



### LESSON 9:

# Benjamin Franklin and the Long Struggle for Independence

## OVERVIEW

The effort to forge a new nation of the thirteen colonies began long before the Revolutionary War broke out. Benjamin Franklin was one of the first to see the need for colonial unity as a means of protection against threats from the French and their Native American allies. He proposed the Albany Plan of Union in June of 1754, one of the founding documents of the United States. After being selected to represent colonial interests in 1757, Franklin spent most of the next thirty years living abroad—first in London seeking to maintain unity with England and then in Paris building a crucial alliance with France.

Franklin proved a master diplomat in the American war for independence from Britain. In France, he drew on strategies of collaboration and mutual self-interest to obtain the moral and material support that made the American victory possible. Following his success in France, Franklin returned to Philadelphia where, at the age of 81, he brought his spirit of compromise and pragmatism as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention.

This lesson helps students understand the series of events that surrounded the American Revolution. Students first read about the American Revolution and Franklin's role in it, then practice putting the events in the correct sequence, and finally work in groups to illustrate the events. The illustrations will be used to construct a pictorial timeline of the American Revolution.

## OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Learn the major causes of the American Revolution and the series of events surrounding it.
- Understand that events in history are interconnected.
- See how Franklin played a major role in uniting the colonies, persuading the French to lend the Americans crucial support for fighting Great Britain, and working with other founding fathers to craft the U.S. Constitution.

## TIME

This lesson and activity require two class periods.

## MATERIALS

- “Benjamin Franklin and the Long Struggle for Independence” reading handout
- “Benjamin Franklin and the Long Struggle for Independence” worksheet
- Drawing paper
- Pencils and crayons
- Classroom wall or bulletin board
- Tape or stapler

## McREL STANDARDS

### History

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

**Language Arts**

Standards 8. Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

**Visual Arts**

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

**LESSON AND ACTIVITY**

1. Distribute the “Benjamin Franklin and the Long Struggle for Independence” handout to students. Read the handout aloud to the class or call on students to read.
2. Distribute the “Benjamin Franklin and the Long Struggle for Independence” worksheet. This may be completed as a class, in groups, or individually. Review the worksheet and be sure students understand the correct sequence of events.
3. Explain how the class will create a pictorial timeline along a wall or bulletin board by illustrating the events on the worksheet.
4. Separate students into groups or ask a set number of students to illustrate each event.
5. After all have finished, call on the students to attach their illustrations to the timeline. Follow the order of events to reinforce students’ learning.

**ASSESSMENT**

Students are assessed on their completed handouts, the quality of their class participation, and the neatness and detail in their illustrations.

**EXTENSION ACTIVITY**

Incorporate additional lessons on the American Revolution and the leaders of it. Ask students to research and illustrate additional events surrounding the American Revolution. Add the new illustrations to the timeline.

## Benjamin Franklin and the Long Struggle for Independence

Benjamin Franklin lived in the 1700s, when America was made up of thirteen colonies belonging to Great Britain. Even though the colonists lived and worked in America, Great Britain's King George III ruled the colonies from across the Atlantic Ocean. As a young man, Benjamin Franklin considered himself a British American. He believed that Great Britain and the colonies would both be stronger if the two worked together.

But eventually the colonists became very unhappy about the way King George III was governing the colonies. The King made the colonists pay taxes on things they needed for their everyday lives—tea, paper, even playing cards. Benjamin Franklin traveled to London in 1757 and stayed there until 1775, trying to convince the King to treat the colonies fairly. He explained that the colonists should not pay taxes to Britain without having any say in how the money was spent or how the colonies were governed. Meanwhile, as people in the colonies grew more and more angry with the British, the idea of becoming an independent nation spread.

Benjamin Franklin returned to Colonial America. He helped Thomas Jefferson write the Declaration of Independence, a document telling the world that the colonies would form a free and independent nation. On July 4, 1776, the American colonists declared their independence from Great Britain.

The colonists needed a lot of help in going to war with Great Britain, the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the world. Many people joined the Continental Army, but the new American government had no money to provide them with food, uniforms, or military supplies. Benjamin Franklin was selected as a colonial representative and sent overseas to convince the French government to form an alliance with the American government and to lend military supplies for fighting the Revolutionary War.

In Paris, Benjamin Franklin formed friendships with many influential French people who supported the American cause in their struggle for independence from Great Britain. Franklin met with the King of France and convinced him to give the American government troops, money, and equipment for fighting the Revolutionary War. With crucial help from the French, the Americans defeated the British.

Benjamin Franklin returned to America shortly after the war. He helped write the United States Constitution. Franklin was the oldest member of the Constitutional Convention. Even though he suffered from poor health and often was in pain, Franklin made important contributions in writing the Constitution. The other members greatly admired Franklin for his commitment to America all through the Revolution, his spirit of compromise, and his sharp intellect. At the end of nearly four months of debates, Franklin wrote a speech urging all delegates to sign the document.

# Benjamin Franklin and the Long Struggle for Independence

## SEQUENCE OF EVENTS WORKSHEET

**DIRECTIONS:** These events from “Benjamin Franklin and the Long Struggle for Independence,” are not in the correct order. Number the events 1–6 to retell the story correctly.

\_\_\_\_\_ Benjamin Franklin went to France to ask for help in fighting the American War for Independence.

\_\_\_\_\_ Benjamin Franklin went to Great Britain to talk to King George III about his rule over the colonies.

\_\_\_\_\_ Benjamin Franklin helped write the Declaration of Independence.

\_\_\_\_\_ King George III of Great Britain ruled the American colonies from across the Atlantic Ocean.

\_\_\_\_\_ Benjamin Franklin helped write the Constitution of the United States of America.

\_\_\_\_\_ Benjamin Franklin returned to the colonies.