

The Writings of Ben Franklin and How They Apply to Literature and Life
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English – Grade 9

Historical Context and Background:

Ben Franklin was one of the founding fathers of the United States but he had many roles besides that of politician. He was a leading author, printer, scientist, inventor, civic activist, and diplomat. Benjamin Franklin, born in 1706, came from a large family and even at an early age loved to read. Since he was one of seventeen children, his father could not afford to send his son to school for an extended period of time so he apprenticed him to his brother James who was a printer. James started *The New England Courant*, which was the first newspaper in Boston. Since Ben was only an apprentice, he knew his brother would not let him write articles for the paper so he began to write letters at night and signed them with the fictitious name of Silence Dogood, a fictional widow. Using this pseudonym, Franklin was critical of the way women were treated. Everyone wanted to know who was really writing these letters and Ben finally confessed that he was the author. James was not pleased with Ben and scolded him for writing these letters.

In 1729 Ben Franklin bought his own newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. Again he contributed articles to the paper using aliases. This newspaper would print the first political cartoon, authored by Ben himself. In 1733 Ben started publishing *Poor Richard's Almanack*. This Almanack was published yearly and is best known for the witty aphorisms or proverbs still widely quoted to this day. According to Ben himself, these aphorisms were gleaned from the "wisdom of the ages and nations." Again Ben did not use his own name when writing for this publication. He created the persona of Richard Saunders, a poor man who need money to take care of his nagging wife. This Almanack was very popular and sold ten thousand copies per year.

Franklin's most famous piece of writing was his *Autobiography* written from 1770 to 1790. This record of Franklin's life is divided into four parts. The first is addressed to his son William and includes stories about his relatives that a father might tell his child. He also tells William about his fondness for reading and his apprenticeship to James, Ben's brother. The *Autobiography* also contains a list of the virtues that Franklin tries to live by as well as a book with columns for each day of the week where he marks the offenses that he commits relative to these virtues. The virtues include temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity, and humility. Franklin also creates a plan for organizing each day and feels that order is very important in his life. In the *Autobiography* Ben also discusses his involvement in creating the first library in the United States, discovering electricity, inventing the Franklin stove, and many other solutions to common problems. Franklin was a genius and didn't mind bragging about all his accomplishments!

Essential Questions:

1. How do Ben Franklin's proverbs relate to life and literature today?
2. How does a character reveal his or her personality through a letter?
3. Which of Ben Franklin's virtues are still relevant today? What other virtues should be added to reflect today's values?
4. Which of Franklin's virtues apply to the major characters in literature that we have read this year?

Learning Objectives:

1. Students will be able to apply several of Franklin's proverbs to their own lives and to the lives of the characters in the books that they have read this year.
2. Students will be able to identify purpose, tone, point of view, and audience in the letters of 1733 and 1734 that Richard Saunders wrote.
3. Students will be able to apply the list of Franklin's virtues to their own lives and to the lives of the characters in the literature they have read this year.
4. Students will write a letter from a fictional character to a specific audience reflecting their understanding of the virtues of a character through his actions.

Learning Activities:

1. Students will work in groups to identify the purpose of Poor Richard's Almanack as discussed in the letter to the reader at the beginning of "Poor Richard, 1773." Students will have to make assumptions about the fictional character Richard Saunders based on what is said in the letter to the reader. They will then present their findings to the class.
2. Students will then look at the list of proverbs in the 1733 edition of the Almanack and find three that they can relate to. They should then translate them into modern English and illustrate them then share their work with the class. They must also find a newspaper article that deals with a subject related to one of the proverbs
3. Finally students will be assigned a character from literature such as Atticus Finch, Juliet, Romeo, Lennie Small, George Milton, Tom Robinson, etc. and they must find a proverb that might apply to that character and write a paragraph explaining why the proverb relates. They may use websites to find all of Franklin's proverbs.
4. Students will read the thirteen virtues as seen in the primary source document from *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. Students will discuss the list and then in groups they will put the virtues in order from most important to least important. They will share their findings with the class.

