



A Rising People: Ben Franklin
and the Americans
June-July 2009
A Landmarks in American History and
Culture Workshop

Enlightenment Unit

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Grade Level: 9-12

Unit Background:

The Enlightenment is one of the most influential time periods in the history of this world. It could be said that it is the doorway into modern history. This unit is a basic look at the Enlightenment. During the course of this unit students will learn not only why the Enlightenment developed out of absolute rule by divine kings and powerful popes but also what the basic ideals of Enlightenment thinkers were. This unit will conclude by looking at America and how the Enlightenment affected the creation of a new nation. To truly understand the Enlightenment's influence, educators may wish to choose a person from history to draw their student's focus into the subject of the Enlightenment and the American Revolution as has been done here by highlighting Benjamin Franklin.

Enlightenment Unit Objectives:

Students will:

- Discover the basis behind the "new science" of the 16th and 17th centuries.
- Learn basic Enlightenment ideals as set forth by John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Montesquieu and Voltaire.
- Apply their knowledge of the Enlightenment to the life of Benjamin Franklin and compare his actions with the ideals of the Enlightenment.
- Read the Declaration of Independence and pinpoint the Enlightenment influences in that document.

Unit Time:

This lesson will take three block periods.





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Materials:

- World History Textbook: Readings should include-
 - Scientific Revolution (focus on the Scientific Method, Newton and Sir Francis Bacon)
 - Enlightenment (Main ideas and key people)
 - American Revolution (Introduction to the Revolution)
 - Constitutional Convention and the United States Constitution
- Power Point Presentations: Enlightenment and American Revolution
- Copy of the Declaration of Independence
- “Quick Biography of Benjamin Franklin”
- Benjamin Franklin’s life: Timeline
- Pictures of Benjamin Franklin as a young man, a middle aged man and as a backwoodsman (available at <http://www.library.upenn.edu/exhibits/pennhistory/ben/ben.html>)
- Benjamin Franklin’s Founding Documents: Introductions and Sources
- Timeline of Benjamin Franklin’s Life

Unit Assessments:

- Unit Test
 - Choice of Projects:
 - Paper on the Enlightenment’s influence on the Beginnings of the United States with at least one paragraph about Benjamin Franklin and the Enlightenment’s influence on his life experiences.
 - Research project: Written and visual on two Enlightenment thinkers
 - Overview Visual/Written: Main ideas of the Enlightenment and the historical figures these ideas came from
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Lesson 1: The Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment

Background:

After years of authoritarian rulers and the absolute rule of the Christian church, the 1500's saw the birth of new and radical thought. First Martin Luther and his Reformation turned Europe on its head. In his wake, the next generations of thinkers in Europe would ask the dreaded question, "Why?" Christianity would be abandoned in the pursuit of the answers to all the "why's". This new period of history, called the Enlightenment, would shape not only modern European thought but also American thought as well.

Materials:

- Textbook reading on the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment
- Power Point on the Enlightenment

Lead-In to the Lesson:

Students will read the section in the textbook on the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment for homework.

Lesson and Activities:

1. **Warm-up:** Why do you think the church and divine right kings had absolute power in Europe?
2. Discussion on why "Why" was bad for absolute rulers and the Church.
3. Power Point: The Enlightenment
4. Social Contract: What is the contract students have with their school?
 - a. Students create a list of what they think they must do for the school and what the school must do for them in return (5 minutes)
 - b. Pair and Share
 - c. Discuss as a class
5. Enlightenment chart (individual activity or partner)

Assessment:

Students will be able to discuss the main ideas of the Enlightenment and will complete the chart accurately using their notes and text.

Homework:

Read in the textbook about the American Revolution





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Lesson 2: The American Revolution

Background:

The Enlightenment took root in Europe in the 1600's and 1700's. It influenced governments, economies and entire cultures. With the increasing use of the printing press, the ideas of John Locke and Baron de Montesquieu, as well as others, traveled across the Atlantic Ocean and into the hands of men such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. The Enlightenment shaped the justification for independence as set down in the famous "Declaration of Independence".

