

BLOOMSBURG THEATRE ENSEMBLE PRESENTS

***THE AMAZING
MR. FRANKLIN
OR
BEN THERE, DONE THAT***



STUDY GUIDE 2026

ON TOUR MARCH 16 – MAY 8, 2026

For more information, or to book a performance, please contact BTE's
Education Director, Abigail Leffler, at
abigaill@bte.org

Welcome, Teachers!!



Dr. Benjamin Franklin, one of our country's Founding Fathers, was a true "Renaissance" man all the way back to his feisty teenage years.

Not only is he the face that graces the hundred-dollar bill, Ben Franklin is a dynamic diplomat, a brilliant inventor and very human character. Ben was a visionary man who is still way ahead of his time;

perhaps this is why he remains to be one of the most recognizable men in our history today.

Among the many things we may attribute to Benjamin Franklin, such as the man who "tamed lightning" and helped edit the Declaration of Independence, this BTE Theatre In the Classroom Study Guide and our show investigate how this fascinating, funny, and wonderfully inventive American leader still affects the values, imagination, and everyday lives of people today.

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A History of Theatre in the Classroom

Since 1978, the Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble has been bringing live theatre to classrooms across Pennsylvania and surrounding states. The energetic storytelling style, imaginative use of props, multiple characters and locations created, and audience participation have been the hallmark of original BTE shows for young audiences.

Designed to address the cultural isolation that is often found in non-urban areas, Theatre In the Classroom (TIC) was originally designed for High School students, bringing scenes from the great playwrights, Shakespeare, Shaw, Oscar Wilder, Thornton Wilder to school auditoriums. In 1981 we added our first original show for elementary and middle school students, *The Wise Men of Chelm*. Since 1989, TIC has focused solely on elementary and middle school audiences. We've created shows based on folk literature, local and world history, mythology, and science. Students are seated on the floor in a half circle to keep them as close to the action as we can. Hundreds of pictures drawn each year by audience members and mailed to us after performances are poured over by the cast, staff, and artistic team and hung on our office walls. Where in performance we pretend to throw water at someone, they draw actual water. Where we describe a tree, they draw it in great detail. These pictures are a testament to the power of imagination and the power of live theatre.

We often say that TIC is the heartbeat of BTE. It has been our training ground (there is no audience more honest than a young audience!) teaching us versatility, crowd control, vocal projection, improvisation, and oh yes, stamina.

Today you and your students will be a part of something that countless students have witnessed throughout the years, and I am humbled to say that being the director of a TIC show is a full circle moment for me. I remember seeing TIC when I was in kindergarten. I remember drawing one of those pictures that may have been hung on an office wall. In addition to the legacy I am contributing toward, I am keeping in mind those children that will remember this for years or even decades to come. My hope is that your students will leave, not only learning about a founding father, but inspired to foster their creative sides in ways that may not have been considered.

Thank you for inviting BTE to your school. You are supporting, not only the arts in rural Pennsylvania, but future artists who will leave the show wanting to explore what it means to be an actor, painter, musician, and more.

-Abigail L Leffler
Director

Meet the Cast



HANNAH GRACE NICHOLS (she/her), (ACTOR) Hannah is an actress, singer, & dancer born in the USA, currently based between the US & London! Hannah's passion for theatre was ignited as a child by watching the iconic 1998 straight-to-VHS pro-shot of CATS! The rest is history (on both her love affair with theatre & cats!). She deviated from theatre for a while to pursue contemporary dance, obtaining her BA from New Mexico State University & MA from London Contemporary Dance School. She danced & choreographed professionally in the USA, Spain, Belgium, & the UK before London's West End reminded her that she probably wouldn't get to sing 'Memory' if she didn't start acting again! Since, she's been in productions of 'The Wedding Singer' (Ensemble/Dance Captain) & 'Head over Heels' (Philoclea), along with readings of new work & some concerts.

Her love of children led her to audition for 'The Amazing Mr. Franklin', & she's so excited to lend her skills, goofiness, & heart to this show. A huge thanks to BTE for having her & Mr. Mistoffelees (her cat) across the pond!



JAMES OFALT (he/him), (ACTOR) James is delighted to be working with Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble once again; Previously at BTE, James directed their most recent performance of *The 39 Steps*.



