



LESSON 9:

Join, or Die: Reenacting the Albany Conference

OVERVIEW

In 1754, Britain and France were struggling for control over portions of North America. In the face of a looming war that would play out, in part, on American soil, Franklin proposed a plan that would unite the colonial governments into a single federal council. In his Albany Plan, Franklin held that the colonies, by acting with one united voice, could more effectively fend off threatened attacks by the French and their Native American allies. Both the colonists and the British Crown rejected Franklin's plan because it encroached on their respective powers, but the Albany Plan remains important as one of the first documented efforts to unite the colonies.

In this lesson, students reenact the 1754 Albany Conference with small groups representing the British North American colonies, the six-nation Iroquois Confederacy, and the British government. Groups research and create a dossier of information and issues to bring to the conference so that they can represent their interests correctly. The reenactment outcome does not have to attain the same results as the 1754 Albany Conference, but the issues discussed will be the same. This activity involves student research, writing of individual colony position papers, and a culminating costumed reenactment of the Albany Conference.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Learn the issues that Franklin and the British colonies were tackling in the mid-18th century Anglo-French struggle for domination in North America.
- Appreciate Franklin's early contribution to the transformation of 13 colonial legislatures into the United States of America.

TIME

This lesson and activity require three to four class periods. Preparations include performing background and specific research into colonial opinions from the period and writing position papers. The reenactment requires approximately two hours and is best done in a single block of time.

MATERIALS

- Thomas F. Harrington, Bank Street School for Children. "Colonies in Crisis." (included)
- Access to current encyclopedia in any format (book, disc, or online)
- "Background Research" form
- *Albany Plan of Union, 1754* available at www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/amerdoc/albany
OR Leonard Larrabee, ed., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 5 (New Haven: Yale University, 1959), 387-92.
- "Join, or Die" cartoon
- Activity folders
- Costumes (optional)

McREL STANDARDS

United States History

Standard 4. Understands how political, religious, and social institutions emerged in the English colonies

LESSON AND ACTIVITY

1. Reading

This lesson begins with a reading of the attached handout, “Crisis in the Colonies,” and Franklin’s own “Join, or Die” cartoon. Considered America’s first political cartoon, the graphic illustrates Franklin’s central message urging the colonies to join together against the French. (This motif remained popular, reappearing in the period leading up to the Revolutionary War, as a symbol of the strength of union of the colonies against Great Britain.) Students can read in advance for homework or read quietly in the classroom.

2. Students should respond to the following questions, either in bullet or paragraph form:

- What was the French-Indian crisis and how did it affect the colonies, the British government (the Crown), and the Six Nations (Iroquois)?
- What was Benjamin Franklin’s opinion on how best to respond to the crisis?
- What was Franklin’s intent in creating the “Join, or Die” cartoon?

3. Discussion

Lead the students in a discussion of the reading assignment. The teacher lists the issues and the respective points of view of the colonists, the Crown, and the Six Nations as discussed by the students.

4. Group Work

Create small groups of two to three students to represent each of the colonies that attended the Albany Conference. Roles can be assigned by the teacher or via lottery.

- British Government
- Six Nation Iroquois Confederacy
- Massachusetts Bay
- New Hampshire
- Connecticut
- Rhode Island
- New York
- New Jersey
- Pennsylvania
- Maryland
- Virginia
- North Carolina
- South Carolina

5. Working in the established groups, students use encyclopedias or other general reference materials to complete the “Background Research” form. Completed handouts are filed in a group folder with the group name and members’ names written on the cover.

6. Students continue research on the Albany Conference to discover their group's position or that of other groups. They may consult sources listed in "Further Resources."

7. Position Paper

Using research information, groups prepare a position paper describing their group's position on the issues.

8. Activity

If desired, all participants don appropriate costumes, wigs, etc. The groups assemble in one room to discuss the best plan for addressing rising conflicts with the French and Native Americans. The conference should elect a chairman and a secretary, establish an agenda, discuss solutions, and craft a final agreement, which is then presented to the teacher.

9. Once the class has presented its final resolution, teacher will reveal to students Benjamin Franklin's Albany Plan, the Conference's support for the plan, and its fate at the hands of the colonial legislatures and the British Crown. Students are asked to compare their solution to Franklin's in a class discussion. Teacher maintains a T-chart of the comparison on the board or overhead projector.

10. Self-Reflection

Ask students to write about their experiences with the conference reenactment including their individual roles, the cooperation of others in the group, their understanding of the historical issues, and how the conference and related writing and research helped in understanding those issues. Lastly, students will compare Franklin's Albany Plan to their solution.

