OVERVIEW
Although he never finished writing it, Franklin’s Autobiography is the most widely published memoir in history and has never gone out of print. In his autobiography, which he started as a letter to his son, Franklin offers the story of his life as an archetypal journey from rags to riches. The Autobiography remains inspiring today: it documents Franklin’s many achievements; it details his struggles with personal improvement; it explains his belief in personal virtue; and it exemplifies his commitment to self-questioning.

OBJECTIVES
Students will:
• Learn about Franklin’s core accomplishments, principles, and philosophies through a central primary source document, The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin.
• Read and interpret the Autobiography’s major themes.
• Write an analytical essay about the Autobiography in the form of an introduction to the book.

TIME
This lesson and activity require two to three or more class periods, with additional time allotted for at-home reading and writing.

MATERIALS
• The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin. An online version of the book is available at http://eserver.org/books/franklin/
• “Benjamin Franklin Timeline of Events” handout

McREL STANDARDS
History/Historical Understanding
Standard 2. Understands the historical perspective
Language Arts
Standard 1. Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process
Standard 2. Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing
Standard 3. Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions
Standard 6. Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts

LESSON AND ACTIVITY
1. Ask students to read the Autobiography as homework. You may want to assign the reading in manageable chunks that can then be discussed during class time. Refer students to the attached “Benjamin Franklin Timeline of Events” as a resource to fill in some of the significant facts and dates missing from the Autobiography.

2. Writing
Inform students that for their assignment they should imagine that they have been selected to write the introduction to a special 300th-anniversary edition of Franklin’s Autobiography.
The introduction should be somewhere between 3 – 5 pages and should prepare the reader for the book by:

- Describing the book’s central themes
- Providing an overview of Franklin’s major accomplishments
- Discussing Franklin’s perspective on the role of religion, social class, and education in society
- Analyzing Franklin’s impact on the shaping of American character and culture

3. Brainstorming
If you have not done so already, review the above essay requirements and discuss as a class.

4. Outlining (optional)
You may want to ask students to prepare outlines and hand them in for your review.

5. Students draft, revise, edit, and turn in the completed assignments.

ASSESSMENT
Students are assessed on the quality of their final writing assignment according to an established rubric.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY
Ask students to read and report back to the class on the autobiographies of other famous Americans.

FURTHER RESOURCES
- A Documentary History, available at www.english.udel.edu/lemay/franklin
- “Benjamin Franklin: Glimpses of the Man,” available at www.fi.edu/franklin/
- Franklin Writings on the Web:
  ➤ On an Early Marriage:
    www.earlyamerica.com/earlyamerica/bookmarks/franklin/frnktext.html
  ➤ On the Price of Corn and Management of the Corn:
    www.founding.com/library/lbody.cfm?id=145&parent=55
  ➤ An Address to the Public (Concerning Slavery):
    www.founding.com/library/lbody.cfm?id=146&parent=55
  ➤ Information to Those Who Would Remove to America (1794):
    www.founding.com/library/lbody.cfm?id=147&parent=55
Benjamin Franklin Timeline of Events

1706    Born January 17, the ninth of eleven children born to Josiah and Abiah Franklin
1714 - 1715  Attends Boston’s South Grammar School for two years
1716    Works in his father's candle-making shop
1718    Begins an apprenticeship in his brother James's printing shop in Boston
1722    Begins writing a series of letters under the pseudonym “Silence Dogood”
1723    Runs away to Philadelphia, arriving October 6. Finds work in the printing shop of Samuel Keimer and lodging in the home of John Read, the father of his future wife Deborah Read
1724    Sails for England on November 5, continuing his training as a printer
1726    Returns to Philadelphia and works as clerk, bookkeeper, and shopkeeper for Thomas Denham
1727    Forms the Junto, a club for "self-improvement, study, mutual aid, and conviviality"
1728    Co-founds printing shop with Hugh Meredith
1729    Purchases The Pennsylvania Gazette, which over the course of 19 years becomes renowned for its humor, originality, and strong influence on public opinion
1730    Joins in common-law marriage with Deborah Read
          Named official printer for Pennsylvania
          Sometime around 1729 or 1730, William Franklin, Benjamin Franklin’s son, is born out of wedlock to an unidentified mother
1731    Establishes The Library Company of Philadelphia, the first lending library in America
          Launches one of the colonies’ first printing franchises in South Carolina
1732    Deborah Read Franklin gives birth to a son, Francis Folger Franklin
          Issues the first edition of Poor Richard’s Almanack, an instant best-seller that quickly becomes the most popular almanac in the colonies
1736    Four-year-old son Francis Folger Franklin dies of smallpox
          Helps found the Union Fire Company, which organizes and trains teams of firemen
1737    Begins service as postmaster of Philadelphia, continuing until 1753
1740-41  Designs the Pennsylvania Fire-place, now known as the Franklin stove
1743    Deborah Read Franklin gives birth to Sarah (Sally) Franklin, the Franklins’ only daughter
          Publishes A Proposal for Promoting Useful Knowledge, leading to the formation of the American Philosophical Society
1748    Retires from the printing business at the age of forty-two
Benjamin Franklin Timeline of Events (continued)

1749  Founds the Academy and College of Philadelphia, later renamed the University of Pennsylvania

1750  Designs the lightning rod to divert lightning from buildings during thunderstorms

1751  *Experiments and Observations on Electricity*, a collection of Franklin’s letters about his electrical experiments, published in London

Co-founds the Pennsylvania Hospital, the colonies’ first public hospital

Founds the Philadelphia Contributionship, the colonies’ first property insurance company

1752  Performs legendary kite and key experiment, confirming his theory that electricity existed in thunderclouds in the form of lightning

1753  Awarded the Royal Society of London’s Copley Medal for work in electricity

Appointed joint deputy postmaster general of North America

Awarded honorary degrees from Harvard and Yale

1754  Drafts the Albany Plan of Union, urging the colonies to form a united defense against threats from the French and their Native American allies

Publishes in *The Pennsylvania Gazette* the “Join, or Die” cartoon, America’s first symbol of the united colonies

1756  Awarded an honorary Master of Arts degree from William and Mary College

1757  Appointed colonial agent to London. Lives and works in London for the majority of the next eighteen years

1758  *A Way to Wealth*, a collection of Franklin’s *Poor Richard*’s writings is published

1759  Awarded an honorary Doctor of Law degree from the University of St. Andrews, Scotland

1762  Invents the glass armonica

Awarded an honorary doctorate degree from Oxford University, England

1766  Elected to Royal Society of Sciences

1769  Elected president of the American Philosophical Society

1771  Begins writing his *Autobiography*

1774  Deborah Read Franklin dies

1775  Arrives back in Philadelphia

Elected the Pennsylvania delegate to the Second Continental Congress

1776  Serves on the committee to draft the Declaration of Independence

Appointed commissioner to the court of France and arrives in Paris on December 21
Benjamin Franklin Timeline of Events (continued)

1778  Helps negotiate and signs the Treaty of Amity and Commerce between America and France, securing critical support from the French in the form of loans, military supplies, and troops

1783  Helps negotiate and signs Treaty of Paris, officially ending the Revolutionary War

1785  Moves back to Philadelphia after his years of service in France

1787  Elected president of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery. Serves as delegate to the Constitutional Convention

1790  Dies on April 17, 1790, at the age of eighty-four