5. Students will each write their own list of virtues and then also write a list of virtues for one of the characters from a piece of literature that they have read this year with an explanation of why they picked the virtues that they did.

F. Authentic Assessment

Each student will create a booklet that incorporates the activities as described in the learning activities. The booklet must include:

1. a proverb that applies to their own life and why
2. a proverb that applies to a fictional character and why
3. a list of six virtues that apply to their own life and why
4. a list of six virtues that apply to the fictional character they chose and why
5. a letter from the fictional character to a specific audience showing the virtues that you chose for that character. For example, Atticus Finch might write a letter to a juror or Bob Ewell. George Milton might write a letter to Curly, Juliet might write a letter to Paris.

G. Bibliography

Franklin, Benjamin. *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*.

Franklin, Benjamin. *Poor Richard's Almanack*,

Historical Thinking Benchmarks

1. Analysis of primary and secondary sources.
2. An understanding of bias and point of view.

District Initiatives

1. Emphasis on critical and creative thinking skills

Poor Richard, 1733

Poor Richard, 1733
Courteous Reader,

I might in this place attempt to gain thy Favour, by declaring that I write Almanacks with no other View than that of the publick Good; but in this I should not be sincere; and Men are now a-days too wise to be deceiv'd by Pretences how specious soever. The plain Truth of the Matter is, I am excessive poor, and my Wife, good Woman, is, I tell her, excessive proud; she cannot bear, she says, to sit spinning in her Shift of Tow, while I do nothing but gaze at the Stars; and has threatned more than once to burn all my Books and Rattling-Traps (as she calls my Instruments) if I do not make some profitable Use of them for the good of my Family. The Printer has offer'd me some considerable share of the Profits, and I have thus begun to comply with my Dame's desire.

Indeed this Motive would have had Force enough to have made me publish an Almanack many Years since, had it not been overpower'd by my Regard for my good Friend and Fellow-Student, Mr. *Titan Leeds*, whose Interest I was extreemly unwilling to hurt: But this Obstacle (I am far from speaking it with Pleasure) is soon to be removed, since in- exorable Death, who was never known to respect Merit, has already prepared the mortal Dart, the fatal Sister has already extended her destroying Shears, and that ingenious Man must soon be taken from us. He dies, by my Calculation made at his Request, on *Oct. 17 . 1733 . 3 ho. 29 m. P.M.* at the very instant of the ☊ of ☉ and ♀: By his own Calculation he will survive till the 26th of the same Month. This small difference between us we have disputed whenever we have met these 9 Years past; but at length he is inclinable to agree with my Judgment; Which of us is most exact, a little Time will now determine. As therefore these Provinces may not longer expect to see any of his Performances after this Year, I think my self free to take up the Task, and request a share of the publick Encouragement; which I am the more apt to hope for on this Account, that the Buyer of my Almanack may consider himself, not only as purchasing an useful Utensil, but as performing an Act of Charity, to his poor
Friend and Servant
R. SAUNDERS.

Never spare the Parson's wine, nor the Baker's pudding.

Visits should be short, like a winters day,
 Lest you're too troublesom hasten away.

A house without woman & Fire-light, is like a body without soul or sprite.

Kings & Bears often worry their keepers.

Light purse, heavy heart.

He's a Fool that makes his Doctor his Heir.

Ne'er take a wife till thou hast a house (& a fire) to put her in.

He's gone, and forgot nothing but to say *Farewel*--to his creditors.

Love well, whip well.

Let my respected friend *J. G.*
Accept this humble verse of me. *viz.*
Ingenious, learned, envy'd Youth,
Go on as thou'st began;
Even thy enemies take pride
That thou'rt their countryman.

Hunger never saw bad bread.

Beware of meat twice boil'd, & an old foe reconcil'd.

Great Talkers, little Doers.

A rich rogue, is like a fat hog, who never does good til as dead as a log.

Relation without friendship, friendship without power, power without will, will witho. effect, effect without profit, & profit without vertue, are not worth a farto.

Eat to live, and not live to eat.

March windy, and April rainy,
makes *May* the pleasantest month of any.

The favour of the Great is no inheritance.

Fools make feasts and wise men eat 'em.

