Benjamin Franklin

Why do we remember Benjamin Franklin today?

Supporting Questions

1. How did Benjamin Franklin help create the United States?
2. Why were Benjamin Franklin’s scientific discoveries important?
3. How did Benjamin Franklin’s work as an author influence others?
Why do we remember Benjamin Franklin today?

**Connection to Connecting Theme/Enduring Understandings**

**Individuals, Groups, Institutions:** The student will understand that the actions of individuals, groups, and/or institutions affect society through intended and unintended consequences.

**GSE for Social Studies**

SS1H1 – Read about and describe the life of historical figures in American history.
- Identify the contributions made by these figures: Benjamin Franklin (inventor/author/statesman).
- Describe how everyday life of these historical figures is similar to and different from everyday life in the present (for example: food, clothing, homes, transportation, communication, recreation, etc.).

SS1G1 – Describe how each historic figure in SS1H1a was influenced by his or her time and place.
- American colonies (Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson)

SS1CG1 – Describe how the historical figures in SS1H1a display positive character traits such as: fairness, respect for others, respect for the environment, courage, equality, tolerance, perseverance, and commitment.

**GSE for ELA, Science, or Math (K-5)**

ELAGSE1W8 – With guidance and support from adults, recall information about experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer questions.
ELAGSE1SL2 – Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

**Connection to Literacy Standards for Social Studies and Social Studies Matrices**

**Information Processing Skills:**
2. organize items chronologically
6. identify and use primary and secondary sources

**Supporting Question 1**
How did Benjamin Franklin help create the United States?

**Sample Instructional Activity**
Creating a New Nation: Telling a Story with Documents

**Featured Sources**
- **Document 1:** Writing the Declaration (painting) & Declaration of Independence
- **Document 2:** Franklin at the Court of France (painting) & Treaty of Alliance with France
- **Document 3:** Map of United States & Treaty of Paris
- **Document 4:** Signing of the Constitution (painting) & United States Constitution

**Supporting Question 2**
Why were Benjamin Franklin’s scientific discoveries important?

**Sample Instructional Activity**
Solving a Problem: Ben Franklin’s Scientific Discoveries

**Featured Sources**
- **Document 5:** Franklin’s experiment (etching)
- **Document 6:** Design for bifocals
- **Document 7:** Diagram of glass armonica & video of glass armonica being played

**Supporting Question 3**
How did Benjamin Franklin’s work as an author influence others?

**Sample Instructional Activity**
What are you writing, Ben?

**Featured Sources**
- **Document 8:** ‘Join or die’ political cartoon
- **Document 9:** Cover of Poor Richard’s Almanack & interior page of Poor Richard’s Almanack
- **Document 10:** Cover page of Franklin’s Autobiography
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<th>Summative Performance Task</th>
<th>PRODUCT PRESENTATION</th>
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<td>Students will create a booklet that demonstrates the ways in which Benjamin Franklin’s inventions, innovations, and scientific/artistic/political contributions impact their lives today. The booklet concludes with them using evidence from their work to answer the essential question posed in this lab.</td>
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<td>EXTENSION</td>
<td>Students could continue their work by creating an additional page - or second volume - for the lasting accomplishments of another historical figure they have studied during the year.</td>
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<td>Have students research the meaning of the phrase “Renaissance Man” (or woman!). Students can then create a visual or written explanation of how Benjamin Franklin exemplifies the phrase.</td>
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<td>Taking Informed Action</td>
<td>Identify someone from your school, family, or community who deserves to be remembered in the future. Share that person’s accomplishments with your class.</td>
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Born in 1706, in Boston, to a British-born father and a Massachusetts-born mother, Benjamin Franklin's long life spanned the transformation of thirteen British colonies into a cohesive and independent United States.

Franklin's formal education was fairly limited. As one of his father’s fifteen children, he only attended a few years of school before his father sent him to try out various careers. Because of Franklin's love of the printed page, his father finally settled young Benjamin in an apprenticeship to his older brother, James, who was a printer.

Unfortunately, the match was not a good one, and after learning enough about the mechanics and business of printing to work for himself, Benjamin ran away from his brother's shop without fulfilling the full term of his apprenticeship. He fled first to New York, and then to Philadelphia.

Franklin left Philadelphia in 1724 for London, where he worked for two years. Upon returning to Philadelphia, he established his own print shop, and quickly rose to prominence in the young city. Franklin's quick wit and talent with a pen led to much success as both an author and printer; his shop published a newspaper, the now-famous Poor Richard’s Almanack, numerous books and pamphlets, and various paid commissions including bank notes for the Pennsylvania colony.

