

Historical Context and Background

Few men could compare to Benjamin Franklin. Virtually self-taught, he excelled as an athlete, a man of letters, a printer, a scientist, a wit, an inventor, an editor, and a writer, and was probably the most successful diplomat in American history.

1706-1790 American statesman, printer, inventor, scientist, writer, diplomat

- In 1723 Benjamin Franklin went to Philadelphia as a printer, published Poor Richard's Almanack.
- He served as deputy postmaster general of the colonies.
- A famous experiment with a kite in a thunderstorm proved the presence of electricity in lightning.
- Franklin proposed union of colonies.
- He helped draft the Declaration of Independence, which he signed.
- Proposed idea of the Public Library one of the best ideas of all time.
- One of the Sons of Liberty and the Framers of the Constitution.

Benjamin Franklin's Inventions

Bifocals

Catheter

Franklin Stove

Glass Armonica

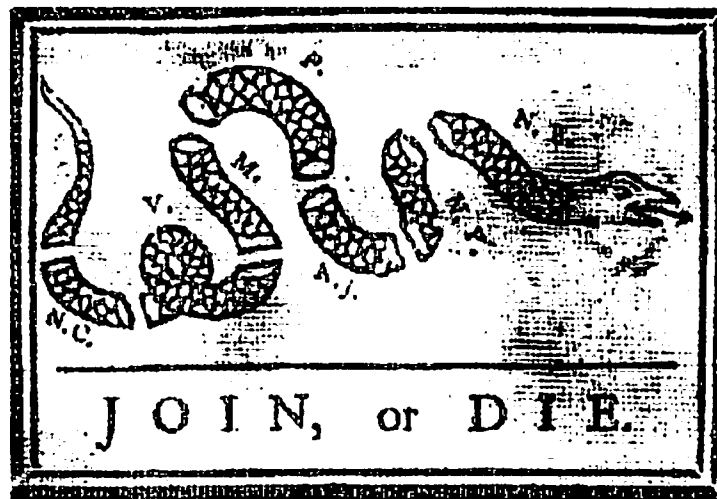
Lightning Rod

Odometer

Ideas and Discoveries

- **Daylight Savings Time:** While in Paris, Franklin was the first to propose the idea of Daylight Savings Time. By increasing the available amount of daylight during the summer and decreasing it during the winter season, Franklin hoped to provide the world with a greater opportunity of doing productive work during the summer months, as opposed to the cold and dreary days of winter.
- **Electricity**

- **Fire Department:** In 1736, Benjamin Franklin started the first fire department ever. Located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, it was called the Union Fire Company
- **Fire Insurance Company:** In 1752, Franklin was responsible for setting up America's first fire insurance company.
- **Gulf Stream:** Franklin was one of the first people to chart the Gulf Stream. Since he spent so much time sailing back and forth from America to Europe as a diplomat, he was able to measure different temperatures in the Atlantic Ocean and chart the Stream in detail.
- **Political Cartoon:** Benjamin Franklin is credited with creating the first political cartoon. By combining both his wit and political convictions, he portrayed his own reflections on issues affecting society. Since then, the political cartoon has become a staple of modern culture and thought. The following picture, titled "Join or Die", is the first political cartoon ever. Appearing in Franklin's Pennsylvania Gazette, it concerns the Albany Plan of Union and the author's stance on the matter.



- **Vitamin C:** Before this nutrient had even been discovered, Franklin encouraged the eating of citrus fruits, including oranges, limes, and grapefruits. Recognizing the healthy advantages of fruit, wise Benjamin coined the phrase "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." He touted the advantages of fruit in helping to maintain the gums and skin. Only in 1795, years after Franklin's recommendations, did the British navy mandate a lime in the daily diet of British seamen. Interestingly, at that point, "limey" became a popular term for an Englishman. The decision to use the lime was instrumental in reducing instances of scurvy among naval crews and illustrates Franklin's foresight.

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May 1, 2007
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Poor Richard's Almanack

In the 1700s, Benjamin Franklin published a yearly book, called an **almanac**, containing many kinds of practical information. Franklin included in his almanacs short, catchy sayings that stated a truth. Below are some of these sayings excerpted from **Poor Richard's Almanack**, 1735, 1737, 1742, and 1758.