Beware of the young Doctor & the old Barber.

He has chang'd his one ey'd horse for a blind one.

The poor have little, beggars none, the rich too much, *enough* not one.

After 3 days men grow weary, of a wench, a guest, & weather rainy.

To lengthen thy Life, lessen thy Meals.

The proof of gold is fire, the proof of woman, gold; the proof of man, a woman.

After feasts made, the maker scratches his head.

Neither Shame nor Grace yet *Bob*.

Many estates are spent in the getting,

Since women for tea forsook spinning & knitting.

He that lies down with Dogs, shall rise up with fleas.

A fat kitchin, a lean Will.

Distrust & caution are the parents of security.

Tongue double, brings trouble.

Take counsel in wine, but resolve afterwards in water.

He that drinks fast, pays slow.

Great famine when wolves eat wolves.

A good Wife lost is God's gift lost.

A taught horse, and a woman to teach, and teachers practising what they preach.

He is ill cloth'd, who is bare of Virtue.

The heart of a fool is in his mouth, but the mouth of a wise man is in his heart.

Men & Melons are hard to know.

He's the best physician that knows the worthlessness of the most medicines.

Beware of meat twice boil'd, and an old Foe reconcil'd.

A fine genius in his own country, is like gold in the mine.

There is no little enemy.

He has lost his Boots but sav'd his spurs.

The old Man has given all to his Son: O fool! to undress thy self before thou art going to bed.

Cheese and salt meat, should be sparingly eat.

Doors and walls are fools paper.

Anoint a villain and he'll stab you, stab him & he'l anoint you.

Keep your mouth wet, feet dry.

Where bread is wanting, all's to be sold.

There is neither honour nor gain, got in dealing with a vil-lain.

The fool hath made a vow, I guess,
Never to let the Fire have peace.

. Snowy winter, a plentiful harvest.

Nothing more like a Fool, than a drunken Man.

God works wonders now & then;
Behold! a Lawyer, an honest Man!

He that lives carnally, won't live eternally.

Innocence is its own Defence.

Time *eateth* all things, could old Poets say;
The Times are chang'd, our times *drink* all away.

Never mind it, she'l be sober after the Holidays.

Poor Richard, 1734

Poor Richard, 1734
Courteous Readers,

Your kind and charitable Assistance last Year, in purchasing so large an Impression of my Almanacks, has made my Circumstances much more easy in the World, and requires my grateful Acknowledgment. My Wife has been enabled to get a Pot of her own, and is no longer oblig'd to borrow one from a Neighbour; nor have we ever since been without something of our own to put in it. She has also got a pair of Shoes, two new Shifts, and a new warm Petticoat; and for my part, I have bought a second-hand Coat, so good, that I am now not asham'd to go to Town or be seen there. These Things have render'd her Temper so much more pacifick than it us'd to be, that I may say, I have slept more, and more quietly within this last Year, than in the three foregoing Years put together. Accept my hearty Thanks therefor, and my sincere Wishes for your Health and Prosperity.

In the Preface to my last Almanack, I foretold the Death of my dear old Friend and Fellow-Student, the learned and in genious Mr. *Titan Leeds*, which was to be on the 17th of *October*, 1733, 3 h. 29 m. *P.M.* at the very Instant of the ☉ of ☉ and ♀. By his own Calculation he was to survive till the 26th of the same Month, and expire in the Time of the Eclipse, near 11 a clock, *A.M.* At which of these Times he died, or whether he be really yet dead, I cannot at this present Writing positively assure my Readers; forasmuch as a Disorder in my own Family demanded my Presence, and would not permit me as I had intended, to be with him in his last Moments, to receive his last Embrace, to close his Eyes, and do the Duty of a Friend in performing the last Offices to the Departed. Therefore it is that I cannot positively affirm whether he be dead or not; for the Stars only show to the Skilful, what will happen in the natural and universal Chain of Causes and Effects; but 'tis well known, that the Events which would otherwise certainly happen at certain Times in the Course of Nature, are sometimes set aside or postpon'd for wise and good Reasons, by the immediate particular Dispositions of Providence; which particular Dispositions the Stars can by no Means discover or foreshow. There is however, (and I cannot speak it without Sorrow) there is the strongest Probability that my dear Friend is *no more*; for there appears in his Name, as I am assured, an Almanack for the Year 1734, in which I am treated in a very gross and unhandsome Manner; in which I am called *a false Predicter, an Ignorant, a conceited Scribler, a Fool, and a Lyar*. Mr. *Leeds* was too well bred to use any Man so indecently and so scurrilously, and moreover his Esteem and Affection for me was extraordinary: So that it is to be feared, that Pamphlet may be only a Contrivance of somebody or other, who hopes perhaps to sell two or three Year's Almanacks still, by the sole Force and Virtue of Mr. *Leeds's* Name; but certainly, to put Words into the Mouth of a Gentleman and a Man of Letters, against his Friend, which the meanest and most scandalous of the People might be asham'd to utter even in a drunken Quarrel, is an unpardonable Injury to his Memory, and an Imposition upon the Publick.

