The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin Study Guide

The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin by Benjamin Franklin

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin is a blueprint for the prototypical American, chronicling Benjamin Franklin's life as a printer, diplomat, statesman, patriot, scientist, inventor, and writer. Published posthumously in various forms over several years, first in French and then in English, Franklin's autobiography is a literary achievement worthy of the epic U.S. founding father. Franklin originally intended the document of his life and works to be for the sole use and enjoyment of his son, William. The first part, written in 1771, addresses his eldest child, but parts 2-4, written in 1784, 1788, and 1790, reflect its subject's hope that the book would find a wider audience, for the benefit of mankind. Franklin writes,

Having emerg'd from the Poverty and Obscurity in which I was born and bred, to a State of Affluence and some Degree of Reputation in the World, and having gone so far thro' Life with a considerable Share of Felicity, the conducing Means I made use of, which with the Blessing of God so well succeeded, my Posterity may like to know, as they may find some of them suitable to their own Situations, and therefore fit to be imitated.

As much a historical account of eighteenth-century America as a guide to being virtuous, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* follows in the tradition of "conduct books" made popular by statesmen, soldiers, and noblemen before Franklin. His straightforward, no-nonsense writing style reveals much about the man who readily admits "that were it offer'd to my Choice, I should have no Objection to a Repetition of the same Life from its Beginning." Much of Franklin's contentment in life lies in his striving to achieve moral perfection. His father planted the seed of that goal early in the author's life; he approached the project with scientific clarity later. Of his father, Franklin writes,

I remember well his being frequently visited by leading People, who consulted him for his Opinion in Affairs of the Town or of the Church he belong'd to and show'd a good deal of Respect for his Judgment and Advice. He was also much consulted by private Persons about their Affairs when any Difficulty occur'd, and frequently chosen an Arbitrator between contending Parties. At his Table he lik'd to have as often as he could, some sensible Friend or Neighbour, to converse with, and always took care to start some ingenious or useful Topic for Discourse, which might tend to improve the Minds of his Children. By this means he turn'd our Attention to what was good, just, and prudent in the Conduct of Life.

Author Biography

Benjamin Franklin

Benjamin Franklin, the eighth child and youngest son of his parents' ten children, was born on January 17, 1706, in Boston to Josiah and Abiah Franklin. Although his father hoped Franklin would become a member of the clergy, he was only able to pay for two years of schooling, ending his son's formal education at the age of ten. At the age of twelve, Franklin became a printer's apprentice to his brother, James. By 1730, Franklin had his own print shop, started his own newspaper, and was well on his way to becoming a honored member of Philadelphia society. He married Deborah Read, fathered three children, and soon began publishing his famous collection of quotations, *Poor Richard's Almanack*, from which the adage "A penny saved is a penny earned" is taken.

Once his financial standing was secure, Franklin began to indulge in his passion for scientific inquiry. He investigated the phenomena of electricity and invented the lightning rod, bifocals, the Franklin stove, and the flexible urinary catheter, among other things. He held many public offices, was awarded honorary degrees by both Harvard and Yale universities, and was selected to serve on the committee to draft the Declaration of Independence. In 1776, Franklin was sent to Paris, France, where he served as America's first ambassador. He lived outside of Paris, in a town called Passy, for nine years and became one of its most beloved residents. He returned to America in 1785 and became president of the abolitionist society in 1787. Franklin died at the age of 84 on April 17, 1790, in Philadelphia and was buried beside his wife, Deborah. An estimated 20,000 mourners attended his funeral on April 21, 1790. His autobiography was published nearly a century later, in 1886.

