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Valley High School
West Des Moines, IA
A Rising People: Benjamin Franklin and the Americans, Summer 2011

Lesson Focus: Benjamin Franklin’s Autobiography and Influence
Course: Early American Literature
Grade Level: 11/12
Time Frame for lesson: One 80 minute block period and one 45 minute class period

Iowa Core Standards:
Literature 11-12.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Literature 11-12.2: Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

Prior to day 1:

Students need to respond to the following journal prompt before coming to class: The Age of Enlightenment was a time dedicated to individual, scientific, and societal improvement and progress. In the spirit of that era, make a list of five character traits or habits in your own life you would like to improve. For each item on your list, explain why you want to work on that trait. How might you go about improving each trait? How would you monitor your progress? Choose things that you would not mind sharing with other people.

Day 1: 80 minute class period

Journal Sharing:

In small groups, students will share a couple of the items on their list, their reasons, and their plans for improvement. After small groups have shared, ask students what they have done in the past when setting these kinds of goals. What has made their plans successful? What has interfered with their success? After initial discussion, make the link to Franklin and his desire for improvement.

Benjamin Franklin background:

1. If available, show a 14 minute clip from the PBS documentary Benjamin Franklin (2002). The clip covers Franklin’s arrival in Philadelphia after his trip to England, the beginnings of his print shop, some background on the Junto, Poor Richard’s Almanack, and Franklin’s civic contributions. Ask students to listen for the many ways Franklin focused on improvement, not just for himself but for his society.
2. After the video clip, place students in groups with six to eight students. Give each group six of the original questions that Franklin and the Junto discussed at their meetings. Each group will choose two of their assigned questions to discuss. After groups have read their assigned questions and discussed two of them, groups will share their two questions with the class and provide a brief summary of their discussions. Choose a couple on the list for whole class discussion. Once groups have shared, ask students what we can learn about Franklin from this list of questions. What ideas and issues concerned him? Are these still questions worth considering today? Why or why not?

3. Give students a list of several Franklin aphorisms from Poor Richard’s Almanack. Ask students to read through the list. Which ones do you like best? Why? What themes keep coming up in these aphorisms? What can we conclude about Franklin from these sayings? How do these sayings match up with the questions considered by the Junto?

**Set-up for Autobiography Excerpt:**

1. Choose 6-8 questions from the Franklin Virtue quiz available on the website for the PBS documentary. Designate four corners of the room as A, B, C, and D. Have students go to the corners that best represent their choice for each question. Before going on to the next question, ask students to guess which answer, based on what they’ve learned about him so far, would have been Franklin’s choice. The quiz provides a quick way for student to compare their actions to those of Franklin’s in The Autobiography.

2. Students will read and annotate the excerpt from Franklin’s Autobiography for tomorrow’s class. Before asking students to read the text, make sure students have an understanding of what Franklin meant by each of his 13 virtues. Ask students to number off by 13. Students should read Franklin’s description of the corresponding virtue and then work with their partner(s) to write a modern day translation for their assigned virtue. Have students share their translations with the class so all students leave class with an understanding of what Franklin meant by each virtue. This will make it easier for students to understand the rest of the assigned text.

**Day 2: 45 minute period**

1. Give students an opportunity to ask clarifying questions about Franklin’s text.
2. Have students discuss the following questions using the pair/share strategy. Follow individual questions with large group sharing. Students should change discussion partners for each question.
   1. Discuss yesterday’s virtue quiz results with your partner. How do you compare to Franklin? What did you have in common? Where did you and Franklin differ the most?
   2. Which virtues on Franklin’s list would you consider to be the most important? Why? Are there any that do not matter today? Are there any that should be on a more modern list of virtues?
   3. Take a look at Franklin’s schedule on p. 6. What can you infer about him based on his list of activities? What things did he value? How does his schedule compare to yours?
4. What was Franklin’s most troublesome virtue? Why? Which of Franklin’s virtues would be most difficult for you to master? Why?
5. What surprised Franklin as he worked on his plan? (p. 7). “But I think I like the speckled ax best” (p. 7). What does this mean? What does it show about Franklin?
6. Go back to yesterday’s list of Franklin’s aphorisms. What virtues can you connect to the different aphorisms? Which bits of Franklin advice are most relevant today?