Materials:

- Textbook reading on the American Revolution
- Power Point on the American Revolution

Lead-In to the Lesson:

Students will read the section in the textbook on the American Revolution for homework.

Lesson and Activities:

1. **Warm-up:** "Who am I?" Enlightenment thinkers matching activity.
2. Review Enlightenment ideas
3. Know-Want to Know-Learned: American Revolution
4. Power Point: The American Revolution
5. Declaration of Independence and Enlightenment ideas worksheet
6. Complete KWL chart

Assessment:

Students will complete their KWL chart and will be able to discuss the Enlightenment's influence on the Declaration of Independence.

Homework:

Read "Quick Biography of Benjamin Franklin"





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Lesson 3: Benjamin Franklin “An Enlightened Historical Figure”

Background:

Benjamin Franklin is one of the most well known of American’s historic figures. Children in elementary school learn about him as scientist and inventor. Middle school children discover his role as founding father of the United States of America. High school students grapple with Mr. Franklin’s theories and writings. By the end of their public school careers, students know that Ben Franklin’s life was multi-faceted. What many students do not discover is the inspiration for the many hats Benjamin Franklin wore. The Enlightenment ideas of the 17th and 18th centuries influenced many American’s, Benjamin Franklin included. It is safe to say that the Enlightenment shaped the United States in its earliest conception.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Apply their knowledge of the Enlightenment to the life of Benjamin Franklin and compare his actions with the ideals of the Enlightenment.

Materials:

- “Quick Biography of Benjamin Franklin”
- Benjamin Franklin’s life: Timeline
- Pictures of Benjamin Franklin as a young man, a diplomat and as a backwoodsman (available at <http://www.library.upenn.edu/exhibits/pennhistory/ben/ben.html>)
- Benjamin Franklin’s Founding Documents: Introductions and Sources
- Access to word processors or pen and paper

Lead-In to the Lesson:

Students will read “Quick Biography of Benjamin Franklin”

Lesson and Activities:

1. **Warm-up:** Tri Fold....draw or write three major things Benjamin Franklin is known for
2. Picture analysis: Benjamin Franklin through time (use as backdrop to review Ben Franklin’s life)
3. Timeline:
 - a. Read once as a class (highlight interesting things, allow for questions)
 - b. Go through timeline again and have students underline items which remind them of the Enlightenment or Enlightenment ideas





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4. Focus on Benjamin Franklin's life in the public sphere: Discuss from yesterday's reading the Albany Plan and Franklin's influence in helping American gain France as an ally. Refer to the timeline to find other instances of Benjamin Franklin's public life.
5. Students will read some of the documents that Benjamin Franklin was the author of. Break into groups: Each group will be assigned one document.
 - a. Each group will receive a founding documents that Franklin helped to draft (see Materials) with its corresponding introduction (attached), along with the commentary that Franklin wrote about the document or about events that led up to or followed the document's creation (see Materials).
 - b. After students have read the founding document and Franklin's corresponding commentary, they will assess the following basic information about the founding document: What is the document's central theme? Why was it created? Where was it created? Who else participated in its creation? What was Franklin's contribution to the document's creation?
 - c. Students will then present their document's introduction and answers to these questions to the class.
6. Students will pretend that Benjamin Franklin is applying to the post of United States Ambassador to the world. Write a resume showing Benjamin Franklin's ability to fulfill this position's obligations.

Assessment:

Students will be assessed on class participation on their ability to create a convincing and factual resume for Franklin.

Homework:

Complete resume for Franklin.

Extension Activity:

1. Answer the following question: Analyze the impact of Enlightenment ideas in the Americas. Did the spread of this new philosophy bring communities together across the Atlantic or did it drive them apart?

Sources:

<http://www.benfranklin300.org/>

<http://www.ushistory.org/franklin/info/index.htm>