Franklin's account of life as an English American, as a subject of England's king in one of the British Empire's many colonies, is a fascinating glimpse into a nation at the time of its birth. More fascinating, still, is the fact that Franklin himself had much to do with the construction of the emerging nation. Like his father, Franklin's opinion on a variety of matters was highly sought after by intelligent, respectable colonists. Due to his reputation, the printer-turned-statesman was able to influence his colleagues to pursue industry, knowledge, economy, and sobriety as a way of becoming successful. These traits, along with his love of reading and flourish with language, are responsible for his success in the many and varied endeavors he undertook in his lifetime. The long list of Franklin's achievements includes inventing the first room-warming stove, the postal service, the public library, the lightning rod, and bifocals. He was also elected to represent the American colonies on trips to England and the Continental Congress, and he was selected to become a member of the committee that drafted the Declaration of Independence.

According to Edmund S. Morgan in his foreword to the second Yale University Press edition of the book,

[*The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*] became itself the most widely read autobiography ever written by an American. It has served many Americans as it may have served Franklin—to define what it meant, what it had meant, and what it ought to mean to be an American.

Plot Summary

Benjamin Franklin was probably one of the most influential and accomplished men in American history. He was a man of vigilance, pursuit, and honor. Franklin was a printer by trade, though his occupational experiences were very diverse. He was a persuasive writer, although for the first decades of his life, he hardly wrote anything using his own name. As he became more confident in his writing skills, Franklin finally started to use his name, but only wrote for the greater good. His autobiography is one of the very rare occasions when he wrote about himself.

As busy as Benjamin Franklin was, one must wonder how he had time to write his life story. He did it over a period of eighteen years, making three separate attempts to complete it. The first section was written in 1771 as a genealogical summary addressed to his son, William. He wrote it with the hope that his children would not have to go through the same extensive research he had to go through to find out about his family's history. In this first section, Franklin describes his childhood, focusing on the events that shaped his character and contributed to his successful life. Here, he discusses his parents' career goals for him in comparison to his own goals. He talks about his apprenticeships and his developments as a scholar. Immediately into his life account, Franklin emphasizes the importance of social networking, to be introduced to everyone in one's path and to make oneself known. Writing, learning, and debate were Franklin's biggest interests in his early years.

In the second section, restarted more than a decade later, Franklin writes from France after the revolutionary war, continuing the story of his youth as it related to self improvement and community involvement. It was during this time that Franklin became the greatest influence on not just the community, but the surrounding American colonies. In this portion of his life, Franklin set out to achieve a virtuous life for himself. His goal was to follow a list of virtues, outlined by himself, to become a better person and a more valuable contributor to society. He published his goals and accomplishments in this endeavor, along with other thoughts and ideas. His writings at this time were popular throughout Pennsylvania. More and more people were eager to hear what Benjamin Franklin came up with next. Every thought or discovery Franklin came up with was written and shared with the public in an effort to spread knowledge and build a more intellectual community.

The third section focuses on Benjamin Franklin's political contributions, describing the events that led to the American Revolution. Unfortunately, Franklin's death came before the completion of the autobiography, leaving the details of the Revolution to other historian writers. The book is still a valuable resource both as a historical account and a glimpse into the mind of a great American icon. Through his memoirs, Franklin reveals himself to be a man who got involved in all matters of public interest, from communication to education.

Plot Summary

Part 1

Part 1 of *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* begins as a letter with the salutation, "Dear Son." The setting and date noted at the top, "Twyford, at the Bishop of St. Asaph's 1771," mark the location of Franklin's week-long vacation, a respite dedicated to setting down his memoirs for his son William, then royal governor of New Jersey. He writes that he enjoyed "obtaining any little Anecdotes of my Ancestors" and so believes William might like to "know the Circumstances of *my* life." Franklin writes that if he could, he would repeat his life, correcting the errors he had made along the way. Acknowledging the impossibility of such an experience, he writes, "the next Thing most like living one's Life over again, seems to be a *Recollection* of that Life; and to make that Recollection as durable as possible, the putting it down in Writing." He thanks God for the good life he has had and begins to recount a bit of his family's ancestry.