AARON WHITE (he/him), (ACTOR) Aaron last rolled out with TIC in the inaugural tour of the Amazing Mr. Franklin 12 years ago. In the interim, Mr. White, has become a father, an Ensemble member of the Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble, and a witness to the increasing upheaval within the country that Benjamin Franklin helped to shape 250 years ago. As a Resident Artist at BTE, Aaron serves as an actor, director, choreographer, fight choreographer and Set/Sound/Puppet designer. He will add playwright to the list when TIC hits the road in 2027 with ***Neuro-Influencers: This is your Brain on Social Media***. Aaron also is a contributor and co-producer to the BTE Down Center Podcast. Aaron is also committed to teaching his craft to the next generation.

He has served as an Adjunct Professor at Luzerne Community College, Lycoming College and Susquehanna University. He teaches regularly for BTE Theatre School and has lead workshops for Schools throughout the region. Aaron holds a BA from Susquehanna University. He has done post-graduate work at Ohio University and received his MFA from the PATP at the University of Houston. Originally from Dalmatia, Pa, Aaron now resides in Williamsport with his loving wife, Nina, and their son, Liam.



ABIGAIL LEFFLER (she/her), (DIRECTOR) Abigail is BTE's Education Director, as well as BTE Improv Facilitator and performer. She has been back at BTE since 2019 and is very excited to be directing her first TIC. She has always had a special place in her heart for these touring shows as she has been in several (*All Aboard!*, *Passage to America*, *Eureka II*.) and remembers seeing them when she was in elementary school. Abigail is beyond grateful for kids' (Gabe and Lynn) and husband's (Matt) support and cannot wait for the community she grew up in (she's a Bloomsburg native!) to see this amazing show.

Ben Franklin- The Writer



Ben Franklin was from first to last a man of letters. As a boy he would save his hard-earned money to buy books. He taught himself the art of writing by reading an article, putting it aside, writing his own version of what he had just read, and then comparing the two. After much practice, Ben thought his versions were better.

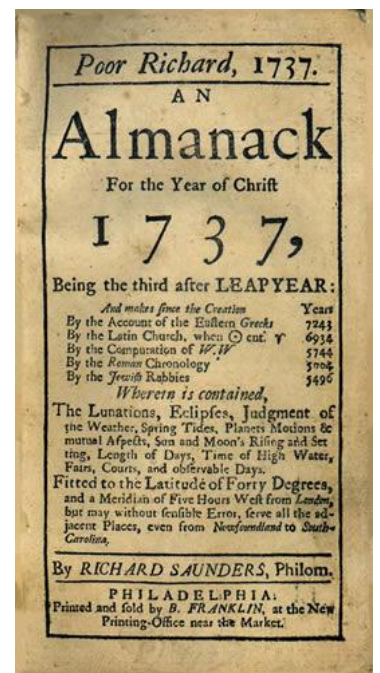
Ben learned the trade of being a printer from his brother, James. James printed a newspaper in Boston, and a newspaper needs articles for people to read. Ben started secretly writing articles for his brother's newspaper while he was still a young apprentice. In these articles or essays, Ben would poke fun at people, events and institutions by making up characters and writing

in their voices. Silence Dogood, a Puritan widow, was his first character. One of her "letters" to the newspaper talked about Harvard College, how one's ability to go there depended on money and not intelligence, and how people often left it no smarter than when they went in. Ben wrote these kinds of articles until the end of his life. In one of his last, he attacked the institution of slavery.

Of course, when Ben moved to Philadelphia and ran his own print shop, he wrote news stories to put in his newspaper, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*. Like the essays, his news articles were often funny and provocative which meant he sold many newspapers.

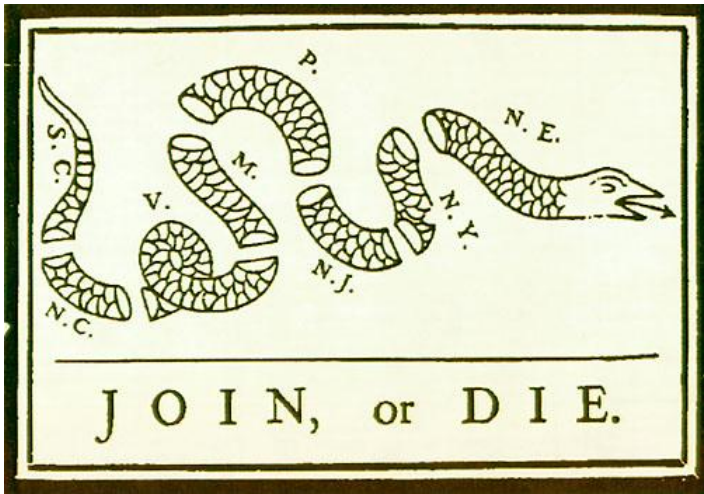
Ben began publishing a series of booklets called *Poor Richard's Almanack* for which he wrote many jokes, poems and sayings. After the bible, these little books became the most popular reading matter in the colonies. Many sayings we still use today can be found in *Poor Richard's Almanack*. The *Almanack* came out for the next twenty-five years and its' success helped Ben to be rich enough to retire at age forty-two.