1. Assign written response:

In Common Sense, revolutionary writer Thomas Paine wrote: “Youth is the seed time of good habits, as well in nations as in individuals.” Franklin’s Autobiography was one of the first of its kind in America and its publication coincided with the beginnings of our nation. Although Franklin says he wrote The Autobiography for his son, the timing and advice were well-timed for a wider audience. In a short essay, explain why The Autobiography and other Franklin writings and contributions were important to a nation trying to figure out what it wanted to be when it grew up. To use Paine’s phrasing, what good habits did Franklin plant in the national conscience? Select three to five ideas reinforced by Franklin’s life and writing and explain why those ideas were a good match for a youthful nation. Why were those ideas important? How did they shape Americans? Use specific examples from Franklin’s writing and his life as you develop your response.
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<th>The Junto</th>
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<td>This is the list of questions Franklin devised to guide the discussions at Junto meetings.</td>
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1. Have you met with anything in the author you last read, remarkable, or suitable to be communicated to the Junto? particularly in history, morality, poetry, physics, travels, mechanic arts, or other parts of knowledge?

2. What new story have you lately heard agreeable for telling in conversation?

3. Hath any citizen in your knowledge failed in his business lately, and what have you heard of the cause?

4. Have you lately heard of any citizen’s thriving well, and by what means?

5. Have you lately heard how any present rich man, here or elsewhere, got his estate?

6. Do you know of any fellow citizen, who has lately done a worthy action, deserving praise and imitation? or who has committed an error proper for us to be warned against and avoid?

7. What unhappy effects of intemperance have you lately observed or heard? of imprudence? of passion? or of any other vice or folly?

8. What happy effects of temperance? of prudence? of moderation? or of any other virtue?

9. Have you or any of your acquaintance been lately sick or wounded? If so, what remedies were used, and what were their effects?

10. Who do you know that are shortly going [on] voyages or journeys, if one should have occasion to send by them?

11. Do you think of any thing at present, in which the Junto may be serviceable to mankind? to their country, to their friends, or to themselves?

12. Hath any deserving stranger arrived in town since last meeting, that you heard of? and what have you heard or observed of his character or merits? and whether think you, it lies in the power of the Junto to oblige him, or encourage him as he deserves?

13. Do you know of any deserving young beginner lately set up, whom it lies in the power of the Junto
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<th>Question</th>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Have you lately observed any defect in the laws of your country, of which it would be proper to move the legislature an amendment? Or do you know of any beneficial law that is wanting?</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>Have you lately observed any encroachment on the just liberties of the people?</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>Hath anybody attacked your reputation lately? and what can the Junto do towards securing it?</td>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>Is there any man whose friendship you want, and which the Junto, or any of them, can procure for you?</td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>Have you lately heard any member’s character attacked, and how have you defended it?</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>Hath any man injured you, from whom it is in the power of the Junto to procure redress?</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>In what manner can the Junto, or any of them, assist you in any of your honourable designs?</td>
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<td>21.</td>
<td>Have you any weighty affair in hand, in which you think the advice of the Junto may be of service?</td>
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<td>22.</td>
<td>What benefits have you lately received from any man not present?</td>
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<td>23.</td>
<td>Is there any difficulty in matters of opinion, of justice, and injustice, which you would gladly have discussed at this time?</td>
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<td>24.</td>
<td>Do you see anything amiss in the present customs or proceedings of the Junto, which might be amended?</td>
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Benjamin Franklin Aphorisms from *Poor Richard’s Almanack*

Three may keep a secret, if two of them are dead.

Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.

He that lieth down with Dogs, shall rise up with Fleas.

Keep your eyes wide open before marriage, half shut afterwards.

Experience keeps a dear school, but fools will learn in no other.

Little strokes fell great oaks.

Fish and visitors stink after three days.

Well done is better than well said.

Be slow in choosing a friend, slower in changing.

Those who in quarrels interpose, must often wipe a bloody nose.

What you seem to be, be really.

Love your Neighbor; yet don't pull down your Hedge.

People who are wrapped up in themselves make small packages.

Glass, China, and Reputation, are easily crack'd, and never well mended.

Silence is not always a Sign of Wisdom, but Babbling is ever a folly.

A good example is the best sermon.

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Courteous Reader, remember that time is money.

A mob's a monster; heads enough but no brains.

Doing an injury puts you below your enemy; revenging one make you but even with him; forgiving it sets you above him.

Genius without education is like silver in the mine.

Old boys have their playthings as well as young ones; the difference is only in the price.