Franklin’s interests extended far beyond printing, and his time in Philadelphia also included numerous scientific investigations. He explored the new science of electricity, and developed several devices to improve his day-to-day life. Bifocals, a more efficient stove, swim fins, and an adjustable library chair are among the inventions that he created. Franklin never patented any of his inventions, believing that his work was done for the public good, not profit.

Taking an active role in civic life became important to Franklin, as well. He served as postmaster of Philadelphia, and organized a subscription library and volunteer fire service. He also entered a common law marriage with Deborah Read, and they raised a son from a previous relationship and two children of their own. Only their daughter, Sarah, would survive to adulthood. Eventually Franklin was elected to various offices in the colony. In 1757, he returned to London as the Pennsylvania Colonial Assembly’s representative, where he remained until 1762. His scientific work continued in London, where he invented the glass armonica and continued his work with electricity.

As the situation between the Crown and the colonies deteriorated, Franklin was once again sent to London to defend burgeoning American interest in self-government and eventual independence. He spent the decade from 1764 to 1775 in London, returning to America following his wife’s death in 1774. He was in Philadelphia during the writing of the Declaration of Independence. Illness prevented him from active participation, but he contributed to the document’s final draft and signed it.

As armed revolt looked more likely, Franklin moved to France in 1776 to secure French support for the War for Independence. He charmed the French court with a carefully calculated “rustic” appearance, and negotiated the Treaty of Alliance with French King Louis XVI in 1778.

Once the Alliance guaranteed French support, Franklin remained in France as the emissary of the American colonies throughout the rest of the war. He was among the American representatives who negotiated the Treaty of Paris in 1783 that ended the conflict, and found time in Paris to write portions of his autobiography and invent bifocal glasses. Franklin returned to the newly-formed United States in 1785, and represented Pennsylvania at the Constitutional Convention. He signed the Constitution in 1787, and was the oldest signatory at age 81. Often bedridden by illness in his final years, Franklin continued to write and publish until his death in 1790. It is said that 20,000 people attended his funeral. Franklin is buried beside his wife Deborah in Philadelphia.
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<td>Document 10</td>
<td>- <em>The Private Life of the Late Benjamin Franklin, LL.D., Late Minister Plenipotentiary from the United States of America to France, &amp;c.</em>, by Benjamin Franklin, 1793 – cover page (published posthumously) (<a href="http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/franklin/images/bf0060s.jpg">http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/franklin/images/bf0060s.jpg</a>)</td>
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Writing the Declaration of Independence, 1776
(Jean Leon Gerome Ferris, c. 1932)

Declaration of Independence (1776)
Document 2

Franklin’s Reception at the Court of France, 1778
(Anton Hohenstein, 1860s)

Treaty of Alliance with France (1778)
**Document 3**

The United States of America . . according to the preliminary articles of peace signed at Versailles the 20\textsuperscript{th} of Jany. 1783 (Robert Sayer & John Bennett, 1783)

Treaty of Paris (1783)
Signing of the Constitution
(Howard Chandler Christy, 1940)

United States Constitution
(1787)
Document 5

Franklin’s Experiment, June 1752
(Currier & Ives, c. 1876)
Franklin’s Design for Bifocals
(Letter from Benjamin Franklin to George Whatley, May 23, 1785)
Document 7

The Armonica
(Letter from Benjamin Franklin to Father Giambatista Beccaria, c. 1776)

Sounds of a Glass Armonica
(William Zeitler, 2013)
Join or Die
(Benjamin Franklin, May 9, 1754)
Poor Richard, 1743 – cover page
(Benjamin Franklin, 1743)

Poor Richard, 1758 – leaf 5 reverse
(Benjamin Franklin, 1758)
The Private Life of the Late Benjamin Franklin, LL.D.
(Benjamin Franklin, printed 1793)
Sample Instructional Activities/Assessments

Creating a New Nation: Telling a Story with Documents

This activity is meant to give students a brief, age-appropriate introduction to the American Revolution and early days of the United States through documents and related images. Try to avoid getting bogged down in details to the point that students lose track of the larger story. Also, the founding documents used in this activity are meant to be used more as images than as texts. Some students may find it interesting to try to read them, and teachers may certainly read them aloud, but the goal is not for students to analyze the documents as much as it is for students to be aware that the documents exist, and that real people wrote them for a specific purpose.