After that, Ben devoted time to inventing things and conducting experiments. His famous experiment using a kite in a thunderstorm, which he wrote about and published in pamphlets excited scientists all over the world, and won him a place in honored institutions like the Royal Society. Another pamphlet introduced people to his invention of the Franklin Stove. Ben's



writings on science and inventions were freely shared with others in the hopes that people would benefit or build on them and he never made money from them.

Throughout his life, Ben wrote letters to his family, friends. He also wrote to others he never met in order to share his ideas on science, government, inventions, discoveries- all the things that he was interested in. In the 18th Century, this was one of the few ways apart from printed material to share information over great distances. These letters would often be shared with others in order to spread new ideas and knowledge even further.



Ben's writings also include political writings. In fact, most of his writings were in one way or another, political. Ben knew that in order to make change in the world, one has to be able to talk about what is going on in it with as many people as possible. Ben used his writing (and printing) skills to comment on events and to convince people to his way of thinking about them: from the very first political cartoon in America- an image

of a snake in pieces with the name of a colony by each piece, and the caption, 'Join or Die'; to articles in London papers attacking the Stamp Act; to assisting the writing of the Declaration of Independence; to early essays on the abolition of slavery in America.

Ben always questioned the religion of his day and wrote and published many pieces on philosophy and on how one can be and do good in the world.

Finally, Ben wrote the story of the first part of his life in *The Autobiography*. *The Autobiography* was very popular for generations of readers and was the first 'rags to riches' story of the young person starting with a few coins in his pocket and rising to success through intelligence, good will and hard work, which has become so much a part of our American identity.

Ben Franklin-The Inventor

Ben Franklin created many inventions throughout his time in order to improve the quality of life in the Colonial era. However, there is no way to count all of them because he never put a patent on anything he invented. He intended them to be used by everyone and that no one person should make a monetary gain. He is attributed with at least nine designs of inventions and these include:



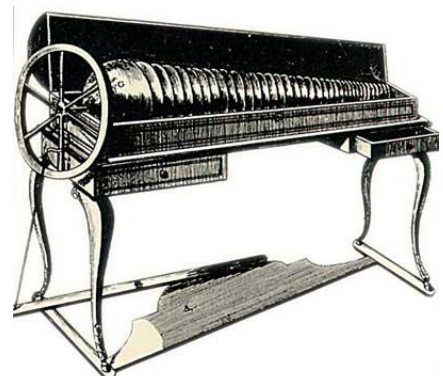
- Extension Arm: Used to reach books off of high shelves.
- Franklin Stove: A wood burning stove that was placed in the center of a room allowing heat to be given off in every direction. It provides more heat, less smoke, and uses less fuel than a traditional wood stove.
- Flexible Catheter: Made of silver, would replace the bulkier, more painful metal catheters.
- Bifocals: A pair of glasses with an upper and lower section. The upper section was used to see at a distance and the lower half was used for reading.