“Well done is better than well said.”

“The worst wheel of the cart makes the most noise.”

“If you'd have a Servant that you like, serve your self.”

“The noblest question in the world is *What Good may I do in it?*”

“Have you somewhat to do to-morrow; do it to-day.”

“He that sows thorns, should not go barefoot.”

“He that riseth late, must trot all day, and shall scarce overtake his business at night.”

“By diligence and patience, the mouse bit in two the cable.”

“It is better to take many Injuries than to give one.”

“Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy wealthy and wise.”

“Great Modesty often hides great Merit.”

“You may delay, but *Time* will not.”

“Half the Truth is often a great Lie.”

Benjamin Franklin made an attempt to achieve “Moral Perfection” by examining certain aspects of his character. He identified 12 traits that men should possess in order to achieve moral perfection

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 extremes; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.

10. Cleanliness

Tolerate no uncleanness in body, cloaths, or habitation.

11. Tranquility

Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.

12. Chastity

Rarely use venery but for health or offspring, never to dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation.

"My list of virtues contain'd at first but twelve; but a Quaker friend having kindly inform'd me that I was generally thought proud; that my pride show'd itself frequently in conversation; that I was not content with being in the right when discussing any point, but was overbearing, and rather insolent, of which he convinc'd me by mentioning several instances..."

13. Humility

Imitate Jesus and Socrates..

Essential Questions:

1. What was Poor Richard's Almanack?
2. What made this publication so successful?
3. What practical information is conveyed through Franklin's short, catchy sayings?
4. Which of Franklin's sayings are most popular today?

Learning Objectives:

1. Students will be able to explain what Poor Richard's Almanack is.
2. Students will identify at least one element of good writing used by Benjamin Franklin in his work.
3. Students will identify what makes some of Benjamin Franklin's sayings applicable today.
4. Students will create a class almanac based on "Poor Richard's Almanack".

Lesson 1

Make observations using sections of "Poor Richard's Almanack".

- What are some things Benjamin Franklin writes about?
- Who is the author of Poor Richard's Almanack?
- What do you notice about the language used in the Almanack?
- What is the format of the Almanack? Is it broken into sections, does it have a table of contents, etc.
- How is it like a newspaper of today?
- Why do you think this publication was so popular? What do you think people liked about it?

Lesson 2

In Poor Richard's Almanack, Franklin included short, catchy sayings that stated a truth. Reproduce the list of sayings included in the historical background.

Have students choose at least 3 sayings, research their meanings, and then explain in their own words. Each group of students will choose one to illustrate and compile into a mini book. The title of this book can be decided upon by the class.

Lesson 3

Create a class Almanac.

- Brainstorm a list of what important information should be included, based on what was learned from observing Poor Richard's Almanack.
- Decide on who should write each section. (What traits should a sports writer have? What traits should a food critic have? etc.)
- Working in partners or cooperative groups students will draft, edit, revise and publish a section of this classroom almanac.

Lesson 4

In chapter 8 of his autobiography, Benjamin Franklin describes his attempts to achieve "Moral Perfection" by examining certain aspects of his character.

As a class, we will discuss the meaning of "moral perfection" and discuss why this was something Benjamin Franklin was seeking. Students will then use Benjamin Franklin's list of moral aspects, and choose at least 3 traits to research. Students will find the meaning of each trait and discuss why Benjamin Franklin felt this was an important trait to possess. Students will give one example of how this trait is demonstrated in day to day life.

Assessment:

Lesson 1: Informal assessment will be based on observations and participation of students.

Lesson 2: Students will accurately explain and illustrate one of Benjamin Franklin's sayings.

Lesson 3: I will collect and grade the writing assignments for the class almanac based on punctuation, spelling and grammar, and creativity.

Lesson 4: Students will respond to the following open response question with accurate information and in paragraph form:

Benjamin Franklin describes his attempts to achieve "Moral Perfection" by possessing 12 traits. Choose one trait and explain why this trait is an important one for people to possess. Give an example of how people could apply this trait to their every day lives.

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