Franklin writes, "The Notes one of my Uncles (who had the same kind of Curiosity in collecting Family Anecdotes) once put into my Hands furnish'd me with several Particulars relating to our ancestors." According to these notes, the Franklins lived in Ecton, Northamptonshire, England, for at least three hundred years. Franklin himself was the youngest son of the youngest son for five generations. His father, Josiah Franklin, left England for America in 1682 with his first wife and three children. After settling in their new home, they had four more children. After the first wife died, Josiah married Abiah Folger, Franklin's mother. Josiah had ten more children with Abiah, making Franklin the fifteenth of Josiah's seventeen children.

Josiah Franklin wanted his youngest son to become a member of the clergy. This meant he would have to go to school, unlike his other brothers who became apprentices in various trades. Franklin proved a failure at math, but showed great promise in reading and writing and quickly rose to the top of his class. Because of the family's financial situation, though, Franklin was made to leave school after only two years to become an assistant in his father's soap- and candle-making business. Franklin admired his father and writes of how the man, though lowly in station, was well respected by his neighbors and friends. Josiah taught his son much, including right virtues and the art of debate. The latter would come to serve Franklin especially well in his later life.

Franklin became an apprentice in his brother James's print shop at the age of twelve. Indentured by contract to work there for the next eight years, Franklin was able to pursue his love of reading and books due to his new station. He read the works of Cotton Mather and Daniel Defoe and, around this time, began imitating the writing style of professional writers in an effort to improve his own. He discovered a book "by one Tryon, recommending a Vegetable Diet," which Franklin pursued for a brief time. He became skeptical of religion, attempted to become less arrogant, and began writing anonymous articles that were published in his brother James's newspaper, the *New England Courant*. James printed the pieces, not knowing his younger brother had

penned them. Franklin's brother was a severe master to his brother/apprentice Benjamin, who notes, "I fancy his harsh and tyrannical Treatment of me, might be a means of impressing me with that Aversion to arbitrary Power that has stuck to me thro' my whole Life." His unexpected success in writing gave Franklin the confidence to quit the print shop and secretly move to Philadelphia.

In 1723, seventeen-year-old Franklin found work with a man named Keimer who ran a Philadelphia print shop. He received a letter from his brother-in-law, Robert Holmes, who asked Franklin to return home to Boston. Franklin's eloquently written reply was read by Pennsylvania Governor William Keith, who was impressed by Franklin's writing ability. Franklin recounts that Keith said, "I appear'd a young Man of promising Parts, and therefore should be encouraged: The Printers at Philadelphia were wretched ones, and if I would set up there, he made no doubt I should succeed." Keith visited Franklin at Keimer's print shop and offered to help the young man set up his own printing business. Franklin first decided to travel to England to make connections with professionals in book-selling and stationery businesses there. He asked Deborah Read to marry him, but she refused because of his upcoming travels. Franklin asked his friend James Ralph, a fellow writer and lover of debate, to accompany him to England.

In London, Franklin wrote a pamphlet titled *A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain*. He also broke off his friendship with Ralph over a misunderstanding with Ralph's girlfriend. Though Franklin found some measure of success in London as a writer, he returned to Philadelphia in 1726, after eighteen months abroad. He took over Keimer's print shop and started his own newspaper. He began practicing Deism and formed a group called the Junto. Members of the group convened every Friday night to discuss topics related to morality and philosophy. He fell out with Keimer and opened his own printing shop in 1728. Franklin became the official printer for the Pennsylvania assembly and began making a substantial amount of money, which he used to expand his newspaper operation. After writing a pamphlet called *The Nature and Necessity of a Paper Currency*, Franklin was chosen by the legislature to print the money, which brings in even more income. Franklin married Deborah Read and began a subscription library, his "first project of a public nature."