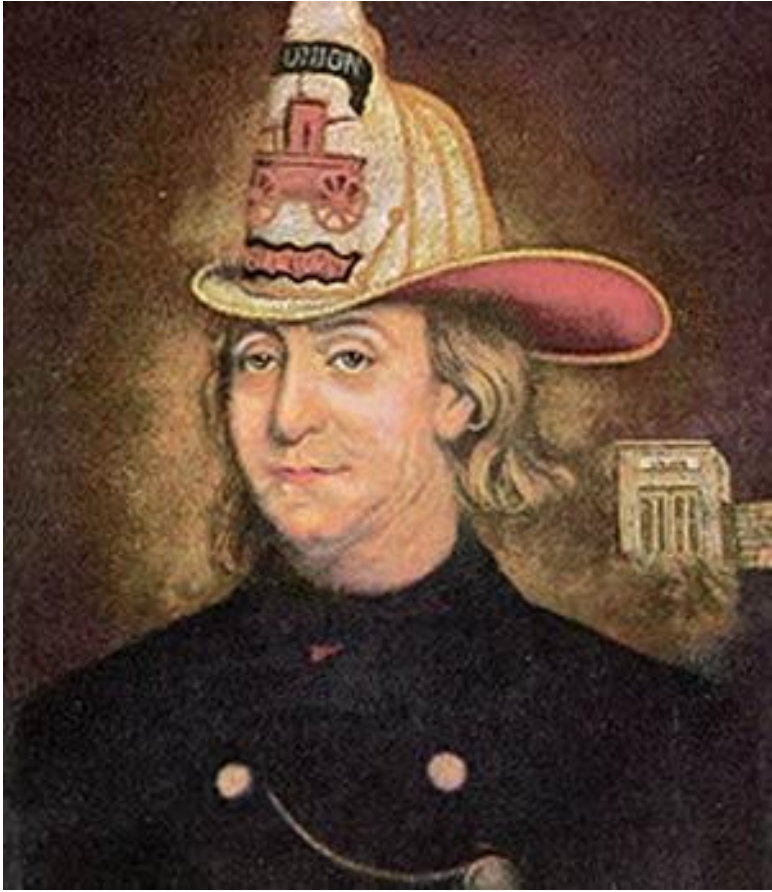


- Library Chair: Chair that could be converted into a step stool.
- Swim Fins: Two wooden, oval-shaped paddles attached to the hands.
- Lightning Rod: An iron rod

attached to the outside of a building. When lightning would strike, it would hit the rod and then travel safely to the ground, preventing fire and electrocution.

- Glass Armonica: A foot-operated instrument containing 37 glass bowls. The bowls were color coded by note.
- Odometer: Attached near the wheel of a carriage. Used to measure distance.



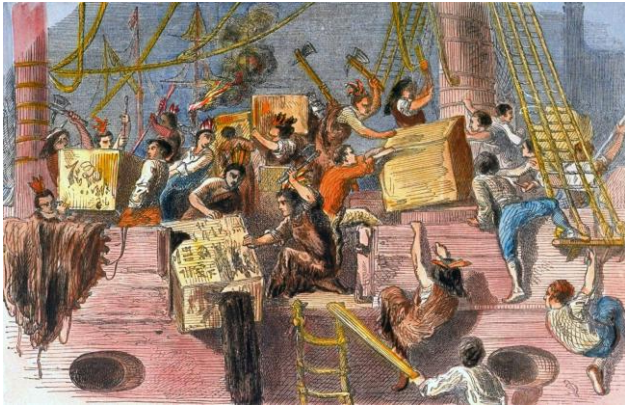


Franklin has also been attributed with the discovery of the Gulf Stream, The Union Fire Company, and The Library Company of Philadelphia. In addition to these Franklin was also the first to use many scientific words in the field of electricity including: battery, charge, condenser, conductor, plus, minus, positively, negatively, and armature.

Ben Franklin Abroad



Ben Franklin spent much of his life abroad. His first move was to London in 1724, when he was 18 years old. He went to purchase supplies to start his own printing shop and was told his trip would be financed by Pennsylvania Governor, Sir William Keith. Unfortunately, Keith did not keep his word. So, Franklin worked in printing shops to earn the funds to finance his voyage back to Pennsylvania. He returned home in 1726.



On June 20, 1757, Franklin moved back overseas. The Pennsylvania militia needed money, and the Penn family—the very rich founders of the colony, refused to pay their share of the taxes to support the small army. So, Ben set sail for England to ask for governmental support. While there, he helped his son William, who had accompanied him on the journey, to obtain the title of Royal Governor of New Jersey. In 1762, William and Ben returned to the colonies, both having successfully completed their missions.

But Ben did not stay in the colonies for long. There was unrest, so the Pennsylvania Assembly asked Ben to return to London as their representative. On November 9, 1764, he set sail for London once again.

While there, Franklin successfully helped convince the British to abolish the Stamp Act. But soon, other taxes took its place. Finally, all of them were repealed except for the tax on tea, but Franklin feared correctly that this would not satisfy the colonists.

