



# What's the Big Idea, Ben Franklin?

by Jean Fritz

## Teacher's Guide

Written By Barbara Zalesky



CLASSROOM  
FAVORITES

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*Note to the Teacher: This guide is not intended to be followed exactly. Feel free to pick and choose among the suggested activities based on the needs and interests of your particular group. You are encouraged to make adaptations, or to supplement the guide with activities of your own creation.*

## Objectives

1. Students will relate a variety of facts and opinions about Benjamin Franklin through discussions, writings, diagrams and research.
2. Students will expand their vocabulary through word study, class discussion, research and activities.
3. Students will respond to literature through debate, invention, imitation, cartography and creativity.
4. Students will practice research skills to learn about colonial American life.
5. Students will expand their response to a novel by completing a variety of related activities.

## Word Study Activities

1. Have students keep an index card file of the new vocabulary words. At the top of each card, write the new word. Under that, the sentence from the book which contains the word. Next, write the dictionary definition with the phonetic respelling, part of speech and etymology. Finally, write the word in an original sentence.
2. With a partner, quiz each other on the meaning and spelling of the word.

## Introductory Activities

1. Make a class list of facts and ideas already known about Ben Franklin and colonial America.
2. Read information about Franklin and colonial America from a history book.
3. Have a discussion about why people invent things. What characteristics must an inventor have? How

- would other people treat an inventor?
4. Discuss the good and bad points of having one job or career as opposed to having many jobs and many careers.
  5. Make a list of all the possible jobs during this period in history.

## Benjamin Franklin's Early Life In Boston (pp. 1 - 12)

### Synopsis

Ben Franklin was born in Boston on January 17, 1706. His father was a soap and candle maker. Benjamin was the tenth and last son. At first, he was sent to a Latin school to become a preacher. Later, at age ten, he was removed from school to help his father.

### Word Study

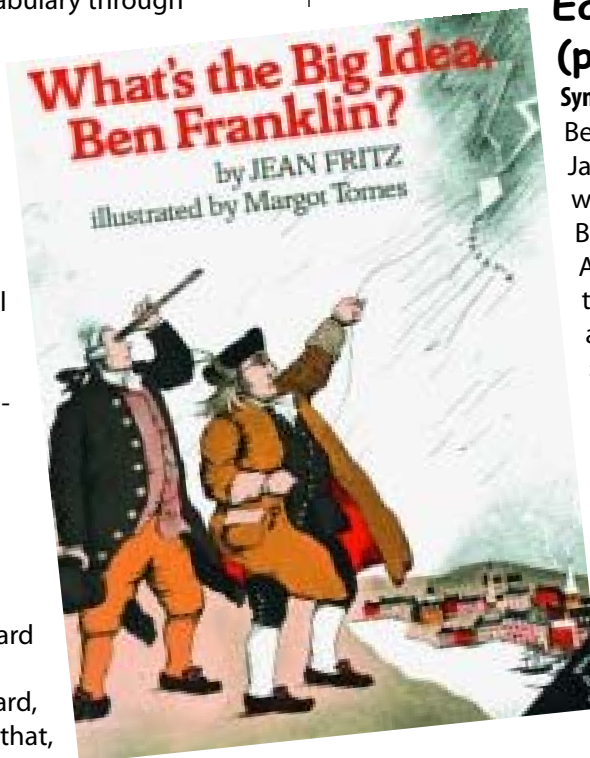
officials p. 7, pulpit p. 10, errands p. 11, apprentice p. 12, scarlet p. 12

### Discussion Questions

1. Describe the setting at the beginning of the story. Compare it to life today.
2. How do you think streets were named at that time in Boston? Do you know any streets with interesting names? How do you think they got those names?
3. What does a blacksmith do? Why do you think that the oldest son in each generation of Franklin's family was always a blacksmith?
4. Give various reasons why Benjamin was taken out of school at the age of ten. Do you agree or disagree with them?
5. Describe what Benjamin thought about being an apprentice. What would you think: about being an apprentice?

