

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: YOUNG PRINTER

by

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If available, hold up a pair of glasses and ask your student, “Do you know who invented this? The same person who invented the glasses also invented a special kind of stove and the rocking chair. Do you know who it is?” Allow time for student’s guesses. “His name was Benjamin Franklin.”

Young Ben Franklin grew up in Boston in the early eighteenth century. His parents, Josiah and Abiah Franklin, provided Ben with a frugal yet comfortable and happy home. Ben and his siblings were taught by their parents because they could not afford to send them all to school. The parents taught their children in a very inventive manner by inviting guests to dinner. The children would ask them to tell stories of places they’d been and lessons they’d learned in life. Ben, more than any of the other children, sat in rapt attention to all the guests.

Ben’s parents recognized the boy’s eagerness to learn and wanted to send him to school. When his father received a special job from the city which paid enough money, they sent Ben go to a Latin school. The teachers were lazy and incompetent, and soon Ben was sent to a writing school instead. At first, the other boys were skeptical of Ben’s inventive spirit, but he quickly gained popularity because he was so smart and helped them with their lessons. He invented paddles to help him swim faster and a swimming kite that pulled him across lakes. With Ben’s fascination with swimming and the water, he eventually made his own sailboat from an old boat. Ben soon discovered that he was an excellent sailor and became infatuated with everything to do with sailing.

Meanwhile, Ben became very unhappy making candles and soap as his father’s apprentice. He had no wish to learn to make candles, and his father feared that Ben would run away to sea, but Ben promised that he would stay with his father. Soon, his brother James asked Ben to become his apprentice in his printing business. Despite his own wishes to sail, he obeyed his parents and went to work for James.

Ben soon learned to enjoy his work, for he loved to read, and he was very good at the jobs his brother assigned him. When his brother decided to start printing a newspaper, the *New England Courant*, Ben decided to secretly write columns for the new paper. By the time he was sixteen Ben was a very knowledgeable and skilled writer. He wrote his stories as satirical pieces criticizing political and social problems of the day. He wrote his articles under the pseudonym of Silence Dogood because he knew James wouldn’t print them if he knew that his little brother was the writer. When James discovered the identity of Silence Dogood, he became jealous of Ben’s popularity. Ben, too, became a little arrogant from his newfound reputation. The working conditions for Ben deteriorated because of his brother’s rivalry. Ben eventually ran away to

Philadelphia to become a printer. He quickly gained fame in Philadelphia, too, and began to publish his *Poor Richard's Almanac* when he is only twenty-six years old.

Benjamin Franklin made many other inventions during his lifetime including the spectacles, the Franklin stove, and the rocking chair. His kite experiment proved his ideas on electricity. Ben's character and leadership ability also led him to become an ambassador to France.

Suggested Activities:

Vocabulary

1. Increase your vocabulary by finding each word in its context. Reread the sentences before and after the word. Do you understand the meaning of the word? Now, look up the word in the dictionary and write a clear, simple definition, and use it in a sentence.
 - a. foreign – (chapter titled, “Advice from Ben”)
 - b. keen – (chapter titled, “Guests at the Blue Ball”)
 - c. astonished – (chapter titled, “Boston School”)
 - d. invention – (chapter titled, “Ben’s Experiments”)
 - e. anxious – (chapter titled, “Sailboats”)

2. Complete the sentences with the correct vocabulary word. OR Write your own sentences using the vocabulary words.
 - a. The rocking chair is one of Benjamin Franklin’s _____ (s).
 - b. Ben’s _____ mind made his parents want to send him to school.
 - c. Ben’s brother may have sailed to a _____ country.
 - d. Mr. Franklin was _____ when he saw the important men in the grand coach.
 - e. Nathan felt _____ about saying his Latin piece.

Discussion Questions

1. Chapter titled “At the Sign of the Blue Ball”
In what ways was young Ben different from his brothers and sisters?
2. Chapter titled “The Rule”
The Franklins had a special rule about table manners. What was it? Why do you think they had this rule? What is a special rule in your family?
3. Chapter titled “Guests at the Blue Ball”
“Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.” This quote is commonly credited to Benjamin Franklin. Perhaps he heard it said once and remembered it for life. What do you think the quote means?
4. Chapter titled “Grandfather Peter Folger”
In your own words, retell the story of the “Indian Girl and the Pony.”
5. Chapter titled “Boston Schools”

- How did Ben help both his master and his friend, Nathan, when he refused to speak his Latin piece?
6. Chapter titled “Swimming at High Bank”
How did the bad sailor try to convince Ben into going with him on his ship? What do you think might have happened if Ben had followed the sailor?
 7. Chapter titled “Ben’s Experiments”
Which experiment did you like, the swimming paddles or the swimming kite? Why?
 8. Chapter titled “Sailboats”
When Ben and Nathan went sailing with Jonathan on his new boat, tell how Jonathan’s attitude changed from the beginning to the end of the trip.
 9. Chapter titled “Mrs. Sourface and Ben”
Mrs. Sourface entered the shop with a very angry attitude and unjustly accused the shop of selling her bad soap. Ben handled the situation calmly and wisely. Do you think Ben was being wasteful in giving Mrs. Sourface an extra bar of soap? Why or why not?
 10. Chapter titled “Advice from Ben”
When the boys asked Ben for advice, why do you think Ben thought the sailor was bad?
 11. Chapter titled “A Trade for Ben”
Although Ben didn’t want to work for his brother, James, as his apprentice, why do you think he decided to do so? Why do you think Ben’s parents wanted him to be James’ apprentice?
 12. Chapter titled “The Great Secret”
Why do you think Ben wrote the column under the name, Silent Dogood?
 13. Chapter titled “The Quarrels”
Why was James jealous of Ben?
 14. Chapter titled “Ben’s Wonderful Inventions”
What are some of Ben’s inventions?
 15. Chapter titled “Welcome Home”
Benjamin Franklin did many things in his life. What would you like to do in your life?