Benjamin Franklin was the only person to sign all four documents that are considered cornerstones of our country’s earliest days: the Declaration of Independence (1776); the Treaty of Alliance with France (1778) that guaranteed essential military support to the Colonial Army from the French Crown; the Treaty of Paris (1783) that ended the Revolutionary War; and the United States Constitution (1787). The language below is written for the teacher to help her/him tell the story of the documents with students. Break things down as needed, and continually draw students back to the overall chronology: the colonies existed as part of England; they broke with England; they fought a war to secure their independence; a peace treaty ended the war; the new country had to create a way to govern itself.

--Using Document 1, ask students to explain what they think they see in the painting. (The picture shows Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams looking over a draft of the Declaration of Independence.) Ask them to share how they think the painting relates to the document on the other side of the page. Remind students that, as they learned in Kindergarten, the July Fourth holiday/Independence Day commemorates the ceremonial signing of this document. Explain briefly that the Declaration served as a formal decision to separate the thirteen colonies from England, and that the men who signed it did so knowing that they were potentially risking their lives by doing so.

--Prior to the signing of the Declaration, military conflict between English soldiers and American colonists had already begun. Once the Declaration created an official break between the colonies and England, colonial leaders knew that they would need military support to beat England definitively. Benjamin Franklin, who had long served in London as a sort of ambassador from the Pennsylvania colony, went to the Court of King Louis XVI of France to try to win French support for the colonial revolution. The picture in Document 2 shows Franklin in that role. Franklin carefully developed a plain and simple image to convince the French that the new American nation would be thrifty and careful with any provided assistance. He succeeded, and Franklin concluded a treaty for alliance in 1788, without which many historians believe the colonies would have failed to win their independence.

--As the armed conflict drew to an end, Franklin once again served in a diplomatic role, helping to develop and then to sign the Treaty of Paris that officially ended the Revolutionary War in 1783. The map in Document 3 shows a contemporary view of the new American nation. (Extension: Students can compare this map to a modern map of the original United States to see how cartography and geographic knowledge has changed significantly!) Help students make the connection between the Treaty document and the very existence of the United States as a new nation.

--Franklin returned to the United States and served as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention, charged with creating a usable governing document for the new nation. Due to age and illness, Franklin did not attend many meetings, but did make several contributions to the final document. When Howard Chandler Christy painted The Signing of the Constitution* in 1940 for the U.S. Capitol (Document 4), he chose to seat Franklin in the middle of the painting. Discuss with students why Franklin’s position might be significant. Share the image of the actual Constitution to show how our government came to be. Review how each of the documents was written by actual living, breathing people, and how none of it would have ever existed without much discussion and compromise.
--Use copies of the documents (with the numbers cut off) to allow pairs or groups of students to create a very simple visual timeline of the order in which events occurred: Declaration of Independence, Alliance with France, Treaty of Paris, Constitution. The goal here is to have students realize that there is a chronology to these events. Help them think through the cause and effect relationships between the events, and adjust their timelines accordingly.

| GSE Standards and Elements | SS1H1 – Read about and describe the life of historical figures in American history.  
| a) Identify the contributions made by these figures: Benjamin Franklin (inventor/author/statesman).  
SS1G1 – Describe how each historic figure in SS1H1a was influenced by his or her time and place.  
| a) American colonies (Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson)  
| Literacy Standards Social Studies Matrices Enduring Understanding(s) | ELAGSE1W8 – With guidance and support from adults, recall information about experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer questions.  
Information Processing Skills:  
2. organize items chronologically  
6. identify and use primary and secondary sources  
Individuals, Groups, Institutions: The student will understand that the actions of individuals, groups, and/or institutions affect society through intended and unintended consequences.  

**Sample Instructional Activities/Assessments**

**Solving Problems: Ben Franklin’s Scientific Discoveries**

*Teachers may find it helpful to read aloud a children’s book, such as Now and Ben by Gene Barretta or Ben Franklin and the Magic Squares by Frank Murphy, to introduce the many scientific contributions of Benjamin Franklin before looking at the documents in this activity. Depending on when in the first grade year students study Franklin, teachers may want to increase or decrease the amount of independent work required in the activity below.*

--Use the images in Documents 5, 6, and 7 to discuss a few of Benjamin Franklin’s scientific discoveries, innovations, and inventions. Have students make connections between these things and their lives (“my grandmother wears bifocals,” or “we have a lightning rod on our house”). Take time to watch the glass armonica video so that students can understand a bit of how it works.

