



### LESSON 6:

# Benjamin Franklin's Community Contributions

## OVERVIEW

A number of the institutions and amenities that appear inherent to U.S. communities today actually can be traced back to Benjamin Franklin's civic initiatives in mid-18<sup>th</sup>-century Philadelphia. Franklin's drive for self-improvement tied naturally into a desire to improve the world around him. 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 decades of activity, Franklin and his associates enriched community life in Philadelphia by establishing a lending library, hospital, school, fire brigade, insurance company, learned society, and militia. Franklin also led various efforts for public safety: he supervised the lighting, cleaning, and paving of Philadelphia streets and designed a fireplace that conserved fuel while avoiding house fires.

This activity teaches students about Franklin's contributions to the Philadelphia community and asks them to consider the lasting effects of his work on American communities. Students experience Franklin's public spirit and appreciate the value of his civic initiatives by creating collages that depict plans for improving their own communities.

## OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Learn that Franklin helped found institutions and create civil services that are familiar in their own communities.
- Appreciate the value of civic initiatives and see that they too can work to improve their communities.

## TIME

This lesson and activity require two class periods.

## MATERIALS

- Classroom blackboard
- Poster board
- Recycled magazines to be cut and used for collages
- Scissors
- Glue
- Markers

## McREL STANDARDS

### Civics

Standard 10. Understands the role of volunteerism and organized groups in social and political life

Standard 27. Understands how certain character traits enhance citizens' ability to fulfill personal and civic responsibilities

### Visual Arts

Standard 1. Understands and applies media, techniques, and processes to the visual arts

### Language Arts

Standard 8. Uses listening and speaking skills for different purposes

### History

Standard 2. Understands the history of a local community and how communities in North America varied long ago

Standard 4. Understands how democratic values came to be, and how they have been exemplified by people, events, and symbols

### LESSON AND ACTIVITY

#### 1. Discussion

Begin with a class discussion of community. Ask students to share their thoughts on such matters as:

- What makes a community?
- Why is community important?
- What are the responsibilities of citizens in a community?

2. Teach a lesson on Benjamin Franklin's civic actions in Philadelphia and write the following on the blackboard: community, colonial Philadelphia, Junto, library, hospital, fire company, university, paved streets, and street lights. Explain to the class that a number of the places and services familiar to our communities today actually began as Benjamin Franklin's projects for improving the Philadelphia community in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century.

3. Name and briefly describe the Junto, emphasizing that Franklin deeply valued the power of people working together. As you go over the blackboard list identifying the accomplishments of Franklin and the Junto, help students to appreciate these deeds by asking them to imagine their own communities without a library, fire company, hospital, street lights, etc.

4. Prompt the students for the collage-making activity by asking them to name things that they can do to improve their communities (e.g., pick up trash, plant flowers and trees, help persons in need). Allow students to brainstorm and to browse magazines before beginning their collages.

#### 5. Homework/Activity

Students create collages to illustrate their ideas for improving their communities. Encourage students to "think big" and to anticipate involving classmates, teachers, and family members. Students may add descriptive text or labels to further annotate their collages.

#### 6. Presentations

After all students have finished, ask them to share their collages with the class. The collages can be displayed in the classroom.

### ASSESSMENT

Students are assessed on active participation in discussion during the lesson, the creativity and clarity with which they communicate their ideas in the collages, and their oral communication skills in presenting their work to the class.

**EXTENSION ACTIVITY**

Assign students to write compositions that either:

- Describe how and where they see the marks of Franklin's efforts in their communities today; or
- Persuade others to join them in carrying out their plans for community improvement.