Part 2

Part 2 begins with letters urging Franklin to finish and publish his memoirs. The first, from Abel James, was written in 1782. The second, from Benjamin Vaughn, is dated January 1783. Vaughn, after having read the outline and sections of early text, encourages Franklin to finish the book because it would offer direction to people hoping to better their lives. He also points out that wide publication of the *Autobiography* would show the British how industrious and virtuous the Americans were. Further, it would prove that America held great economic promise. Franklin writes in 1784, "It is some time since I receiv'd the above Letters, but I have been too busy till now to think of complying with the Request they contain." Writing from Paris immediately after the American Revolution, Franklin is seventy-eight years old by the time he picks up where he left off.

The library he started in 1730 was a huge success. He writes that "Reading became fashionable," as a result of people's access to books. He hesitated to take full credit for the system, sensing some resentment about his growing good fortune. He and his wife started a family that Franklin supported by continuing to be frugal and industrious. Around this time he embraced a personal challenge:

I conceiv'd the bold and arduous Project of arriving at moral Perfection. I wish'd to live without committing any Fault at any time…. As I knew, or thought I knew, what was right and wrong, I did not see why I might not always do the one and avoid the other. But I soon found I had undertaken a Task of more Difficulty than I had imagined.

This project involved listing thirteen virtues, to be mastered in order, perfecting each one before moving on to the next. Franklin decided that temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity, and humility are the most important virtues. Once he began his project, he was not troubled by realizing just how many faults he had, noting, "A benevolent Man should allow a few Faults in himself, to keep his Friends in Countenance." He hopes those who read *The Autobiography* "may follow the Example and reap the Benefit" of his experiment.

Part 3

Part 3 begins, "I am now about to write at home, August 1788[,] but cannot have the help expected from my Papers, many of them being lost in the War." He picks up from 1731, the year he started planning "*a great and extensive Project*." He quotes from a paper ("accidentally preserved") from 1731, in which he outlines a "Party for Virtue," organized "by forming the Virtuous and good Men of all Nations into a regular Body, to be govern'd by suitable good and wise Rules, which good and wise Men may probably be more unanimous in their Obedience to, than common People are to common Laws." The party would be called "the Society of the *Free and Easy*" and would be based on the essential principles of major religions. All party members would have to subscribe to Franklin's thirteen virtues and come to each meeting prepared with a plan for bettering the human race. Because of his devotion to several public and private occupations, he did not have the time or energy to establish the party.

A year later, Franklin began writing *Poor Richard's Almanack*, which featured information typical of annual almanacs, but which also contained the author's aphorisms—adages or memorable words of wisdom. He recalls that "I endeavor'd to make it both entertaining and useful, and it accordingly came to be in such Demand that I reap'd considerable profit from it," during its twenty-five-year run. Franklin considered the *Almanack* a means with which to instruct the common people; this same interest drove Franklin to dedicate parts of his newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, to educational purposes as well.

As he aged, Franklin became more politically motivated and began to advocate the education of women. He learned several languages and played chess regularly. He

made amends with his brother, James, in Boston. In 1736, his four-year-old son died of small pox, a fate he hoped to spare other parents from enduring:

I long regretted bitterly and still regret that I had not given it to him by Inoculation; This I mention for the Sake of Parents, who omit that Operation on the Supposition that they should never forgive themselves if a Child died under it; my Example showing that the Regret may be the same either way, and that therefore the safer should be chosen.

In 1736, the original twelve members of the Junto decided that each should go and start his own group to increase their "Power of doing Good." Franklin became Clerk of the General Assembly of Pennsylvania that same year, and the year after, Deputy Postmaster of Philadelphia; he allows that both official posts enhanced his private businesses. Through the Junto, he advocated a property tax to better fund the police and formed the Union Fire Company, the first American fire department. With these many successes under his belt, Franklin became famous.