### Activities

1. Draw an illustration of the setting of the story show-



- ing, also, how people dressed in colonial America.
2. Make a list of all the possible jobs Benjamin might have had at that time in history .
  3. Of all the possible jobs, which would you have preferred? Tell why.
  4. Using the list of possible careers, discuss why some of those jobs still exist and others do not. Give reasons.

## Benjamin Franklin Grows Up (pp. 13-23)

### Synopsis

Benjamin did not like the smell of soap-making and finally became an apprentice to a printer. He began writing under the pen name of Silence Dogood. Later, he became a vegetarian and developed his skills as a good swimmer. He used paddles and a kite to help him swim faster. Benjamin liked arithmetic and created magic squares.

Through reading a book, he developed an effective method of arguing. Next, he made a list of rules for good behavior. In 1723, he ran away to Philadelphia and obtained a job as a printer.

### Word Study

stale p. 14, lyep. 14, argumentative p. 14, prone p. 16, vegetarianism p. 17, contradict p. 20, opponent p. 20, eels p. 20, watch chain p. 23, swaggered p. 23

### Discussion Questions

1. What was Benjamin's first pen name and why did he use it? Do you think authors should use pen names? What name would you choose for a pen name?
2. Why did Benjamin run away from home when he was 17? Can you think of any other way he might have solved his problems?
3. Give reasons why Benjamin became a vegetarian. Do you think it is a good idea or not?
4. Why do you think Benjamin liked arithmetic so much?
5. According to the book Benjamin read, how should a person argue? Do you have a different method of winning an argument?

### Activities

1. Locate the "how to" section in a library. Like Benjamin, read a "how to" book. Then report to the class on it.
2. After rereading Benjamin's list of rules for good behavior, write ten rules of your own for good behavior and share them with the class.

3. List the good and bad points of using a kite to pull a person across a lake.

## Benjamin's Life in Philadelphia (pp. 24-35)

### Synopsis

In Philadelphia, Benjamin helped form a Leather Apron Club where serious discussions were held. He married Debbie Read in 1730 when he was 24, and they ran a store together. At this time, he had many jobs and continued inventing and experimenting. In 1732, Franklin started publishing *Poor Richard's Almanac*. Also, Franklin was trying to prove that electricity and lightning were the same.

### Word Study

disposition p. 24, courted p. 25, codfish p. 25, compasses p. 25, comets p. 26, hurricane p. 26, molasses p. 26, dispose p. 27, windmill p. 28, almanac p. 30, grenadiers p. 33

### Discussion Questions

1. Describe the Leather Apron Club. What would you call a club that loved mankind and the truth?
2. Explain each one of Benjamin's wise sayings on p. 31.
3. After describing *Poor Richard's Almanac*, explain why you think it was so popular.

### Activities

1. Locate a copy of *Poor Richard's Almanac*. After reading it, share your favorite part with the class.
2. Design an almanac yourself or with a partner, placing a joke or wise saying on each page.
3. Draw an illustration of one of Franklin's wise sayings on p. 31.
4. Make a list of things you would discuss if you were a member of the Leather Apron Club today. Choose some friends to discuss these items.
5. Like Franklin, discuss, debate or write about the idea that a person should or should not obey a bad law.

## Franklin In London And France (pp. 36-47)

### Synopsis

Franklin was sent to London to convince England to stop taxing the colonies in America, but the officials there ridiculed him and he returned to America. He then helped to write the Declaration of Independence. Later, in 1776, he was sent to France to try to convince that country to help America in its battle

against England. Franklin helped to write a peace treaty in 1783, and then returned to Philadelphia where he helped write the Constitution. On April 7, 1790, Franklin died at the age of 84. His biggest idea was the independence of America.

## Word Study

celebrated p. 36, garter p. 36, contraption p. 37, venison p. 40, satin p. 40, repeal p. 40, gout p. 43, indigestion p. 45

## Discussion Questions

1. Describe how a lightning rod works.
2. Explain what Franklin did as a postmaster.
3. Why was Franklin sent to London?
4. Describe why Franklin turned "white with rage" at the Privy Council.
5. Discuss Franklin's biggest idea.