Mr. *Leeds* was not only profoundly skilful in the useful Science he profess'd, but he was a Man of *exemplary Sobriety*, a most *sincere Friend*, and an *exact Performer of his Word*. These valuable Qualifications, with many others, so much endear'd him to me, that although it should be so, that, contrary

to all Probability. contrary to my Prediction and his own, he might possibly be yet alive. yet my Loss of Honour as a Prognosticator, cannot afford me so much Mortification, as his Life, Health and Safety would give me Joy and Satisfaction. I am,

*Courteous and kind Reader,
Your poor Friend and Servant,
Octob. 30. 1733 .R. SAUNDERS.*

Would you live with ease,
Do what you ought, and not what you please.

Principiis obsta.

Better slip with foot than tongue.

You cannot pluck roses without fear of thorns, Nor enjoy a fair wife without danger of horns.

Without justice, courage is weak.

Many dishes many diseases,
Many medicines few cures.

Where carcasses are, eagles will gather,
And where good laws are, much people flock thither.

Hot things, sharp things, sweet things, cold things
All rot the teeth, and make them look like old things.

Blame-all and Praise-all are two blockheads.

Be temperate in wine, in eating, girls, & sloth;
Or the Gout will seize you and plague you both.

No man e'er was glorious, who was not laborious.

What pains our Justice takes his faults to hide,
With half that pains sure he might cure 'em quite.

In success be moderate.

Take this remark from *Richard* poor and lame,
Whate'er's begun in anger ends in shame.

What one relishes, nourishes.

Fools multiply folly.

Beauty & folly are old companions.

Hope of gain
Lessens pain.

All things are easy to Industry,

All things difficult to *Sloth*.

If you ride a Horse, sit close and tight,
If you ride a Man, sit easy and light.

A new truth is a truth, an old error is an error,
Tho' *Clodpate* wont allow either.

Don't think to hunt two hares with one dog.

Astrologers say,
This is a good Day,
To make Love in May.

Who pleasure gives,
Shall joy receive.

Be not sick too late, nor well too soon.

Where there's Marriage without Love, there will be Love without Marriage.

Lawyers, Preachers, and Tomtits Eggs, there are more of them hatch'd than come to perfection.

Be neither silly, nor cunning, but wise.

Neither a Fortress nor a Maidenhead will hold out long after they begin to parly.

Jack *Little* sow'd little, & little he'll reap.

All things are cheap to the saving, dear to the wasteful.

Would you persuade, speak of Interest, not of Reason.

Some men grow mad by studying much to know,

But who grows mad by studying good to grow.

Happy's the Woing, that's not long a doing.

Don't value a man for the Quality he is of, but for the Qualities he possesses.

Bucephalus the Horse of *Alexand*. hath as lasting fame as his Master.

Rain or Snow,
To *Chili* go,
You'll find it so,
For ought we know.
Time will show.

There have been as great Souls unknown to fame as any of the most famous.

Do good to thy Friend to keep him, to thy enemy to gain him.

A good Man is seldom uneasy, an ill one never easie.

Teach your child to hold his tongue, he'l learn fast enough to speak.

