



LESSON 5:

The Junto Meets Again

OVERVIEW

Even as a young tradesman, Franklin sought to better himself and his community. Shortly after moving to Philadelphia, Franklin organized the Junto—a small group of fellow tradesmen and artisans committed to mutual improvement. At their weekly meetings they asked how they “may be serviceable to mankind? To their country, to their friends, or to themselves?” The Junto’s actions formed the answer. Franklin and his colleagues helped establish a lending library, firefighting brigade, university, learned society, militia, hospital, and insurance company. Franklin’s commitment to public service was built on his sociable nature: Franklin was a true philanthropist. He believed that society’s many challenges required mutual action, collaboration, and generosity. This, for Franklin, defined citizenship, in the colonies and in the young republic.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Learn about civic engagement and civic improvement in colonial America.
- Work collaboratively in teams to identify needs specific to their own communities.
- Develop an improvement scheme to address those needs.

TIME

This lesson and activity require three class periods.

MATERIALS

- Benjamin Franklin. “Rules for a Club Formerly Established in Philadelphia.” (1732) *Franklin Writings*, edited by J.A. Leo Lemay. (New York: The Library of America, 1987). Available at <http://www.historycarper.com/resources/twobf2/rules.htm>.

McREL STANDARDS

Civics

Standard 28. Understands how participation in civic and political life can help citizens attain individual and public goals

Language Arts

Standard 8. Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

Life Skills/Working with Others

Standard 1. Contributes to the overall effort of a group effort

LESSON AND ACTIVITY

Day 1

1. Distribute “Rules for a Club Formerly Established in Philadelphia” as a handout.

2. Ask students to form small groups and read through the questions. Students should re-write Franklin’s questions so that they can be easily understood by their peers.

3. Using only Franklin's questions as a reference, ask students to answer the following questions in their groups:

- What was the purpose of the Junto?
- What type of people attended the Junto meetings?
- What could a member learn or gain from their membership in the Junto?

4. After the discussion, inform students that they will be convening their own Junto in the classroom. Modeled on Franklin's Junto, students will identify a specific community need and develop a proposal to address that need. (Teacher, or students, may choose to define community as the school, the town where the school is located, or the city where the students reside.)

5. Homework

Instruct students to review local newspapers and conduct conversations with family and friends to identify some of the more pressing issues facing their community. Students will return to school the next day with three to five community issues for their Junto to address.

Day 2

6. Students return to their groups and review with one another their list of issues. Each group must work toward a consensus of which issue they would like to investigate more thoroughly with the intent of developing a plan of action. Once each group has completed its discussion, students will report back to the whole class. Teacher will record the groups' responses on the board.

7. Together the class will work toward prioritizing the list. Class will evaluate the merits of competing issues and the relative value their contribution can make to a particular issue. The result of this discussion will produce one community issue for which the class will be charged with developing a clear and realistic solution.

8. Remind the class that the Junto did not just present and debate ideas, they acted upon them. Inform the students that they will be creating an action plan for the central community need that they identified.

9. Divide the class into four new groups. Each group will be assigned a specific area:

- Group #1
Whom must we contact to make our idea happen?
- Group #2
How much will this new idea cost? How can we raise the money?
- Group #3
How can we work with other groups to help move our idea forward?
- Group #4
What must happen for our new idea to be deemed a success?

10. Groups will meet briefly to decide how best to conduct their research or identify the information they will need to develop a coherent and practical response to their particular

assignment. Groups may decide to break down the assignment into smaller components, giving each student a particular aspect of the task to research, or the group can decide that each person will tackle the whole assignment and report back the following day with their insights.

Day 3

11. Students reconvene in their groups and discuss the results of their research. Students are given approximately 20 minutes to develop a coherent response to their assignment.

12. Each group reports its findings to the class as a whole. The teacher records the action plan for the whole class to see.

13. Assignment

Ask students to compose a letter to the appropriate community leader (principal, mayor, senator, etc.) or to the editorial page of their local newspaper addressing the community need they have studied. Students will share the proposed plan of action, adding or detracting elements as they see fit, as well as offering steps that they individually, or their class or school, can take to help move the proposed action plan forward.

ASSESSMENT

Students are assessed on their level of participation in the group activities and on the extent to which their writing assignments demonstrate understanding of the identified need and ways to address it.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Ask students to consider in what ways groups of which they are already members (clubs, teams, etc.,) behave in ways similar to a Junto (e.g., helping each other out, offering advice, providing networking opportunities). Then ask them to think of a community service project that the group could perform and present their idea to the class. For example, a music group could perform a free concert or a chess club might offer a free lesson to younger kids.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- Brands, H.W. *The First American: The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin*. (New York: Doubleday, 2000).
- Isaacson, Walter, ed. *A Benjamin Franklin Reader*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003).
- Isaacson, Walter. *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003).