Franklin invented a room-warming stove in 1742 and refused to patent it in hopes that it would more widely proliferate. He wrote *Plain Truth* (1744), a pamphlet calling for colonial unity. Franklin became Commissioner of the Peace and a member of the Pennsylvania Assembly and advised the construction of a Presbyterian meeting house. In 1749, he wrote a pamphlet titled *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania*, which launched interest in planning an educational academy. Franklin chose members of the Junto to become a board of trustees and the Academy (now the University of Pennsylvania) opened in 1753. He organized a street-sweeping system, set a street paving initiative into action, and designed street lights, all because he believes "Human Felicity is produc'd not so much by great Pieces of good Fortune that seldom happen, as by little Advantages that occur every Day." Franklin was awarded honorary degrees from Harvard and Yale. During this time, he also rose to the rank of Postmaster General of America.

In 1754, the Seven Years' War erupted in Europe and the French and Indian War erupted in America. This set Franklin to the task of drawing up plans to defend the colonies and for setting up a wartime government. He developed a plan to fund the armed forces, which began to cause great concern among the English government. They saw the colonies becoming self-sufficient and so they began sending British forces to the colonies. Franklin implored those with extra horses and wagons to relinquish them to the war effort, and he began preparing care packages for fighting soldiers. He spent a good deal of time in the field and became a financial commissioner in charge of distributing funds to organize a militia. He spent any extra time, effort, and money on keeping the troops supplied.

Franklin focuses the end of part 3 less on his military experiences and more on his scientific experiments, which he conducted at home in Philadelphia. He published a paper "on the Sameness of Lightning with Electricity," which caused much debate and notoriety:

M. Delor … undertook to repeat what he call'd the *Philadelphia Experiments*, and after they were performed before the King and Court, all the Curious of Paris flocked to see them. I will not swell this Narrative with an Account of that capital Experiment nor the infinite Pleasure I receiv'd in the Success of a similar one I made soon after with a Kite at Philadelphia.

He was awarded a medal of honor from the Royal Society and became a member. As a member of the Pennsylvania's legislative assembly, he often settled disputes between the "Proprietary"—those who the king had granted property and appointed to govern in the colony—and local interests. With such success and repute in that role, Franklin was elected as the assembly's agent to go to England and petition the king against the over-reaching power of his deputies in America. He arrived in London on July 27, 1757.

Part 4

The shortest segment of *The Autobiography*, part 4 recounts Franklin's trip to London in 1757. Lord Granville, the president of the King's Privy Council, informed Franklin that "the King is the legislator of the colonies." Franklin realized the English view is at odds with the colonial view of their relationship:

I had always understood from our Charters, that our Laws were to be made by our Assemblies, to be presented indeed to the King for his Royal Assent, but that being once given the King could not repeal or alter them…. [Granville] assur'd me I was totally mistaken…. [H]is Lordship's Conversation … a little alarm'd me as to what might be the Sentiments of the Court concerning us.

He tried to argue for fairness in England's taxation in the colonies, but the trip was mainly unsuccessful. Upon his return to Philadelphia, the Assembly acknowledged his efforts to promote American interests abroad. Franklin dies before he is able to finish *The Autobiography*, which recounts events only up to the year 1763.

Chapter I

Chapter I Summary and Analysis

The book opens with a letter from Franklin to his son, William. Franklin explains that the memoir is a genealogical record, since it took Franklin much labor to track all the family history. It is also perhaps useful since Franklin has become famous over the years. Benjamin Franklin is unusual in that he is able to be honest about his achievements without being falsely humble nor arrogant. He says he would change the details of some things to look better, but does not have the writing talent to do so. Franklin does not see anything wrong with a little boasting, especially if he thanks God for the vanity first. Franklin learned that for three-hundred years, the oldest son has been apprenticed to a smithing trade, although some eventually found other interests, such as lawyer or politician.