## Activities

1. Debate, discuss or write about the idea that England did or did not have the right to tax their colonies in America.
2. Like Franklin, give a speech to convince the King of France to help America in the war with England.
3. Locate a copy of the Declaration of Independence and find Benjamin Franklin's signature.

## Notes From the Author (p. 48)

The author has added one page of additional facts about some of the events mentioned in the book. Encourage students to read these notes. They may inspire students to do more research on Benjamin Franklin and colonial America.

## Timeline

- January 17, 1706** Benjamin Franklin is born in Boston. The youngest of ten children, Benjamin goes to Latin school for a while, then is taken out to help in his father's soap-making business.
- 1723** Franklin runs away to Philadelphia to become an apprentice printer.
- 1730** Franklin marries Debbie Read; they run a store together.
- 1732** Franklin starts publishing Poor Richard's Almanac, which makes him rich and famous; he also experiments with electricity and lightning.
- 1776** Franklin helps write the Declaration of

Independence; later, he is America's ambassador to France.

**1787** Franklin helps write the Constitution.

**April 7, 1790** Franklin dies at age 84.

## Author Sketch

Jean (Guttery) Fritz was born in Hankow, China, on November 16, 1915. She received a bachelor's degree from Wheaton College in Norton, Massachusetts, in 1937, and completed graduate work at Columbia University. She now lives in Dobbs Ferry, New York.

In addition to her work as a children's author, Ms. Fritz has worked in a number of other capacities, including children's librarian, *New York Times* book reviewer, and university professor. The author has earned many honors, including the following: *New York Times* Outstanding Book of the Year (*And Then What Happened, Paul Revere?* 1973; *Why Don't You Get A Horse, Sam Adams?*, 1974; *Where Was Patrick Henry on the 29th of May?*, 1975; and *What's The Big Idea, Ben Franklin?*, 1976); *Boston Globe-Horn Book* honor for fiction (*Will You Sign Here, John Hancock?*, 1976; and *Stonewall*, 1979); Children's Book Guild Non-Fiction Award for "total body of creative writing" in 1978; and American Book Award finalist (*Where Do You Think You are Going, Christopher Columbus?*, 1981, and *Traitor: The Case of Benedict Arnold*, 1982).

## Critic's Corner

*What's the Big Idea, Ben Franklin?* is a well written, historically accurate book about the life of Benjamin Franklin, from his birth in Boston in 1706 to his death in 1790. The story is told in an amusing and interesting manner with numerous illustrations, and highlights the inventions, ideas, creations and contributions of Benjamin Franklin.

## Bibliography

- "Jean Fritz online resources for teachers," <<http://www.indiana.edu/~reading/ieo/bibs/fritz.html>>
- "Meet the Author Joan Fritz," Houghton Mifflin Reading, <<http://www.eduplace.com/kids/tnc/mtai/fritz.html>>
- "Jean Fritz," Carol Hurst Children's Literature Site, <<http://www.carolhurst.com/authors/jfritz.html>>
- "Jean Fritz biography," <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean\\_Fritz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Fritz)>

## Selected Other Works by Jean Fritz

*Early Thunder* (illustrated by Lynd Ward)

*George Washington's Breakfast* (illustrated by Paul Galdone)

*Why Don't You Get a Horse, Sam Adams?* (illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman)

*Who's That Stopping on Plymouth Rock?* (illustrated by J. B. Handelsman)

*Traitor: The Case of Benedict Arnold* (illustrated by John Andre)

*Homesick: My Own Story* (illustrated by Margot Tomes)

*The Double Life of Pocahontas* (illustrated by Ed Young)

*China Homecoming* (illustrated by Michael Fritz)

*Shh! We're Writing the Constitution* (illustrated by Tomie dePaola)

*The Great Little Madison*

*You Want Women to Vote, Lizzie Stanton?* (illustrated by Dyanne Disalvo-Ryan)

*Bully for You, Teddy Roosevelt* (illustrated by Mike Wimmer)

*Why Not, Lafayette?* (illustrated by Ron Himler)

## Extended Activity

Look up each of the following careers in the dictionary. Write what that career is. Discuss whether you would like that job or not. Give reasons.

