be known.
25. That the particular military as well as civil establishments in each Colony remain in their present state, the general constitution notwithstanding; and that on sudden emergencies any Colony may defend itself, and lay the accounts of expense thence arising before the President-General and General Council, who may allow and order payment of the same, as far as they judge such accounts just and reasonable.

Questions for the Albany Plan of Union:

1. What positions do Franklin's Albany Plan of Union propose?
2. What powers would those positions have according to the document? In other words, what could they do?
3. How often would this colonial government meet? Where would they meet the first time?
4. How many representatives did each colony get according to this plan? Why do you think the numbers vary according to the colony? How might the number of representatives change?
5. Which groups or nations might be trading partners for the colonies? Who do you think might be considered an enemy or a friend?
6. Do you think this is a good plan for a government? Why or why not?
7. Years later, in 1787, Franklin helped design the United States Constitution. Do you see any similarities between the Albany Plan and the Constitution?
8. The Albany Plan of Union was not accepted by Parliament and no united colonial government formed until just before the American Revolution. Why do you think the British Parliament, which governed the colonies from England, did not approve of Franklin's plan?



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Resources:

Books

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(Aladdin Books, 1986).

Wood, Gordon S.,
The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin,
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Websites

The Franklin Institute, Philadelphia:
<http://sln.fi.edu/franklin>

Independence Hall National Park:
<http://www.nps.gov/inde/education/education.html>

The Lemelson Center for the Study of
Innovation and Invention at the Smithsonian:
<http://invention.smithsonian.org/home>



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