



### LESSON 9: Franklin, Master Diplomat

#### OVERVIEW

Franklin devoted nearly 30 years of his life to living abroad—first in London seeking to maintain unity with England, and then in Paris building an alliance to secure American independence. Franklin became a master diplomat and negotiator, exercising restraint, flexibility, and compromise to bring opposing visions into accord. Whether negotiating with Native Americans in western Pennsylvania or with the governments of England and France, Franklin drew on strategies of collaboration and mutual self-interest to forge alliances that shaped the future of America.

#### OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Analyze Franklin’s contributions to the founding of a new nation through primary source documents that Franklin helped to draft, as well as through his personal correspondence, speeches, and essays.
- Appreciate the role Franklin played in the colonies’ fight for independence and in the subsequent shaping of the new government.
- Assess the scope of Franklin’s skills as statesman and diplomat as well as identify core components of his political philosophy.

#### TIME

This lesson and activity require two class periods.

#### MATERIALS

- All Franklin readings below can be found in:  
*Franklin Writings*, edited by J.A. Leo Lemay. (New York: The Library of America, 1987).
  - *The Albany Plan of Union*, July 10, 1754.  
Available at [www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/amerdoc/albany.htm](http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/amerdoc/albany.htm)  
AND Benjamin Franklin. *Reasons and Motives for the Albany Plan of Union, July 1754*.  
Available at <http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch7s2.html>.
  - *Declaration of Independence*. Available at  
[www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/declaration.html](http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/declaration.html)  
AND *An Edict of the King of Prussia*, September 22, 1773. Available at  
[www.historycarper.com/resources/twobf3/pa-1773.htm](http://www.historycarper.com/resources/twobf3/pa-1773.htm).
  - *Treaty of Amity and Commerce between the United States and France*, February 6, 1778.  
Available at [www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/france/fr1788-1.htm](http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/france/fr1788-1.htm)  
AND Letter from Benjamin Franklin to John Jay, October 2, 1780. (Attached)
  - *Treaty of Paris*, February 20, 1783. Available at  
[www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/britian/dec783.htm](http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/britian/dec783.htm)  
AND “The Morals of Chess” (excerpt). Available at  
[www.kmdr.net/morals.htm](http://www.kmdr.net/morals.htm), <http://skepticalfiles.org/think/morals.htm>,  
or [http://july.fixedreference.org/en/20040724/wikipedia/Chess\\_as\\_mental\\_training](http://july.fixedreference.org/en/20040724/wikipedia/Chess_as_mental_training).

- ▶ U.S. Constitution. Available at [www.constitutioncenter.org/explore](http://www.constitutioncenter.org/explore)  
AND “Speech in a Committee of the Convention on the Proportion of Representation and Votes.” Available at  
<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/convention/debates/0611.html>  
or <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/debates/611.htm>.

- Introductions to above documents (attached)

#### McREL STANDARDS

##### History/Historical Understanding

Standard 2. Understands the historical perspective

##### History/United States History

Standard 6. Understands the causes of the American Revolution, the ideas and interests involved in shaping the revolutionary movement, and reasons for the American victory

#### LESSON AND ACTIVITY

1. Share with students that in addition to Franklin’s work as a printer, inventor, scientist, and philanthropist, he devoted much of his life to serving his country at home and abroad.

At home, Franklin served as deputy postmaster of Philadelphia and deputy postmaster general of the colonies. Following the War of Independence, Franklin founded the U.S. Post Office.

Franklin also served in the Pennsylvania Assembly, and after negotiating the Peace Treaty with Great Britain, Franklin returned to Philadelphia and was twice elected to the presidency of the Pennsylvania Assembly.

Franklin’s diplomacy work extended beyond the colonies’ borders: first in England as an agent for several of the colonies in the years preceding the American Revolution, and later in France as a diplomat for the newly established United States.

Franklin is the only founding father who has the distinction of signing five of the country’s founding documents: Albany Plan of Union, Declaration of Independence, Treaty of Amity, Treaty of Paris, and U.S. Constitution.

2. Divide the class into five groups. Each group will receive a sealed envelope or dossier containing one of the five founding documents that Franklin helped to draft (see Materials) with its corresponding introduction (attached), along with the commentary that Franklin wrote about the document or about events that led up to or followed the document’s creation (see Materials).

3. After students have read the founding document and Franklin’s corresponding commentary, they will assess the following basic information about the founding document:

- What is the document’s central theme?
- Why was it created?
- Where was it created?
- Who else participated in its creation?
- What was Franklin’s contribution to the document’s creation?

Students are free to consult outside resources to gather more information about the founding document.