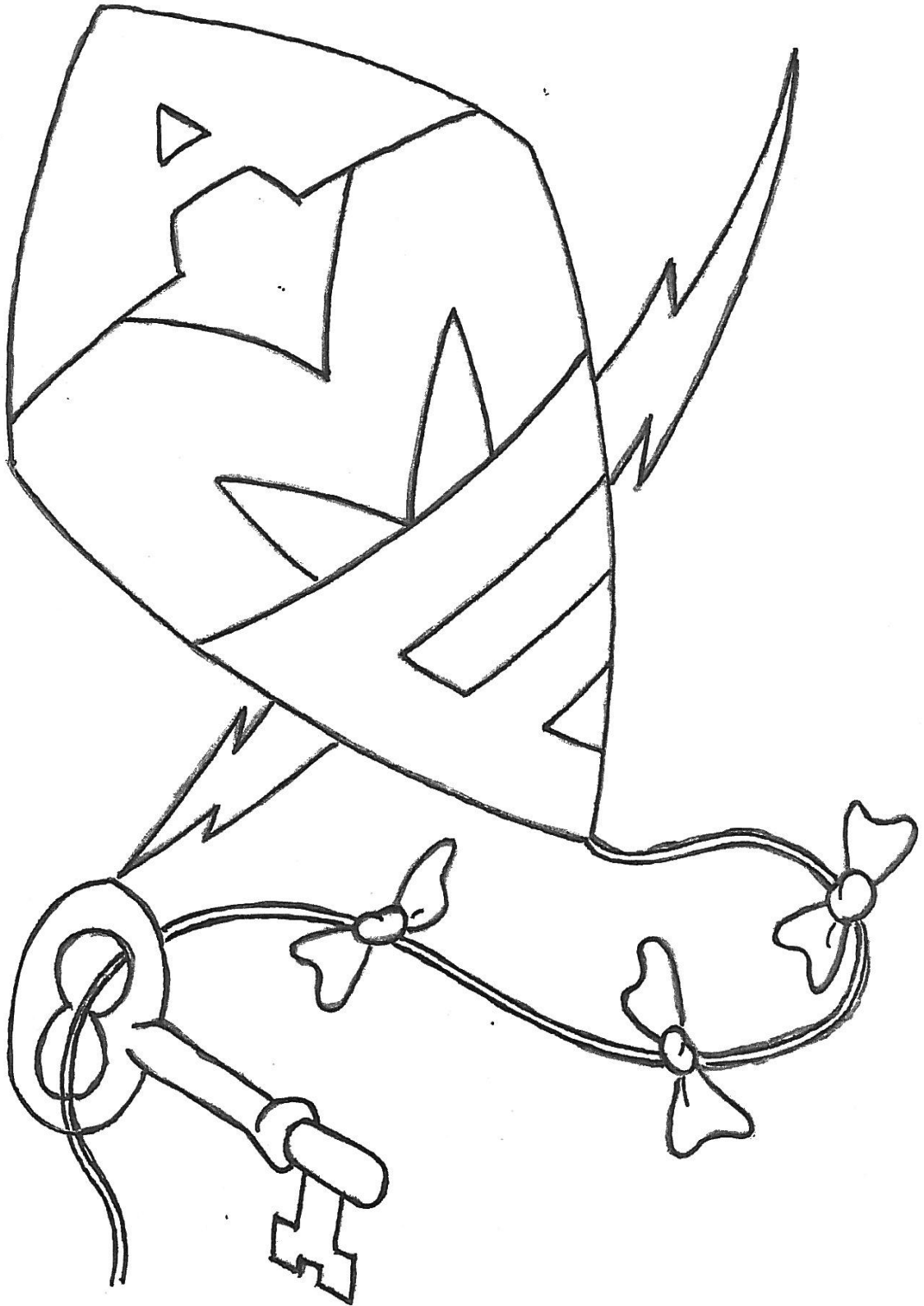
In what is now known as the Boston Tea Party, colonists boarded ships in Boston's harbor and dumped crates of the taxed tea into the ocean. The British were furious and refused to trade in Boston's harbor any longer. They called Ben Franklin to parliament, complained to him about what the colonists had done, and fired him from his position as the colonies' Postmaster General.

The colonies fought back by getting together at the first Continental Congress and drafting a list of wrongs that the British had committed against them. They then sent this list to parliament, asking for reparations. Unfortunately, England would not listen to reason, and the list was ignored.

