



LESSON 5:

Benjamin Franklin, Working for the Common Good

OVERVIEW

Benjamin Franklin's drive for self-improvement tied into a desire to improve the world around him as well. As a young tradesman in Philadelphia, Franklin's ambition, mixed with his intellectual energy and sociable nature, made him a natural leader of public projects. In 1727, Franklin gathered eleven friends to form the Junto, a club that met weekly to discuss ways of working together for the benefit of themselves and the Philadelphia community. Over several years of activity, Franklin and his associates enriched community life in Philadelphia by helping establish vital institutions and by carrying out various civic initiatives. Franklin called his mission for improving the lives of ordinary citizens furthering the "common good." He was a true philanthropist who believed that the challenges of society must be met with mutual enterprise, cooperation, and generosity. Even with his many personal accomplishments, Franklin's commitment to the common good was a lifelong endeavor. This activity first prompts students to think of things they can do to further the common good and then conveys their ideas in the form of a class quilt.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Understand that Franklin highly valued the power of people working together and believed good deeds could be accomplished best through alliances.
- Learn that, in addition to his familiar roles as a scientist and statesman, Franklin also was a community leader whose initiatives left a lasting mark on Philadelphia and on American society.

TIME

This lesson and activity require two class periods.

MATERIALS

- Quilt square template (one per student)
- Pencils and crayons
- Scissors
- Bulletin board or sheet of paper large enough to affix all students' quilt squares
- Glue or stapler (for teacher's use in assembling quilt)

McREL STANDARDS

Civics

Standard 29. Understands the importance of political leadership, public service, and a knowledgeable citizenry in American constitutional democracy

Language Arts

Standard 8. Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

Standard 9. Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

Visual Arts

Standard 2. Knows how to use structures (e.g., sensory qualities, organizational principles, expressive features) and functions of art

Standard 3. Knows a range of subject matter, symbols, and potential ideas in the visual arts

LESSON AND ACTIVITY

1. Prepare the site where the student's quilt squares will be affixed to create a class "Quilt for the Common Good."

2. Discussion

Discuss Benjamin Franklin's civic actions in Philadelphia. Explain to the class that Franklin believed that people should help one another and work together to make communities better places to live for everyone. He called this working for the "common good."

3. Name and briefly describe the Junto, emphasizing that Franklin very much trusted in the power of people working together. Mention certain things that Franklin and the Junto did to improve the Philadelphia community. Then help students to appreciate such deeds by asking them to imagine their own communities without a library, fire company, hospital, street lights, etc.

4. Brainstorm with the students by asking them to name ways that they are helpful in the classroom, at home, etc., (e.g., pick up trash, plant flowers and trees, help persons in need).

5. Activity

Ask students to think of ways to work for the common good with classmates, teachers, and family members. Then ask students to illustrate their ideas on the quilt square templates.

6. Assemble the class "Quilt for the Common Good," making sure to point out the conceptual link between the students' working together to make the quilt and Franklin and his friends working together to improve the Philadelphia community.

ASSESSMENT

Students are assessed on their active participation in discussion during the lesson and on the extent to which their quilt squares use pictures to communicate ideas and demonstrate creativity.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Ask students to write verbal descriptions of their quilt squares.

Quilt Square Template

