A Rising People: Benjamin Franklin and the Americans
Teacher’s Workshop Lesson Plan

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Attended July 5-10, 2009 Workshop in Philadelphia

Learn to Improve Writing Like Benjamin Franklin
Time: 30 minutes a day, three times a week, for two weeks.
Audience: 4th Grade students

Objective: Students will be able write a persuasive argument, which will:
   a. engage the reader,
   b. state a clear position,
   c. support the position with relevant evidence,
   d. improve their own writing by analysis of different styles of argument.

Materials: A simple biography of Benjamin Franklin (e.g., the David A. Adler, Jean Fritz or Dennis Brindell Fradin books), Chapter I of “The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin,” a planning graphic organizer, teacher-provided persuasive essays, two model essay of their own choice, paper, pencil, a writing rubric.

Examples of student essays can be found at

Anticipatory Set: Make a Know chart of the elements of persuasive writing
Procedure:
1. Read to the class a simple biography of Benjamin Franklin to provide context (e.g., the David A. Adler, Jean Fritz or Dennis Brindell Fradin books).
2. Build on prior writing projects of persuasive essays. Review the format of the essay and the main purpose (to inform and persuade)
3. Read and discuss the relevant paragraph of the “Autobiography” (see below). Elicit the main points:
   a. find a good essay
   b. analyze its good points
   c. recall it and revise it
   d. compare it to the original
4. Have students use the writing process to complete their essays.

Closing: Have at least two volunteers share their letters with the class. Have groups of four share their essays with each other, and model how to comment and offer constructive suggestions to each other. They then revise and edit their essays.

Assessment: Use the writing rubric to grade the completed letter.
Franklin’s Procedure for improving his writing

[At a young age, I] grew more attentive to the manner in writing, and determined to endeavor at improvement.

About this time I met with an odd volume of the Spectator. It was the third. I had never before seen any of them. I bought it, read it over and over, and was much delighted with it. I thought the writing excellent, and wished, if possible, to imitate it. With this view I took some of the papers, and, making short hints of the sentiment in each sentence, laid them by a few days, and then, without looking at the book, try'd to compleat the papers again, by expressing each hinted sentiment at length, and as fully as it had been expressed before, in any suitable words that should come to hand. Then I compared my Spectator with the original, discovered some of my faults, and corrected them. But I found I wanted a stock of words, or a readiness in recollecting and using them, which I thought I should have acquired before that time if I had gone on making verses; since the continual occasion for words of the same import, but of different length, to suit the measure, or of different sound for the rhyme, would have laid me under a constant necessity of searching for variety, and also have tended to fix that variety in my mind, and make me master of it. Therefore I took some of the tales and turned them into verse; and, after a time, when I had pretty well forgotten the prose, turned them back again. I also sometimes jumbled my collections of hints into confusion, and after some weeks endeavored to reduce them into the best order, before I began to form the full sentences and compleat the paper. This was to teach me method in the arrangement of thoughts. By comparing my work afterwards with the original, I discovered many faults and amended them; but I sometimes had the pleasure of fancying that, in certain particulars of small import, I had been lucky enough to improve the method or the language, and this encouraged me to think I might possibly in time come to be a tolerable English writer, of which I was extremely ambitious. My time for these exercises and for reading was at night, after work or before it began in the morning, or on Sundays, when I contrived to be in the printing-house alone, evading as much as I could the common attendance on public worship which my father used to exact on me when I was under his care, and which indeed I still thought a duty, though I could not, as it seemed to me, afford time to practise it.
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A Landmarks in American History and Culture Workshop

Resources:

“A Picture Book of Benjamin Franklin” by David A. Adler
“Who Was Ben Franklin?” by Dennis Brindell Fradin
“What's The Big Idea, Ben Franklin?” by Jean Fritz
Miss Lepley’s Blog of Great Student Persuasive Essays -
Mrs. Roesel’s 4th Grade Writing Standards -
http://teacherweb.com/GA/MillCreekElementarySchool/MrsRoesel/ap6.stm