

Fact or Fiction?

Name: _____

Below is a biography on Benjamin Franklin. On the following page is a chart with ten statements. Indicate whether each statement is fact or fiction.

Benjamin Franklin was born on January 17, 1706, in Boston, Massachusetts. He was one of ten children born to Josiah Franklin, a soap maker, and his wife, Abiah Folger. Josiah wanted Benjamin to enter the clergy but could not afford to send him for schooling. Consequently, when Benjamin was 12, he apprenticed for his brother James who was a printer. Benjamin worked extremely hard at formatting the text and composing publications.

Silence Dogood

When Benjamin was 15, his brother printed the first editorial newspaper in Boston. Unlike other publications throughout Boston that simply reprinted events, James's newspaper, called *The New England Courant*, printed articles and editorial columns. Benjamin was very interested in his brother's newspaper and desperately wanted to help him write it. Unfortunately, he knew that James would not allow a fifteen-year-old boy to write articles. Benjamin thought of a plan. He would write under an anonymous pen name and slip the articles under the door at night. He chose the name Silence Dogood. Articles written by Silence Dogood became very popular. People throughout Boston wanted to know who she was. She spoke out about issues abroad and the poor treatment of women. Finally, after 16 letters, Benjamin confessed to James that he was Silence Dogood. James was very angry and jealous of the attention Benjamin received.

Off to London

Nevertheless, the paper continued. James's editorials became increasingly critical of the Puritan leadership within Boston, especially for their support of the smallpox inoculation (which the Franklins believed made people sicker). James was incarcerated for his criticism and Benjamin was left in charge of publication. When James was released from jail, he beat Benjamin, despite the fact that he had kept the publication afloat. In 1723, Benjamin ran away and eventually ended up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he met Deborah Read. While in Philadelphia, Benjamin lived with her family and soon found work as an apprentice printer. Franklin was an excellent printer and was sent by the governor of Pennsylvania to London to purchase font types and printing supplies. In exchange for his service, the governor promised to help Benjamin start his own printing business. In the meantime, Benjamin and Deborah had grown very close, and she had begun to suggest they should get married. Benjamin felt unprepared and left for England. Unfortunately, the governor lied, and Benjamin was forced to work in London for several months. Deborah married another man while he was gone (but the relationship was far from over).

The Pennsylvania Gazette and Poor Richard's Almanac

Upon his return to Philadelphia, Benjamin borrowed money and started his own printing business. He worked extremely hard and soon received government printing contracts. Benjamin's business became very successful and he became well-known throughout Philadelphia. In 1730, he married his sweetheart, Deborah Reed, whose husband had left her.

In 1729, Franklin bought the *Pennsylvania Gazette* and turned it into the most successful newspaper in the colonies. His newspaper contained the very first political cartoons. Benjamin continued to design and author creative and popular publications. In 1733, he printed his *Poor Richard's Almanac*. While most almanacs of the time contained weather reports and other predictions, *Poor Richard's Almanac* contained lively writing, interesting facts, and creative sayings—many which are still used today. “A penny saved is a penny earned” came from Franklin's almanac.

Modernizing Philadelphia

While Benjamin was busy with his publications, he also found time for charity and public work. Franklin launched various campaigns designed to improve the quality of life for Philadelphia's residents. He helped in lighting and paving Philadelphia's streets, cleaning up its environment, and in starting America's first circulation library. He also started the American Philosophical Society as well as the Pennsylvania Hospital, Philadelphia Union Fire Company, and the Philadelphia Contribution for Insurance Against Loss by Fire Company.

Making History in Science!

In the meantime, Benjamin was also conducting science experiments. He had already invented the Franklin stove, which was effective in keeping large houses warm in the winter, as well as bifocal glasses. He soon became interested in the concept of electricity. In 1752, Franklin devised a simple experiment to see if electricity could be harnessed from a storm. He succeeded and gained international fame.

The Statesman

Soon Benjamin turned to politics to satisfy his enormous craving to learn. He soon became the colonial representative for Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Georgia, and New Jersey in England. He stayed in England for 18 years, enjoying the life of a wealthy diplomat. Although he begged his wife to join him in England, she refused and eventually died while Benjamin was in England.

The Hutchinson Affair

In 1765, England passed the Stamp Act on the colonies, which forced Americans to pay taxes on any sort of printed document. America was outraged, and word soon spread across England about the rumblings in the colonies. Franklin helped persuade Parliament to repeal the act but grew sick of the corruption he saw among political officials in England. He began to formulate a plan for

united colonies. Franklin was soon embarrassed by members of Parliament for exposing the “Hutchinson Letters Affair” to the colonies. Thomas Hutchinson, the royal governor of Massachusetts, was a British official sent to Massachusetts to pretend to side with the colonists concerning their complaints against England. In reality, he was controlled by Parliament and had no intention of helping the colonists.

A Founding Father

Benjamin Franklin then came home to join the cause for independence. He was elected a member of the Continental Congress and helped Thomas Jefferson draft the Declaration of Independence. After he signed the Declaration of Independence, Franklin set sail for France as America’s ambassador. Franklin’s charm and persuasion were successful in convincing the French to sign the 1778 Treaty of Alliance, which asserted France’s intention to aid the colonies in their quest for independence and secure loans for military supplies. In 1783, Franklin attended the signing of the Treaty of Paris, which ended the Revolutionary War.

After returning from France, Franklin became a member of the Constitutional Convention and signed the Constitution in 1787. He died three years later on April 17, 1790. Twenty thousand people attended his funeral.

	FACT	FICTION
Silence Dogood was actually a young Benjamin Franklin.		
Benjamin’s brother ran the <i>Pennsylvania Gazette</i> , a popular newspaper.		
Poor Richard’s Almanac was similar to other almanacs of the time.		
Benjamin helped to improve the lives of Philadelphia’s citizens.		
Benjamin Franklin invented things like the Franklin Stove, bifocal glasses, and electricity.		
Benjamin served as the colonial representative of four different colonies.		
Benjamin lived in England for 18 years; while he was there, his wife Deborah died.		
Benjamin actually supported the British when they issued the 1765 Stamp Act.		
Benjamin Franklin earned praise and respect in England for exposing “the Hutchinson Letters Affairs.”		
Benjamin was involved in the drafting of the Declaration of Independence.		
Benjamin Franklin wrote the Constitution.		

Answers:

	FACT	FICTION
Silence Dogood was actually a young Benjamin Franklin.	X	
Benjamin's brother ran the <i>Pennsylvania Gazette</i> , a popular newspaper.		X
Poor Richard's Almanac was similar to other almanacs of the time.		X
Benjamin helped to improve the lives of Philadelphia's citizens.	X	
Benjamin Franklin invented things like the Franklin Stove, bifocal glasses, and electricity.		X
Benjamin served as the colonial representative of four different colonies.	X	
Benjamin lived in England for 18 years; while he was there, his wife Deborah died.	X	
Benjamin actually supported the British when they issued the 1765 Stamp Act.		X
Benjamin Franklin earned praise and respect in England for exposing "the Hutchinson Letters Affairs."		X
Benjamin was involved in the drafting of the Declaration of Independence.	X	
Benjamin Franklin wrote the Constitution.		X