His family had to hide their religion in England by reading the English Bible in secrecy. Josiah Franklin, Benjamin's father, took his wife and three children to America, where they had four more children. Josiah and his second wife had ten children, bringing the total offspring to seventeen. Benjamin was the youngest son, but had two younger sisters. Franklin's education was sporadic. He believed his parents wanted to"tithe" him to the church, but Josiah's could not afford schooling for Ben, so hired tutors for math and writing. The boy was good at writing, but failed math, so his father put him to work in his tallow-chandler and soap business. Benjamin hated the trade and dreamed of going to sea instead. Franklin says his father was an "agreeable" man, but very traditional, serious, and important. Franklin admired his father, who not only received visits from important noble men, but also from friends who would seek his advice.

To keep Ben from running away foolishly, Josiah sent him to apprentice with Ben's brother, James, who was a printer. Benjamin loved to read and took to the printing trade. Ben's father indentured Ben as James' apprentice until Ben was twenty one. Benjamin still dreamed of going to sea but knew this was a better job. He had an almost unlimited access to books. Ben befriends a "bookish" boy named John Collins who would spend engage in heated debates with Ben. The boys parted ways, not to see each other again for a while after an argument about the equal education of women (Ben was for). They continued their argument via correspondence. Ben took a copy of a book called "The Spectator" and set out to mimic its writing style and develop a persuasive style.

Ben read about a vegetable diet and decided to try it. He asked his brother to give him half the money he spent feeding Ben with the agreement that Ben would feed himself, and he used half of his meal allowance for books. Ben's self-taught eduction ranged from mathematics to ship navigation. James started his own newspaper in the early 1720s, "The New England Courant." Ben tested his skills by writing anonymous letters to the Courant, which were published and complemented by James and his friends. Franklin says that James had a temper and sometimes beat Ben, which Ben had

always resented. When James was jailed for one month for not revealing a source, Ben successfully ran the paper. James was ordered not to print the paper called, "The New England Courant." Rather than change the name of the paper, James made Ben the owner. Ben and his brother argued often and Ben threatened to leave and his brother replied that he would keep Ben from any other paper. This was Benjamin's final incentive to leave home and go to New York. Running away was illegal, so Ben had Collins tell the ship captain that Benjamin had gotten a girl pregnant and was running away to avoid marrying her. Ben sold his books to pay for the fare.

Chapter II

Chapter II Summary and Analysis

In New York, Ben,met William Bradford, the first printer in Pennsylvania, who did not have any work but referred him to his son in Philadelphia. The trip was a rough one. When he arrived in Philadelphia, he was hungry, exhausted, dirty and disheveled from the journey. When asked for 3 pennies worth of something, the baker handed him three giant rolls, which is when Ben realizes that not all the colonies were culturally identical. Walking down the road that day, Benjamin Franklin passed his future wife for the first time. Benjamin located Andrew Bradford, and although Andrew did not have work, he let Ben stay with him until he could find steady work. In the meantime, old Mr. Andrews brought him to his son's competitor, a new printer by the name of Mr. Keimer. Keimer did not know that old Mr. Andrews was his competitor's father until after he agreed to give Ben work. Ben worked between the two printers, noticing that neither of them had a good sense of the printing business. Ben moved to board with Mr. Read, his future father-in-law.

Franklin loved his new life in Philadelphia and becomes quite popular. Benjamin's brother-in-law, Robert Holmes, found Ben in Philadelphia and encouraged him to return home. He said Ben's family was sick with worry and said go back. The governor of the province was with Holmes and took a special interest in Ben. He was impressed with the Ben thought Ben's destiny was setting up his own print shop in Philadelphia. Ben left Philadelphia with a letter of recommendation from the governor with the hope that this referral would gain Josiah Franklin's consent. It did not. Ben's family was happy to see him, but his father would not allow him to set up his own shop, saying Ben was too young and irresponsible. However, he was impressed enough by the governor's letter to allow Benjamin to return to Philadelphia to work for a few more years. He said that if Ben saved a good portion of what he needed for his own business, Josiah might consider helping him out.