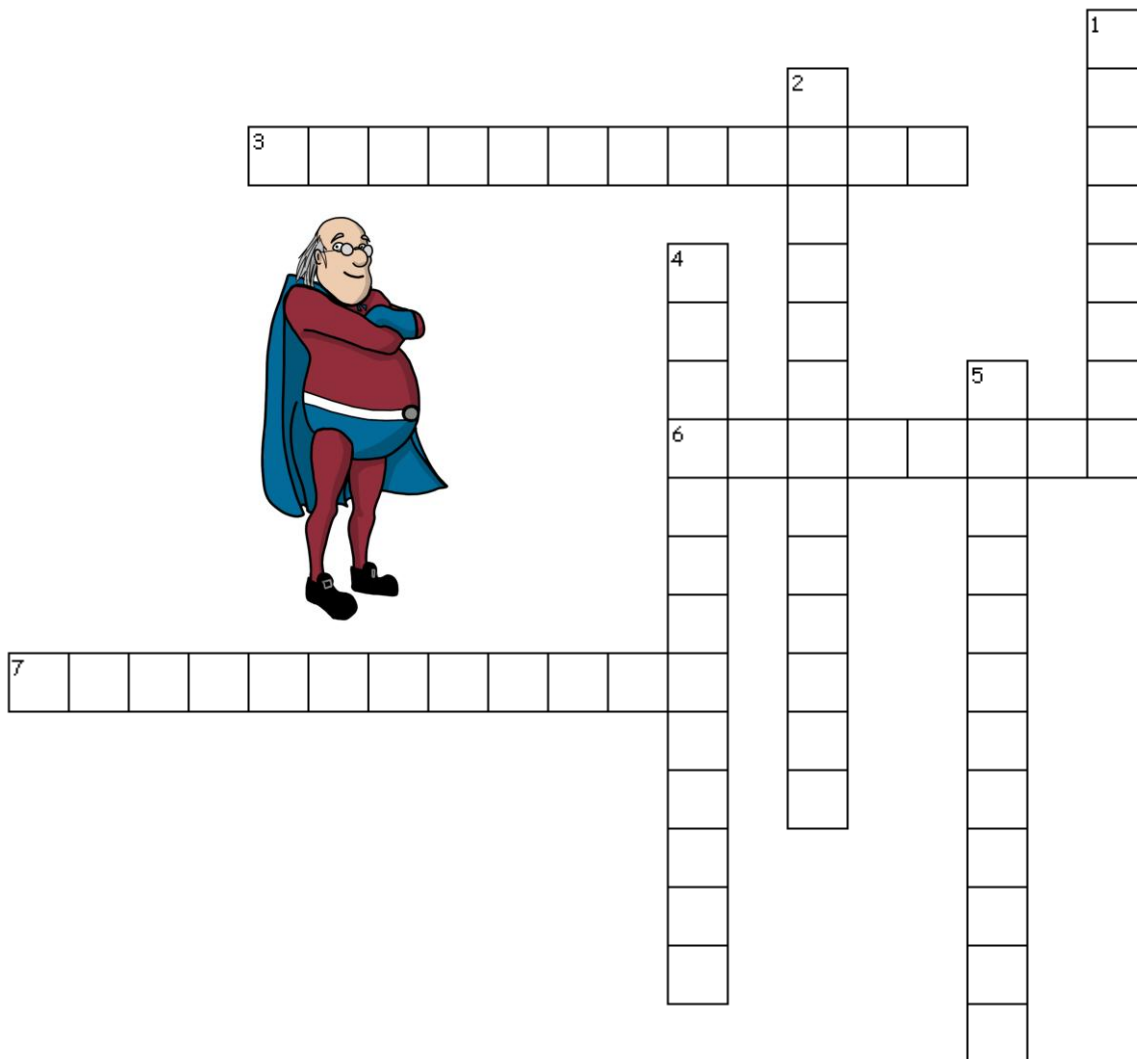
On December 19, 1774, Ben received word that his dear wife, Deborah, had passed away. This combined with an escalating feeling of danger for colonists in England, convinced Ben to return home. It was during his journey that fighting broke out between the British and the colonists in Lexington, Massachusetts, signifying the beginning of the Revolutionary War.

In November of 1776, Franklin left home again, but this time for Paris. In 1778, he successfully engineered an official military alliance between the French and the Americans. Franklin stayed in France throughout the rest of the Revolutionary War and after much fighting; he helped draft a peace treaty between England and the United States. It was signed on September 3, 1783. The war was over, and in July of 1785, Franklin finally got to sail home. He was 77 years old and had spent 28 years of his life living abroad.

Coloring Page: The Amazing Mr. Franklin



Crossword Puzzle: Inventions



Across

3. When lightning strikes a house, this invention of Ben's protects the house from the electrical charge.
6. Ben Franklin fashioned these out of wood and leather to help him swim faster when he was a young boy.
7. This invention allows people to grab things that are out of reach.

Down

1. These glasses help people to see both close up and far away.
2. Ben Franklin invented this to keep his house warm, but not smoky.
4. Ben Franklin invented this instrument.
5. This invention is a mix between a chair and a step stool.

Ben Franklin's Life: A Timeline



BOSTON 1706-1723

17 years in Boston

1706 January 17- Benjamin Franklin was born in Boston. The tenth and last son of Josiah and Abiah Franklin.

1714 - 16 Franklin is enrolled in the South Grammar School. Young Franklin quickly becomes the best pupil in his class. Leaving school, Franklin becomes his father's assistant in the tallow-chandlery and soap-boiling business where he runs errands, delivers soap and dips candles.