ASSESSMENT

Students will be assessed according to the quality of their participation in the conference and class discussions, their group's activity folder (containing "Background Research" form, research notes, and position paper), and on their self-reflections.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Watch the film *The Last of the Mohicans*. Write a review of the film that considers three points of view: the colonists, the Crown, and the Six Nations.
- Write and perform a one-act play set in Albany before the conference. Feature three characters: a colonist, a British army officer, and Mohawk leader (from the Six Nations)
- Study graphic design from the 18th century. Using computer graphics, design a period-style pamphlet or broadside to be distributed at the Albany Conference reenactment. The handbill should support your group's point of view.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- Newbold, Robert C. *The Albany Congress and Plan of Union*. (New York, Vantage Press, 1955).
- Shannon, Timothy J. *Indians and Colonists at the Crossroads of Empire: The Albany Congress of 1754*, 2002.
- www.constitution.org/bcp/albany.htm
- www.u-s-history.com/pages/h789.html
- www.nysm.nysed.gov/albany/albanycongress.html

COLONIES IN CRISIS

FRENCH BUILD FORTS IN OHIO

COLONEL WASHINGTON DEFEATED

Board of Trade Calls for Conference

In the early 1750s the rival superpowers Great Britain and France competed for control of North America. Great Britain controlled the Atlantic coast from Maine to Georgia but nothing more. France claimed Canada and nearly everywhere else. French Louisiana covered the great central mass of the continent drained by the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. In an effort to halt British expansion into its territories, France started to build forts along the frontier.

In response to the French construction of forts, the governor of Virginia, in 1753, sent a promising young man named George Washington and the Virginia militia to the Ohio Valley to demand that the French leave. Washington failed, but his exploits made him a hero and a colonel. In the spring of 1754, Washington returned to the Ohio Valley with more Virginia militia to further harass the French.

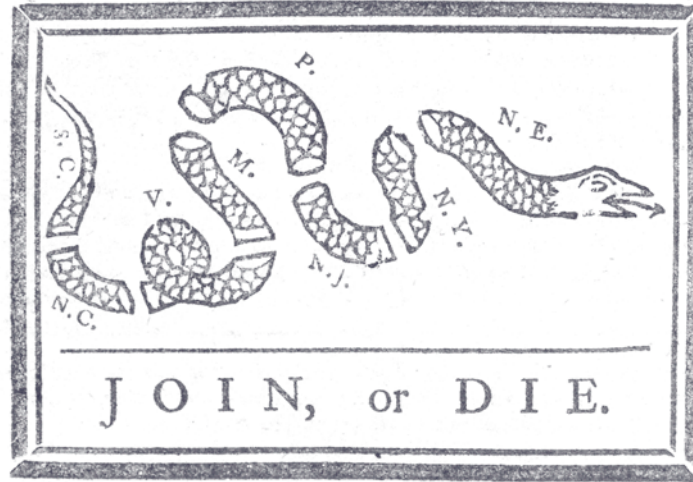
The British government was troubled by these events. Its Board of Trade asked the colonies to send representatives to Albany, New York, to discuss a united defense against the French and to reestablish old friendships with the powerful confederacy of Iroquois known as the Six Nations. The colonies rarely agreed with one another and six of the thirteen decided not to send delegates.

The Albany Conference was fraught with disagreement. The Iroquois felt that the British had neglected them. The colonists did not want to pay for their own defense against a powerful France. They would not even help to pay for forts in other colonies.

Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania, dismayed by the lack of unity and the news of Washington's failures in the Ohio Valley, published the "Join, or Die" cartoon in *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, urging his fellow colonies to join together for the sake of preservation and survival. He brought his views to Albany in June.

Written by Thomas F. Harrington

“JOIN, OR DIE” CARTOON



Benjamin Franklin

“Join, or Die” woodcut cartoon in *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 9, 1754
The Library Company of Philadelphia

Background Research Form

DIRECTIONS: Using encyclopedias, find the following information about the colony or group that your group represents.

1. Name of colony/group: _____

2. When was the colony/group established? _____

3. Important people in establishing the colony/group: _____

4. Location: New England Middle Atlantic South Other _____

5. Was this colony/group:

- Started by a company?
- Started by friend or relative of the King of Great Britain?
- Started by a religious group?
- Other?

6. Ethnic or Religious characteristics: _____

7. What activities supported the economy of your colony or group? Check any that apply.

- large plantations with slave labor
- ship building
- farming, non-slave
- trading slaves and rum
- trading furs, lumber, and other things