

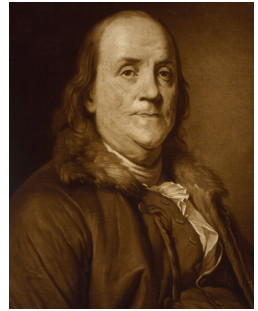
Benjamin Franklin

Pre-reading

Questions: What do you know about this man? What might you learn about him?

Definitions: Statesman – a man who has skill and wisdom in government matters

Autobiography – the story of a person’s life written by that person



Reading

Benjamin Franklin was many things: a printer, writer, scientist, inventor, statesman, and civic leader. He was the oldest figure of the American Revolution and was the only person to sign the three documents that established the United States: the Declaration of Independence, the peace treaty with Britain that ended the Revolutionary War, and the Constitution.

As a writer, he is known for *Poor Richard’s Almanac* and his autobiography. Franklin loved to read. When he was young, he borrowed books from anyone who would lend them to him. He read about all kinds of subjects.

He also wanted to write, but he didn’t know how. He only had two years of school, so he taught himself to write. He found stories that he liked and rewrote them. Some he rewrote from memory. Other stories he turned into poetry. Sometimes he took notes on a story, then mixed up his notes and tried to put the events back in the correct order.

His writing practice and efforts were worth it. When he was 16 years old, he submitted 14 letters to his brother’s newspaper, the *New England Courant*, and his brother published them. Franklin used the name Silence Dogood to write the letters. Franklin often used pseudonyms, which are fictitious names used in writing. Franklin made up a whole character that went by the name Silence Dogood and wrote letters as though he were a she.

Franklin’s most famous pseudonym was Richard Saunders, also known as Poor Richard of *Poor Richard’s Almanac*. This reference book for everyday life was filled with information like calendars and weather forecasts. Before the Internet, TV and radio, many people would buy an almanac every year so they could look up things like holidays and the moon cycles.

The “author,” Richard Saunders, wrote his first almanac in 1732. Poor Richard presented himself as a slightly dull, but often funny, country fellow who believed in hard work and simple living. Many of Franklin’s most famous quotes are from *Poor Richard’s Almanac*. They include: “haste makes waste” and “early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.”

Poor Richard’s Almanac was an immediate success. Franklin published one each year for the next 26 years and sold almost 10,000 copies every year. Franklin wrote many other things too. He wrote articles for his own newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, letters about his life (later published as his autobiography), and other letters on a wide range of subjects.

Source: America’s Story from America’s Library – Library of Congress

Level 7.5

Understanding

1. What is a pseudonym? _____

2. What pseudonyms did Franklin use? _____

3. Why was Franklin such a good writer about so many subjects? _____

4. Where were Franklin's writings first published? _____

5. The signing of what documents makes Franklin unlike any other person in history? Why? _____

6. Why is it surprising that Franklin was such a good writer? _____

7. What is one of Franklin's most famous quotes? What does it mean? _____

8. Where did many of his quotes first appear? _____

Writing

Option A: Summarize the reading in your own words.

Option B: What new information did you learn about Franklin? Why do you think he held in such high regard? What can be learned from his life?
