

Read the passage about a famous American named Benjamin Franklin and then answer the questions that follow.

## Benjamin Franklin: Writer, Inventor, Statesman

*by Pamela Hill Nettleton*



- 1 Benjamin Franklin is one of the most important and interesting people in the history of the United States. Ben helped the country form its first government. He was good with both people and ideas.
- 2 Ben was very smart and curious, too. He taught himself how to do many things well. His inventions and ideas still help us today.
- 3 This is the story of Benjamin Franklin.
- 4 Benjamin Franklin came from a big family. He had 16 brothers and sisters! He was born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1706. Massachusetts was then a colony belonging to England.
- 5 Ben's father had a shop where he made soap and candles. When Ben turned 10, he had to stay home from school and help his father. Ben got to go to school for only two years, but he read every book he found. He taught himself math, writing, and science.

- 6 Ben learned how to make newspapers in his brother's print shop. He and his brother argued a lot, so Ben ran away when he was 17. He went to Philadelphia, the largest city in the 13 colonies. In Philadelphia, Ben worked hard to become a successful printer. By the time he was 24, he had his own print shop. He printed the *Pennsylvania Gazette* newspaper. He also printed a book he wrote called *Poor Richard's Almanac*. People loved to read Ben's almanac. It was funny and full of wise sayings we still use today.
- 7 In 1730, Ben married Deborah Read. She helped run a general store in front of the print shop. She sold things such as soap and fabrics.
- 8 Ben was a happy, funny man. He was also curious. He had a lot of questions about the world: What makes wind blow? Where does electricity come from? Why is the ocean warm near the shore?
- 9 When Ben had a question, he tried to find the answer. He wondered if lightning made electricity. He flew a kite in a storm until lightning hit the kite. The lightning traveled down the string and hit a key tied at the other end. It made a spark—electricity!
- 10 When Ben found an answer, he used it to help people. He invented the lightning rod, a tall pole to put on top of a house. It kept lightning from starting fires in people's homes.
- 11 Back then, people heated their homes with wood-burning stoves. Ben invented a stove that burned less wood yet was even hotter than other stoves. It was called the Franklin stove.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

- Ben got tired of taking his glasses on and off to read, so he invented bifocals. These special glasses help people see both near and far.
- Ben sailed back and forth between America and France many times. He used his time on the ship to study ocean currents and temperatures.
- Ben was one of the first people to work against slavery in the United States. When he was 81, he became president of the first antislavery group in the country.
- Two presidents of the United States were named after Ben. They were Franklin Pierce and Franklin D. Roosevelt.
- William Franklin, one of Ben's three children, grew up to become the governor of New Jersey. Ben wanted the colonies to be free from England's rule. William wanted the colonies to stay with England. This was a problem between father and son.

- 12 Ben ran the post office and helped the mail get delivered faster. In 1775, he became the first postmaster general, in charge of all the post offices in the colonies. In 1847, Ben and George Washington had their pictures on the very first U.S. postage stamps.
- 13 Ben helped start the first library, the first fire department, and the first city hospital in the colonies.
- 14 In 1775, the colonies started the Revolutionary War to win their freedom from England. Ben helped write the Declaration of Independence. This important paper marked the beginning of the United States of America.
- 15 At first, the war was not going well. Ben went to France. He convinced the French to send their army to help the colonies. Many people think the war would have been lost without Ben's work.
- 16 After the war, Ben helped make America's first laws. He signed the Constitution of the United States. The country loved him! He died in 1790, at the age of 84. About 20,000 people went to his funeral.
- 17 Ben once said he would like to return to the world 100 years after he died to see all the new ideas and inventions. Imagine what he would say if he visited us today!

#### TIMELINE: THE LIFE OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

- 1706 — Born in Boston, Massachusetts, on January 6
- 1718 — Worked with his brother James in a print shop in Boston
- 1723 — Ran away to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, at age 17
- 1728 — Opened his own print shop, publishing a newspaper and *Poor Richard's Almanac*
- 1730 — Married Deborah Read
- 1731 — Helped start the first library that loaned out books
- 1736 — Founded the Union Fire Company in Philadelphia
- 1752 — Conducted his famous kite experiment
- 1776 — Signed the Declaration of Independence
- 1778 — Signed the Treaty of Alliance with France to get France's help for the colonies
- 1783 — Signed the Treaty of Paris, ending the Revolutionary War
- 1787 — Signed the Constitution of the United States
- 1790 — Died in Philadelphia on April 17, at age 84