- Milliner

- Alchemist

Apothecary

Caterer

Thespian

Cartographer

Haberdasher

Masseur

Confectioner

Philatelist

Mason

Soothsayer

Tutor

Jester

Architect

Glazier

Chauffeur

## Across the Curriculum

### Math

1. Using Franklin's format of a magic square, p. 20, make one of your own, first with four squares, then six and eight. Check with a calculator.

2. Make a list of how many years Franklin lived in each city using data from the story. Explain to the class how you arrived at your answer.

### Social Studies

1. Using an individual map of the world, plot and identify the places traveled to by Franklin. Then locate these areas on a globe.
2. Using an individual map of the world, plot and identify the river and ponds Franklin probably went swimming in.
3. Create a time line showing important events in Franklin's life and the years they happened.
4. Create a family tree for Benjamin Franklin.

### Science

1. Learn what Franklin did to stop people from sliding on ice. Draw a diagram of it, labeling the parts and showing how it works.
2. Find out how to get a patent for an invention.
3. Compile a book illustrating each one of Franklin's inventions or discoveries. Explain it to the class.

### Study Skills

1. List all the careers Franklin had.
2. Read about other people who have had many careers, such as Leonardo da Vinci.
3. Learn what is meant by the term a "Renaissance Man." Write a description of Franklin as this.
4. Debate, discuss or write about the pros and cons of having one career or many careers. Give reasons.

### Language Arts

1. Debate, discuss or write about the idea that a scientist should have or should not have the right to say how his invention should be used, for example, for constructive or destructive purposes.
2. Write a poem about the life of Franklin.
3. Locate examples of the author's sense of humor in the story and explain why the examples are funny.
4. Describe Franklin's method of becoming a good writer. What is your opinion of it?

## Vocabulary Test

(30 points)

In the space in front of each sentence write the letter of the word which means the same as the underlined word(s).

- \_\_\_ 1. The preacher stood in the platform and gave a sermon.
- \_\_\_ 2. The soap was mild enough to wash red cloth.
- \_\_\_ 3. Franklin saved money on food by becoming a non-meat eater.
- \_\_\_ 4. Franklin would try to get his enemies to lose an argument.
- \_\_\_ 5. The soldiers were given a shock of electricity.
- \_\_\_ 6. Big storms were one of the things Franklin studied and wrote about.
- \_\_\_ 7. At Franklin's store, one of the items sold was sea food .
- \_\_\_ 8. Boiling a chemical was used to make soap.
- \_\_\_ 9. At age 10 Benjamin was old enough to run little jobs .
- \_\_\_ 10. Many important people in England scorned Franklin.
- \_\_\_ 11. Benjamin walked strangely in front of his brother.
- \_\_\_ 12. Benjamin and Debbie sold magnetized needles which showed people's directions.
- \_\_\_ 13. The ants wanted to eat the syrup.
- \_\_\_ 14. Debbie hated the invention that made the doorbell ring.
- \_\_\_ 15. Franklin had a naturally happy attitude.

- A. compasses
- B. molasses
- C. pulpit
- D. vegetarian
- E. hurricanes
- F. swaggered
- G. disposition
- H. officials
- I. lye
- J. codfish
- K. scarlet
- L. grenadiers
- M. opponents
- N. errands
- O. contraption

## Comprehension Test

**Part I: True or False (30 points)**

Write **T** if the statement is true or **F** if any part is false.