4. Based on the students' analysis of the founding document and Franklin's corresponding writing, students will prepare a 3 – 5 page memorandum to be distributed to the other members of the class addressing Franklin's strengths and weaknesses as a diplomat as observed through the documents they have been assigned.

**ASSESSMENT**

Students are assessed on their class participation and on the quality of their analysis of Franklin's diplomatic skills, abilities, and contributions.

**EXTENSION ACTIVITIES**

- Inform students that Dr. Franklin is applying for the position of United States Ambassador to the United Nations. Students are charged with preparing a resume and cover letter for Franklin to tender to the President of the United States.
- Identify some "hot spot" in the world and ask students to draft a peace proposal that reflects Franklin's sense of pragmatism and compromise in the conduct of diplomacy.

## INTRODUCTION: Albany Plan

In 1754, as Britain and France struggled for control over North America, Benjamin Franklin proposed the Albany Plan of Union to unite the British North American colonies. His Plan called for the creation of a legislative body that would have the power to control commerce and organize defense in the face of attacks by the French or their Native American allies.

The Albany Plan was rejected by both the colonists and the British Crown. The Crown worried that the Plan would create a powerful colonial bloc that might prove difficult to control, while the colonists themselves did not yet recognize the value of intercolonial unity. Nevertheless, Franklin's proposal to unite the colonies under a loose confederation contained many of the seeds of a unified national government that the founding fathers would adopt more than thirty years later at the Constitutional Convention.

## INTRODUCTION: Declaration of Independence

The Declaration of Independence was adopted by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776. It proclaimed to the world that colonial America sought independence from Great Britain. It declared that independence rested on the clearest of principles: that men are created free and equal, and that they cannot legitimately be governed by those to whom they have not given their consent. Thomas Jefferson was the primary author of the document, aided by a committee including Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Roger Sherman, and Robert R. Livingston.

The Declaration of Independence was written, in part, to demonstrate American resolve and solidarity in its formal split from Great Britain. This was important because the colonies needed to persuade potential allies—especially France—to aid the American cause.

## INTRODUCTION: *An Edict by the King of Prussia*

In 1773, as tensions between Britain and America increased, a declaration purportedly by King Frederick II of Prussia was published in *The Public Advertiser*, a London newspaper. It asserted that because England was originally settled by Germans and was recently protected by Germany in the war against France, the British should pay exorbitant taxes to Prussia. If any precedent was needed, the British should look no further than their own treatment of colonial America.

Franklin, the true author, delighted in the public's dismay at his parody, boasting to his son William, "I am not suspected as the author...and have heard the latter ['Edict'] spoken of in the highest terms as the keenest and severest piece that has appeared here a long time."

[Letter from Benjamin Franklin to William Franklin, October 6, 1773]

## INTRODUCTION: Treaty of Amity

At the onset of the American Revolution, the fledgling American army was no match for Britain's well-established military might. In the fall of 1776 Franklin was sent overseas to negotiate a military alliance with the French. He recognized that to win the cooperation of the French he had to understand their interests and remain humble in demeanor. By wearing a fur cap rather than an elaborate wig, for instance, Franklin cultivated an image of personal modesty and rustic charm.

His strategy paid off. In 1778 the Treaties of Amity and Commerce (commonly known as the Treaty of Amity) produced a strategic alliance between the United States and France, in which each nation agreed to aid one another in the event of British attack. Already at war with Britain, the new American nation needed significant support in the form of loans, military supplies, and troops. The Treaty officially brought France into the American Revolutionary War, providing aid at a crucial time and ultimately enabling the Americans to win their fight for independence. Negotiating the Treaty on behalf of the United States were Benjamin Franklin, Silas Deane, Arthur Lee, and Conrad Alexander Gerard.

## INTRODUCTION: The Treaty of Paris

Although the Revolutionary War ended with the American victory at Yorktown in the fall of 1781, the terms of peace between Britain and the United States were not formalized until September 3, 1783, when the Treaty of Paris was signed. In the two years between the end of hostilities and the signing of the Treaty, the American negotiators—Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and John Jay—worked with their British, French, and Spanish counterparts to shape a treaty that guaranteed American sovereignty. The Treaty gave formal recognition to the United States, established its national boundaries, and provided for the evacuation of British troops.

## INTRODUCTION: The U.S. Constitution

Franklin returned to America in 1785 and within two years was once again at the center of the effort to define and shape the new nation. In 1787 he was the oldest member of the Constitutional Convention, suffering from poor health and often excruciating pain. Nonetheless, Franklin's experience as a seasoned diplomat and negotiator, combined with his keen observation of human nature, made him an ideal delegate to the Convention. His most important contributions were his spirit of pragmatic compromise and strong desire for unity. He drew on both to play a significant role in brokering the "Great Compromise": a legislature of two houses, one elected in proportion to population and one in which each state would have equal representation.

