

Rediscovering America: The Real Ben Franklin: Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 6-8

Curriculum Focus: U.S. History

Lesson Duration: One class period

Program Description

Printer. Postman. Writer. Civic leader. Scientist. Inventor. Statesman. Diplomat. Philosopher. His experiments led to the lightning rod, his spare-time tinkering created the Franklin stove and his intelligence and patriotism made him one of the crucial architects of the new American nation. Meet Ben Franklin – the Renaissance man of the American Revolution.

Onscreen Questions and Activities

- Pre-viewing questions:
 - What was Ben Franklin's greatest achievement as a publisher? (*Ben Franklin's greatest achievement as a publisher was to publish Poor Richard's Almanac, a book that sold as many as 10,000 copies a year.*)
 - What contributions did Ben Franklin make to natural science that earned him the reputation as one of the greatest scientists of the eighteenth century? (*Ben Franklin was the first to discover that electricity had both positive and negative charges and that lightning and electricity were the same.*)
 - Design the front page of a colonial newspaper. Write a cover story and include the layout and graphics for the paper.
 - Activity: Discuss the course of events that changed Ben Franklin from a loyal British subject to a revolutionary leader. What do you think was the most important incident in this process?
-

Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

Students will understand:

- Ben Franklin is known, among other things, for his wit and wisdom.
- Franklin published an almanac annually for 25 years.

- He scattered proverbs (or aphorisms), short sayings that spoke the truth, throughout the almanac.

Materials

- *Rediscovering America: The Real Ben Franklin* video and VCR, or DVD and DVD player

Procedures

1. Provide a brief biographical sketch of Ben Franklin:
 - Born in Boston in 1706
 - Self-educated
 - As a teenager, studied printing in his brother's newspaper shop
 - Independent, he went off on his own to Philadelphia
 - Became a printer and a civic leader
 - After retirement (at 42), invented the lightning rod, bifocal lenses; discovered electricity
 - Worked extensively in public affairs
 - Died in 1790
2. Explain that above and beyond all the achievements just listed, Franklin was also a writer. He was known for several writings, including his annual almanac. In these almanacs, he sprinkled proverbs, or aphorisms – some of which Franklin had heard and then modified, others of which he created.
3. Distribute to students a list of some or all of the following proverbs by Franklin from *Poor Richard's Almanack*:
 - To err is human, to repent divine; to persist devilish.
 - At the working man's house hunger looks in, but dares not enter.
 - There are no ugly loves, nor handsome prisons.
 - Love your Neighbor; yet don't pull down your Hedge.
 - No gains without pains.
 - Beware of little Expenses: a small Leak will sink a great ship.
 - Fish and Visitors stink after three days.
 - God helps them that help themselves.
 - What you would seem to be, be really.
 - For want of a Nail the Shoe is lost; for want of a Shoe the Horse is lost; for want of a Horse the Rider is lost.

- He that falls in love with himself will have no rivals.
 - Dost thou love Life? Then do not squander Time; for that's the Stuff Life is made of.
 - The Cat in Gloves catches no Mice.
 - You may be too cunning for One, but not for All.
 - Keep thy shop, and thy shop will keep thee.
4. Direct students to select a proverb from the list and write a paraphrase of it, making sure that a reader will have no doubt about what Franklin meant. As a second step, students should create a modern proverb that has the same meaning as the one they picked by Franklin.
 5. Ask students to hand in a piece of paper with the original proverb and their own paraphrases. On a separate piece of paper, they should write their original proverb.
 6. Students sitting next to each other should exchange papers with original proverbs. Each student should then try to figure out which Franklin proverb the original proverb relates to.

Discussion Questions

1. Explain how Benjamin Franklin was “the quintessential American” of his time. Who would you call the quintessential American of our time? Why?
2. How did Franklin shape the Enlightenment in America? Discuss his use of reason to explain things and conduct his life.
3. Was Franklin a traitor to England? Were his actions in support of the colonies justifiable? Debate your answers.
4. Defend or criticize Franklin's response to his son William's leadership in the loyalist movement.
5. Compare and contrast Franklin's views and actions regarding slavery with those of other colonial leaders such as Washington and Jefferson.
6. Discuss what Franklin's epitaph should be.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Student developed a full and clear paraphrase; original proverb, which matches sense of Franklin's, with striking imagery; no errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics.
- 2 points: Student developed an adequate paraphrase; original proverb, which comes close to sense of Franklin's; some errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics.
- 1 point: Student developed an inadequate paraphrase; original proverb only partially related in meaning to Franklin's; many errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics.



Vocabulary

apprentice

Definition: One bound by legal agreement to the work of another for a specific amount of time in return for instruction in a trade, act or business.

Context: Franklin was once an apprentice to his brother in the printing trade.

diplomat

Definition: One appointed to represent their government in its relations with other governments.

Context: On December 3, 1776, America's first diplomat arrived in France.

indentured

Definition: A contract binding a person into the service of another for a specified period of time.

Context: Apprenticeship was indentured labor and at seventeen Benjamin was already too independent for that.

Loyalist

Definition: Colonists in America who remained loyal to Great Britain.

Context: Franklin became reluctantly, but then vociferously, the leader of the revolution and his son William, the leader of the Loyalists.

proverb

Definition: A short saying expressing a well-known truth of fact.

Context: Its huge success was mainly due to the witty proverbs that Franklin wrote or gathered and re-wrote.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- History – United States History: Understands the causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in shaping the revolutionary movement, and reasons for the American victory.



The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org>

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Time, Continuity, and Change
-