- \_\_\_ 1. In 1706, some streets in Boston were still not named.
- \_\_\_ 2. Preachers in Franklin's time sometimes had holes in their shoes.
- \_\_\_ 3. Benjamin's father said, "Forget prose. Stick to poetry."
- \_\_\_ 4. Benjamin had a choice of being an apprentice in many trades.
- \_\_\_ 5. Benjamin never learned how to swim.
- \_\_\_ 6. Debbie never visited her husband, Benjamin Franklin, in London because she was sick.
- \_\_\_ 7. Franklin's rules for arguing were no good against the English because they were very stubborn.
- \_\_\_ 8. George Washington would run the war in America, but Franklin would run it in Asia.
- \_\_\_ 9. Franklin arrived in France dressed smartly and in style.
- \_\_\_ 10. Sometimes Franklin called himself Dr. Fatsides.

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## Part II: Multiple Choice (30 points)

Write the correct word in the blanks.

1. Benjamin found out from a \_\_\_\_\_ how to argue.

**person**      **club**      **book**

2. Once he spent six pennies to see the first \_\_\_\_\_ brought to America.

**giraffe**      **seal**      **lion**

3. His first job in Philadelphia was as a \_\_\_\_\_.

**printer**      **swimmer**      **boxer**

4. Benjamin and Debbie ran a \_\_\_\_\_ when they were first married.

**club**      **store**      **blacksmith shop**

5. Franklin hung a pot of molasses on a string and watched the \_\_\_\_\_ climb up.

**grasshoppers**      **ants**      **snails**

6. Franklin was very popular for writing \_\_\_\_\_.

**a novel**      **a recipe**      **a calendar**

7. A Big Idea, however, meant little to Franklin unless \_\_\_\_\_.

**it was popular**      **he could put it to everyday use**      **it made money**

8. Franklin was still America's best \_\_\_\_\_ and America's most famous \_

**arguer**      **citizen**      **writer**      **inventor**

9. Franklin thought electricity and \_\_\_\_\_ were the same.

**sparks**      **lightning**      **shocks**

10. \_\_\_\_\_ took care of him in London and treated him like a king.

**The Queen**      **Mrs. Stevenson**      **Debbie**

## Part III: Essay Questions (40 points)

Answer **two** of the following questions in paragraph form.

1. Why didn't Franklin want to be an apprentice? After you give his reasons, tell if you agree or disagree and why. Do you think the apprentice system is a good or bad idea?

2. Write about why the French liked Franklin. Include pictures of how the French dressed and how Franklin dressed.

3. How could you prevent a horse from having nightmares? Analyze this situation, and then use your imagination.

4. What do you think was Franklin's greatest contribution to society? Describe completely what it was and why you think it was so important.

5. Evaluate the book. Tell what you liked and didn't like.

## Answer Key

### VOCABULARY TEST

1. C. pulpit
2. K. scarlet
3. D. vegetarian
4. M. opponents
5. L. grenadiers
6. E. hurricanes
7. J. codfish
8. I. lye
9. N. errands
10. H. officials
11. F. swaggered
12. A compasses
13. B. molasses
14. O. contraption
15. G. disposition

### COMPREHENSION TEST

#### Part I: True or False (30 points)

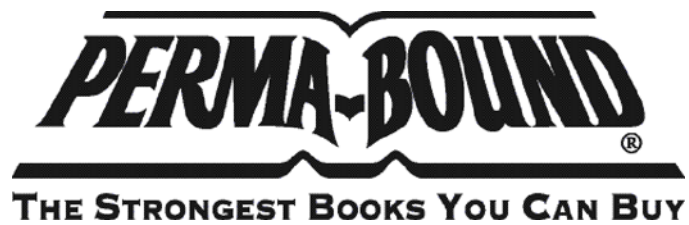
1. T
2. T
3. F
4. T
5. F
6. F
7. T
8. F
9. F
10. T

#### Part II: Multiple Choice (30 points)

1. book
2. lion
3. printer
4. store
5. ants
6. a calendar
7. he could put it to everyday use
8. arguer, citizen
9. lightning
10. Mrs. Stevenson

#### Part III: Essay Questions (40 points)

Answers will vary.



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