--As a class, discuss what it means to identify a problem and then find a solution for it. Have students pick one of Franklin’s discoveries, identify a problem it solves, and share how that discovery/invention was a solution to it. Even things like the armonica solve a problem, albeit a less practical one than things like bifocals.

--Working with partners or groups, students can go through the same process with another invention/discovery. If desired, students can do this using the attached graphic organizer to record their discussions.

--Come back together and create a class chart of inventions-as-solutions, and the problems that they solve. To extend the lesson, students can add inventions/discoveries from other historical figures under study, or from other sources throughout the year.

| GSE Standards and Elements | SS1H1 – Read about and describe the life of historical figures in American history.  
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Solving Problems: Ben Franklin’s Scientific Discoveries
Sample Instructional Activities/Assessments

What are you writing, Ben?

Benjamin Franklin’s career began as a printer, and he both wrote and published numerous types of writing over his lifetime. This activity asks students to look at different types of his writing, and compare them to similar writings from their own lives.

--Review with students that Benjamin Franklin was a printer. It may be necessary to give some description of what this means; help them distinguish the job from the machine attached to a computer. Explain that Franklin not only printed other people’s writings, but also published his own. (Benjamin Franklin by Ingri and Edgar D’Aulaire gives an excellent description of this work.)

--Using Documents 8, 9, and 10, show students various types of writing Franklin did as an author. Help them determine what the writing is, who its audience might have been, and why this writing remains important over two hundred years later.

--Document 8: Join or Die political cartoon created by Benjamin Franklin and published in his newspaper, the Pennsylvania Gazette. (Note that Franklin created and published this cartoon in 1754, and it calls for the colonies to join together in the French and Indian war – NOT the American Revolution.) Walk students through the meaning of the cartoon: by acting separately and not joining to fight a common enemy, the individual colonies risk defeat – or even death. Explain that newspapers still publish political cartoons to comment on current events. Ask students to identify the audience for this cartoon – for example, is it people busy farming on the frontier, or wealthier businessmen in cities? Who would need to be convinced to join together?

--Document 9: Cover and inside page from two different editions of Poor Richard’s Almanack
Unlike the political cartoon, the audience of the Almanack was wide and varied. Explain to students that many people published almanacs of varying expertise and quality. These were written to guide people on weather forecasts, ideal times for various household, garden, and farm chores, and Franklin’s almanac was peppered with advice, quotes, and Biblical references. Help students identify not only who would have read the almanac in Franklin’s day, but also what we use today to obtain the same information (weather websites, phone apps, paper calendars, etc.).

--Document 10: Franklin wrote his autobiography in fits and spurts over several decades, and one version was published abroad shortly after his death. Many people credit Franklin with inventing the autobiography as a genre. Have students think through why Franklin would have wanted to record his life’s story AND publish it, rather than just leaving it in a private journal. Are there other autobiographies that students have read? Many children’s books (including those of Patricia Polacco, Tomie dePaola, and others) have an autobiographical basis. How are those books similar to or different from Franklin’s autobiography?

--After studying all three documents, have students share (orally or in writing) what kind of writing they most enjoy producing as an author, and whether or not it is similar to any of the types created by Benjamin Franklin.

GSE Standards and Elements

SS1H1 – Read about and describe the life of historical figures in American history.
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## Sample Instructional Activities/Assessments

### Summative Performance Task

--Take students on a field trip throughout the school building to identify various parts of their lives that are similar to inventions/innovations/discoveries/contributions attributed to Benjamin Franklin. Potential stops might include:
*the library (Franklin started a subscription lending library)
*teacher mailboxes (Franklin served as Postmaster)
*an electrical box
*a teacher wearing bifocals
*swivel chairs
*maps showing the United States
*work of older students related to founding documents
*posted copies of the Declaration of Independence or Constitution
*copies of school or classroom rules
*newspapers/political cartoons/almanacs
*autobiographies in the school library

--Return to the classroom, and guide students in completing t-charts showing how these inventions existed in Franklin’s day, and how they still exist and are used by students today.

--Have students select five-seven of their favorite comparisons, and then create booklets showing labeled drawings of them with explanatory sentences, as appropriate.

--As a conclusion to their booklets, students should answer the essential question: “Why do we remember Benjamin Franklin today?” Some students may be able to do this independently, while others may need to dictate their answers and allow an adult to record their response. If possible, share these booklets with an older class where students are also studying Benjamin Franklin or the colonial/early American period.

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### Literacy Standards

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