1717 Franklin invents wooden paddles to use as swim fins.

1718 - 1722 Benjamin works as apprentice printer to brother James Franklin, who begins publication of *The New England Courant*. "Silence Dogood" is published in the *Courant*, followed by 13 others before Franklin (age 16) reveals his identity.

1723 Franklin breaks his apprenticeship with James, calling him "harsh and tyrannical" and runs away from Boston.

1723 Having found no work in New York Franklin arrives in Philadelphia. Franklin is employed as a printer in the shop of Samuel Keimer.

1724 Hungry to start his own business, Franklin sails to London to buy type and other printing supplies for his own shop with the promise of Governor William Keith's financial backing.



LONDON 1724 -1726

2 years in London

1724 - 1726 The 18-year-old Franklin arrives in London but quickly finds the Governor has no credit to lend. Unable to finance a trip home, Franklin gets work in two prominent printing shops. He makes a splash by swimming in the Thames and considers staying in London to open a swimming academy.



PHILADELPHIA 1726 - 1757 31 years in Philadelphia

1726 Franklin returns to Philadelphia and Keimer's printing shop. During this time, Franklin founds the Junto club, a society of young men who met together

for self-improvement, study, mutual aid, and social enjoyment. The Junto lasts until 1765.

1728 - 1729 Franklin realizes his dream of having his own printing shop. Franklin becomes the owner, publisher, and editor of the weekly newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. Sometime during this year, Franklin becomes a father to William, whose mother and date of birth are never revealed.

1730 The Pennsylvania Assembly elects Franklin as the official government printer. Franklin enters into a common-law marriage with Deborah (Read) Rogers.

1731 Franklin founds the Library Company of Philadelphia.

1732 Franklin publishes the first edition of *Poor Richard's Almanack* under the pseudonym "Richard Saunders".

1736 Franklin is appointed clerk of the Pennsylvania Assembly. Franklin's son, Francis Folger Franklin, dies at the age of 4 from smallpox. Franklin organizes the Union Fire Company of Philadelphia

1741 Franklin advertises an early version of the Pennsylvania fireplace for sale.

1743 Franklin publishes the founding document of the American Philosophical Society. Sarah "Sally" Franklin born to Benjamin Franklin and Deborah Read.

1747- 1748 Franklin and others organize a volunteer militia – the Associators – for the defense of Pennsylvania. Franklin retires from printing.

1749 Franklin and others organize the "Academy of Philadelphia" (later to become the University of Pennsylvania)

1750 Franklin proposes lightning rods as a means to protect buildings from fire. Franklin is severely shocked while electrocuting a turkey.

1751 Franklin successfully lobbies for funding to create the first hospital in Pennsylvania. Franklin is elected a member of the Pennsylvania Assembly.

Franklin puts forward a plan to establish the first fire insurance company in Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Contributionship.

1752 Pennsylvania Hospital opens in Philadelphia. Franklin experiments with flying a kite in a thunderstorm and also proves that lightning is electrical in nature. Franklin explains how to perform kite experiment in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*.

1753 Franklin appointed joint Deputy Postmaster General of North America.

1754 Franklin designs and prints the "Join or Die" cartoon in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. He proposes a union of the colonies to provide for common defense against the French. The Pennsylvania Assembly rejects the Albany Plan, as do the other colonies and the British government.

1755 Franklin's militia bill for Pennsylvania is adopted by the Assembly

1756 Pennsylvania Assembly passes Franklin's bill for providing night watchmen and street lighting for Philadelphia

1757 Pennsylvania Assembly elects Franklin as its agent in presenting its grievances to the Penn family proprietors and the British government in London. Franklin travels to London with his son William.



LONDON 1757 - 1762 **6 years in London**

1762 Franklin invents the glass armonica. Mozart and Beethoven later composed for it. Franklin returns to Philadelphia



PHILADELPHIA 1762 - 1764 **2 years in Philadelphia**

1764 Franklin runs for a seat in the Pennsylvania Assembly and is defeated. Franklin leaves Philadelphia for London, as the agent of the Pennsylvania Assembly to lobby against taxes being levied on the colonists.



LONDON 1764 - 1775

11 years in London

1765 The House of Commons passes the Stamp Act. While he is away in London, Stamp Act protestors threaten Franklin's house.

