Ken Lavner  
High School level

Summary of Lesson Plan Presentation: Benjamin Franklin  
Based on Materials from NEH Penn State University Seminar

Learning Objective: Students will examine the socio-political complexity during the revolutionary period and Franklin’s apparent persona that was a function of that period.

Is it all black and white? Students will begin to see that appearances may be different from reality, i.e. the way one presents oneself to the world may be different from one’s self-perception; things could also be different when examined in a larger context.

Throughout the block, material will challenge some traditional, historical claims of the period and of Benjamin Franklin.

Begin with original Franklin poetry and period music the students will play on recorder.

Focus/Motivation (opening): connections to prior knowledge

- We have begun studying the early American colonial period and you have also read the historical fiction book, Johnny Tremain, by Forbes. Let us first recap what qualities Johnny Tremain had at the beginning of the book and how he had changed at the end of the book.

- And what prior knowledge do you have of Ben Franklin’s characteristics and accomplishments? Are there similarities/differences from the historical fiction protagonist, Johnny Tremain?
Day 1: Small group work (with rough draft leading questions)- Students will be divided four students per group:

**Group one**: Tories or Loyalists: Conflicts in perception. Using primary material (vanBuskirk: still need citations), students can read position extracts and determine which political side the writer appears to belong.

**Group two**: Autobiographical extract: Was Franklin truly a rags-to-riches, self-made man? What this illustrated in the biography? Using primary source documentation, is this self-professed view accurate? Was he inaccurate, dishonest, or intentionally misleading his own characterization, based on additional objective information? What else might he have been attempting to do (possibilities may lead to discussing irony, satire, self-deprecation, etc.) in his writing?

**Group three**: Pseudonym analysis: Using primary documentation (Franklinpapers.org), students read various letters from Silence Do-good, Busybody, Richard Saunders. What issues of the day are illuminated from these readings? Why did Franklin conceal his identity, in each of the circumstances? What might he hope to gain from anonymity?

**Group four**: Slaveholder, yet liberator? Using primary documentation, students will try to determine what Franklin’s position truly was. Did he want freedom for slaves based on economics? Ideological grounds?

**Group five**: Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love: In an area with Quakers, mutual assistance and patronage were also important. “How might I make connections?” would be on a young entrepreneur’s mind. Using primary source documentation, Franklin’s Autobiography (and extracts from Franklinpapers.org), students should try to determine the function and purpose of the Junto. Was it merely philosophical?

**Group six**: Statesman: Franklin spent a good deal of his life in England and time in France. To what end was the famous picture of Franklin, as commoner, created and marketed? Why? And what was his perspective before the war for independence and later on?

Large paper can be used to record major ideas presented by the students.
• Day 2: Deliberation and discussion of concepts

Read Franklin poetry and play recorder music.

After reading and discussing, the students present their characterizations, collectively and individually, of the various aspects of Franklin’s life. During the presentation, others will have the chance to listen and ask questions.

• Day 3: In Small Group: Incorporate material presented by the other groups that enhanced or forced you to modify your understanding of the issue you researched? How did it deepen your impression/position or alter it?

In entire Class Discussion: Merging the various aspects/presentations by groups

Following this, each group should create their own original artwork in their Main Lesson Book.

Homework: Write a composition examining possible socio-political affects of the revolutionary period on Ben Franklin’s life using specific evidence supported in one’s own individual/group research.