He that cannot obey, cannot command.

An innocent *Plowman* is more worthy than a vicious *Prince*.

Sam's Religion is like a *Chedder Cheese*, 'tis made of the *milk* of one & twenty Parishes.

Grief for a dead Wife, & a troublesome Guest,
Continues to the *threshold*, and there is at rest;
But I mean such wives as are none of the best.

As Charms are nonsense, Nonsense is a Charm.

An Egg to day is better than a Hen to-morrow.

Drink Water, Put the Money in your Pocket, and leave the *Dry-bellyach* in the *Punchbowl*.

He that is rich need not live sparingly, and he that can live sparingly need not be rich.

If you wou'd be reveng'd of your enemy, govern yourself.

A wicked Hero will turn his back to an innocent coward.

Laws like to *Cobwebs* catch small Flies,
Great ones break thro' before your eyes.

Strange, that he who lives by Shifts, can seldom shift himself.

As sore places meet most rubs, proud folks meet most affronts.

The magistrate should obey the Laws, the People should obey the magistrate.

When 'tis fair be sure take your Great coat with you.

He does not possess Wealth, it possesses him.

Necessity has no Law; I know some Attorneys of the name.

Onions can make ev'n Heirs and Widows weep.

Avarice and Happiness never saw each other, how then shou'd they become acquainted.

The thrifty maxim of the wary *Dutch*,
Is to save all the Money they can touch.

He that waits upon Fortune, is never sure of a Dinner.

A learned blockhead is a greater blockhead than an ignorant one.

Marry your Son when you will, but your Daughter when you can.

By Mrs. *Bridget Saunders*, my Dutchess, in Answer to the *December Verses* of last Year.

He that for sake of Drink neglects his Trade,
And spends each Night in Taverns till 'tis late,
And rises when the Sun is four hours high,
And ne'er regards his starving Family;
God in his Mercy may do much to save him.
But, woe to the poor Wife, whose Lot it is to have him.

He that knows nothing of it, may by chance be a Prophet; while the wisest that is may happen to miss.

If you wou'd have Guests merry with your cheer,
Be so your self, or so at least appear.
Famine, Plague, War, and an unnumber'd throng
Of Guilt-avenging Ills, to Man belong;
Is't not enough Plagues, Wars, and Famines rise
To lash our crimes, but must our Wives be wise?
Reader, farewell, all Happiness attend thee:
May each *New-Year* better and richer find thee.

Benjamin Franklin's Thirteen 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 extremes; 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.

It may be well my posterity should be informed that to this little artifice, with the blessing of God, their ancestor ow'd the constant felicity of his life, down to his 79th year, in which this is written. What reverses may attend the remainder is in the hand of Providence; but, if they arrive, the reflection on past happiness enjoy'd ought to help his bearing them with more resignation.

To Temperance he ascribes his long-continued health, and what is still left to him of a good constitution; to Industry and Frugality, the early easiness of his circumstances and acquisition of his fortune, with all that knowledge that enabled him to be a useful citizen, and obtained for him some degree of reputation among the learned; to Sincerity and Justice, the confidence of his country, and the honorable employ it conferred upon him; and to the joint influence of the whole mass of the virtues, even in the imperfect state he was able to acquire them, all that evenness of temper, and that cheerfulness in conversation, which makes his company still sought for, and agreeable even to his younger acquaintance.

hope, therefore, that some of my descendants may follow the example and reap the benefit.

In this piece it was my design to have endeavored to convince young persons that no qualities were so likely to make a poor man's fortune as those of probity and integrity.

My list of virtues contain'd at first but twelve; but a Quaker friend having kindly informed 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; I determin'd deavouring to cure myself, if I could, of this vice or folly among the rest, and I added Humility to my list).

In reality, there is, perhaps, no one of our natural passions so hard to subdue as pride. Disguise it, struggle with it, beat it down, mortify it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive, and will every now and then peep out and show itself; you will see it, perhaps, often in this history; for, even if I could conceive that I had compleatly overcome it, I should probably be proud of my humility.

thus far written at Passy, 1741]

Benjamin Franklin 1706--1790