Fact or Opinion

Learn to tell the difference between fact and opinion. A fact tells something that is true. An opinion is a judgment. Looking in your book, Benjamin Franklin, find the chapter titled “Swimming at High Bank.” Read the first paragraph. The sentence “He was the best swimmer in the Writing School” according to this book is a fact. It tells something that is true. Now, look at the next sentence. “Some of the boys said he was the best swimmer in Boston.” This sentence is an opinion. Some boys made a judgment on

Benjamin's swimming and concluded an opinion. Read the following sentences and decide if the sentences are facts or opinions.

- a. The boys were all between twelve and thirteen years old. (from the chapter, "Advice from Ben")
- b. Their leader, Mike, looked like an old man who had grown from too hard work. (from the chapter, "Advice from Ben")
- c. There was already one (a newspaper) in Boston, but James thought there could be one more. (from the chapter, "The Great Secret")
- d. The paper was printed, and Ben sold it on the streets. (from the chapter, "The Great Secret")
- e. He (Ben) told his father that James treated him as if he were a slave, instead of a brother. (from the chapter, "The Quarrels")
- f. There was a good breeze, so the little ship sailed at once. (from the chapter, "The Quarrels")

Character Sketch

A character sketch is a colorful description of a person. A good character sketch will give not only the person's physical description, but also tell of situations which display his character traits. Look below at the list of character traits and the list of different situations showing those traits. Match the character trait to the best situation.

Character Trait	Situation
a. loyal	Ben remained thoughtful and patient when Mrs. Sourface was upset with him about the soap.
b. obedient	Ben saved Nathan and the master from trouble by not speaking the wrong piece.
c. kind	Ben didn't go with the bad sailor because he knew he must ask his father first.
d. intelligent	He told the boys at the secret meeting that the sailor was probably trying to trick them.

Teacher Helps

Vocabulary

1.
 - a. intelligent, observant, perceptive – The squirrel’s keen sense of sight helped him to see the fox.
 - b. surprised or amazed - They were astonished to see the lame man walk again.
 - c. something new that has been thought of for the first time - He knew that everyone would be able to benefit from his invention.
 - d. worried or nervous - The anxious boy awaited his turn in the recital.
 - e. located away from one’s own country or outside one’s familiarity - The Spanish food was absolutely foreign to him

2.
 - a. invention
 - b. keen
 - c. foreign
 - d. astonished
 - e. Anxious

Discussion Questions

1. He took notice of the way the candlelight shone. He was curious of how the Indians lived. He would often leave his friends to listen to soldiers, sailors, and traders. He loved to read and had an excellent memory. He was interested in nature, the clouds, and everything around him.
2. The Franklins were never to say anything about the food. They probably had this rule so they would be appreciative of everything that was given. Answers will vary.
3. Possible answer: By going to bed early and rising early, a man will get in a full day’s work. By doing so, a man will be healthy and strong. Hard work will eventually bring a man wealth. Hard work and diligence will make a man wise.
4. Let the student freely tell the story. As long as he has the basic idea, it is correct
5. By not speaking the piece that Nathan was supposed to give, Ben saved the master from getting into trouble for giving him the wrong piece. He also saved Nathan because Nathan would probably be given Ben’s piece which he did not know.
6. The sailor told Ben that he would pay Ben to teach him to swim, and he also said he would help him find his brother, Josiah. Possible answer: If Ben had gone with the sailor, Ben might have found himself working as a slave on a ship and his parents would never know what happened to him. He would be missing just like his brother, Josiah.
7. Answers will vary.

8. Beginning - Jonathan was selfish and stubborn. End - Jonathan realized his error and thanked Ben for hitting him.

9. Ben was not wasteful in giving Mrs. Sourface an extra bar of soap because she left the shop a happy and satisfied customer. She would return for more business and probably tell others of the kindness of the Franklins.

10. Ben remembered his incident with the bad sailor.

11. In spite of his own desires, he wanted to obey his parents. Ben's parents wanted him to be James' apprentice so that he would have a trade and not run away to sea.

12. Ben probably felt that James would not print the column if he knew it was written by his little brother.

13. James was jealous of Ben because people were always praising him.

14. A stove, a rocking chair, and spectacles.

15. Answers will vary

Fact or Opinion

Fact

Opinion

Opinion

Fact

Opinion

Fact

Character Sketch

1. loyal - Ben saved Nathan and the master from trouble by not speaking the wrong piece.

2. obedient - Ben didn't go with the bad sailor because he knew he must ask his father first.

3. kind - Ben remained thoughtful and patient when Mrs. Sourface was upset with him about the soap.

4. intelligent - He told the boys at the secret meeting that the sailor was probably trying to trick them.