*I confess, that I do not entirely approve of this Constitution at present; but Sir, I am not sure I shall never approve it ... Thus I consent, Sir, to this Constitution, because I expect no better, and because I am not sure that it is not the best.*

—Benjamin Franklin, *Speech in the Convention at the Conclusion of its Deliberations*, September 17, 1787

## “A Neighbour Might as well ask me to sell my street door.”

To John Jay

Passy, October 2d, 1780

Dear Sir,

I received duly and in good order the several letters you have written to me of August 16<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, September 8<sup>th</sup>, and 22<sup>nd</sup>. The papers that accompanied them of your writing gave me the pleasure of seeing the affairs of our country in such good hands, and the prospect, from your youth, of its having the service of so able a minister for a great number of years. But the little success that has attended your late applications for money mortified me exceedingly; and the storm of bills which I found coming upon us both, has terrified and vexed me to such a degree that I have been deprived of sleep, and so much indisposed by continual anxiety, as to be rendered almost incapable of writing.

At length I got over a reluctance that was almost invincible, and made another application to the government here for more money. I drew up and presented a state of debts and newly-expected demands, and requested its aid to extricate me. Judging from your letters that you were not likely to obtain any thing considerable from your court, I put down in my estimate the 25,000 dollars drawn upon you, with the same sum drawn upon me, as what would probably come to me for payment. I have now the pleasure to acquaint you that my memorial was received in the kindest and most friendly manner, and though the court here is not without its embarrassments on account of money, I was told to make myself easy, for that I should be assisted with what was necessary. Mr. Searle arriving about this time, and assuring me there had been a plentiful harvest, and great crops of all kinds; that the Congress had demanded of the several States contributions in produce, which would be cheerfully given; that they would therefore have plenty of provisions to dispose of; and I being much pleased with the generous behaviour just experienced, I presented another paper, proposing, in order to ease the government here, which had been so willing to ease us, that the Congress might furnish their army in America with provisions in part of payment for the services lent us. This proposition, I was told, was well taken; but it being considered that the States having the enemy in their country, and obliged to make great expenses for the present campaign, the furnishing so much provisions as the French army might need, might straiten and be inconvenient to the Congress, his majesty did not at this time think it right to accept the offer. You will not wonder at my loving this good prince: he will win the hearts of all America.

If you are not so fortunate in Spain, continue however the even good temper you have hitherto manifested. Spain owes us nothing; therefore, whatever friendship she shows us in lending money or furnishing clothes, &c. though not equal to our wants and wishes, is however *tant de gagne*, those who have begun to assist us, are more likely to continue than to decline, and we are still so much obliged as their aids amount to. But I hope and am confident, that court will be wiser than to take advantage of our distress, and insists on our making sacrifices by an agreement, which the circumstances of such distress would hereafter weaken, and the very proposition can only give disgust at present. Poor as we are, yet as I know we shall be rich, I would rather agree with them to buy at a great price the whole of their right on the Mississippi, than sell a drop of its waters. A neighbour might as well ask me to sell my street door.

I wish you could obtain an account of what they have supplied us with already in money and goods.

Mr. Grand, informing me that one of the bills drawn on you having been sent from hence to Madrid, was come back unaccepted, I have directed him to pay it; and he has, at my request, undertaken to write to the

## “A Neighbour Might as well ask me to sell my street door.” (continued)

Marquis D’Yranda, to assist you with money to answer such bills as you are not otherwise enabled to pay, and to draw on him for the amount, which drafts I shall answer here as far as 25,000 dollars. If you expect more, acquaint me. But pray write to Congress as I do, to forbear this practice, which is so extremely hazardous, and may, some time or other, prove very mischievous to their credit and affairs. I have undertaken, too, for all the bills drawn on Mr. Laurens, that have yet appeared. He was to have sailed three days after Mr. Searle, that is, the 18<sup>th</sup> July. Mr. Searle begins to be in pain for him, having no good opinion of the little vessel he was to embark in.

We have letters from America to the 7<sup>th</sup> August. The spirit of our people was never higher. Vast exertions making preparatory for some important action. Great harmony and affection between the troops of the two nations. The new money in good credit, &c.

I will write to you again shortly, and to Mr. Carmichael. I shall now be able to pay up your salaries complete for the year; but as demands unforeseen are continually coming upon me, I still retain the expectations you have given me of being reimbursed out of the first remittances you receive.

If you find any inclination to hug me for the good news of this letter, I constitute and appoint Mrs. Jay my attorney, to receive in my behalf your embraces. With great and sincere esteem,

I have the honour to be, dear sire,

Your most obedient and most humble servant,

[Letter from Benjamin Franklin to John Jay, October 2, 1780. *Franklin Writings* 1027–1030.]