1768 Franklin has maps printed showing the course of the Gulf Stream.

1769 The American Philosophical Society elects Franklin its President .

1771 Franklin begins writing his Autobiography

1772 Franklin secretly obtains the correspondence of Massachusetts Governor Thomas Hutchinson with English authorities, and finding that it advocates repressive measures against colonial dissenters, sends it to Massachusetts Speaker Thomas Cushing.

1774 News of the Boston Tea Party reaches London. Franklin is accused of stealing the Hutchinson letters and is denounced as thief before the Privy Council. The British government removes Franklin from his position as Deputy Postmaster General in America. Franklin returns to America.



PHILADELPHIA 1775 - 1776

1 year in Philadelphia

1775 Immediately upon his return, Franklin is elected a delegate to the Second Continental Congress

1776 Continental Congress appoints Franklin to the committee to draft the Declaration of

Independence. Congress adopts the Declaration of Independence. Continental Congress appoints Franklin to serve as Commissioners to France to raise money for the war against England.



FRANCE 1776 - 1785

9 years in France

1776 Franklin travels from Philadelphia to France to request French aid. Franklin moves to Paris suburb of Passy, where he remains during French mission.

1778 Franklin, on behalf of the United States of America, signs the Treaty of Amity establishing a commercial trade alliance

between the two nations. France declares war on Great Britain

1783 Franklin, John Adams, and John Jay signs the Treaty of Paris between Great Britain and the United States ending the war. Franklin witnesses two of the first manned balloon flights.

1785 Franklin described his invention of bifocal glasses. Franklin leaves France to return to Philadelphia.



PHILADELPHIA 1785 - 1790

4 years in Philadelphia

1785 Franklin arrives in Philadelphia, and is met by cannon salutes, peeling bells, and cheering crowds.

1786 Franklin designs an instrument for taking down books from high shelves.

1787 Franklin is elected President of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery. Franklin serves as a delegate to the constitutional convention held in Philadelphia. At its conclusion, he signs the U.S. Constitution.

1789 Franklin composes, signs, and submits the first petition against slavery to appear before the U.S. Congress.

1790 Franklin dies quietly at home of pleurisy, age 84. Four days after his death, a funeral, attended by 20,000 mourners, carried his coffin to Christ Church burial ground. Both the U.S. House of Representatives and the French National Assembly wore mourning after his death.

Our Favorite Books About Ben

What's the Big Idea, Ben Franklin?

Jean Fritz - Margot Tomes - Coward, McCann & Geoghegan - 1976

A slim volume for young readers (2nd grade and up) with delightful drawings and a lively narrative of Franklin's life and major achievements. I like the idea of a lifelong search for the Big Idea and the fun tone the author takes in sharing this search. Makes Franklin feel very down-to-earth.

The Amazing Life of Benjamin Franklin

by James Cross Giblin, Illustrated by Michael Dooling

A nice comprehensive history of Ben's life and his contributions to science, politics, and American life in general. The illustrations are beautiful and the writing is engaging and to the point. It also includes a very nice timeline, and lists of Franklin's famous sayings and inventions. Perfect for 3rd-7th graders.

The Remarkable Benjamin Franklin

written and illustrated by Cheryl Harness, National Geographic Society, 2005

Audience grades 4-6, but very pleasing for all ages. Franklin's life and endeavors beautifully illustrated, thoughtfully written, and in a type Franklin would have appreciated. Evokes the 18th century world, but keeps us connected with the human story. With quotes from Franklin's writings and a great timeline.

Benjamin Franklin: An American Genius

By Kay Melchisedech Olson, illustrated by Gordon Purcell and Barbara Schulz

Set up in the style of a graphic novel the covers many of the key aspects in Franklin's life, from inventor to statesmen and everything in between. Geared towards younger kids, ages 6-9, this is still a delightful book that is filled with great information. Also provides additional resource material if further reading is wanted.

Internet Resources on Ben

<http://www.benfranklin300.org>

An interactive website with tons of additional information on Ben. Includes trivia, interactive timeline and additional study guides

<http://www.ushistory.org/FRANKLIN/info/>

A great summary of Ben Franklin's life. Filled with information on his inventions and accomplishments

<http://www.pbs.org/benfranklin/explore.html>

Another interactive website that divides Ben's life into four key categories

<http://www.librarycompany.org/bfwriter/>

A site solely devoted to Benjamin Franklin: Writer and Printer

<http://science.howstuffworks.com/innovation/famous-inventors/10-ben-franklin-inventions.htm#mkcpgn=fb6>

A list of 10 Franklin inventions and ideas

http://www.learninggamesforkids.com/social_studies_games/benjamin-franklin.html

Great games and videos for kids about Benjamin Franklin

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