Benjamin's first went to New York to meet up with Collins. Ben brought Collins' books, along with his own, to New York. Books were quite a rare, so when Benjamin arrived in New York, the governor was interested in meeting this young man with such a large collection of books. Ben discovers that Collins had a drinking and gambling problem. Ben pays Collins' way from New York to Philadelphia. Collins breaks his word several times to Ben and the two men stopped getting along so well. After Ben throws Collins overboard from a boat, the two men became estranged. In Philadelphia, Benjamin tells the governor that his father would not pay his way. The governor promised to fund Benjamin's print shop and asked Ben to make a list of what he needed. He then told the boy that it would be better if he went to London to pick out his equipment himself. Ben spent his last months in Philadelphia with three new friends, Charles Osborne, Joseph Watson, and James Ralph, and courting his landlord's daughter, Miss Read. James Ralph accompanies Ben to London. The governor provides a letter of credit for Ben to

buy what he needed in London. Franklin should not have trusted the governor; he later found out that the governor's promises were usually worthless.

Chapter III

Chapter III Summary and Analysis

In London, Ben learns that the governor has an unsavory reputation and the letters of credit were worthless. A contact advised Ben to get a job, saying that he could learn a lot from the printers in London and would be far better off when he set up his own shop. Ben immediately got a job at Palmer's print house. He borrowed books from a shop, which later inspired him to set up a public library system in the States. Ben spends all his earnings on housing and entertainment. His new friend, Ralph, admitted he had no intention of returning to his wife and that he had no money. He was a good friend to Ben, but an expensive one. Ralph used Ben's name to get a job and cheated Ben out of money. The end of their friendship was actually a relief to Ben. Ben quit Palmer's and began working for an even better print shop called Watts.

At Watts, Franklin gives up part of his pay for a community beer till. Since Ben did not drink, he thought this was unfair but paid the money to avoid harassment. When he was promoted from the press room to the composing room, the ante was considerably higher, and he refused to pay. As he was promoted, the ante was upped until he refused to pay it. The men continually played pranks on Ben until he caved in and began paying the beer ante again, although he convinced several men to stop drinking, thus lowering the required payment. After eighteen months, Ben decided to return to Pennsylvania. He was persuaded to become Mr. Denham's clerk in a business that the man planned to set up in America. Franklin recalls little regret over his stay in England.

Chapter IV

Chapter IV Summary and Analysis

Back in Philadelphia, the former governor was so ashamed to see Ben, he walked right by him without a word. Miss Read, Ben found, had married another man, but left the man shortly afterward because she was not happy. Mr. Keimer had expanded his business to include a stationary shop, though Ben did not think it was of a much better quality than the print house.

Mr. Denham, his employer was wonderful, but he died suddenly. Ben accepted employment with Mr. Keimer, who offered higher wages. After putting the print shop back in order, Mr. Keimer becomes disagreeable. Ben's co-worker, Meredith, convinces Ben to hold on a little longer. Meredith's father offers to finance a print shop for Ben. While waiting for machinery to outfit his shop, Ben printed money for the New Jersey government, where he met a number of politically-oriented and influential men. Franklin interjects at this point that when thinking about religion, he settled on the idea that "truth, sincerity, and integrity" were the key factors of a successful and happy human being. This belief became his true religion. The new print supplies arrived, and Meredith and Ben gave Keimer their notice and set up shop nearby. Their first customer was referred to them by Ben's friend, George House, to whom Ben was eternally grateful.

Chapter V

Chapter V Summary and Analysis

Franklin became a member of a club called the JUNTO, which was an intellectual group that discussed philosophy, politics, morals, and other current events. One advantage of the club was to network with other intellectuals, specifically those who could provide references and services at a later time. He received referrals from club members to his new business, but alsothe club helped support his political efforts and other excursions of Franklin's life. George Webb , an old friend, asked for a job and Franklin said he had no work, but was planning to start a newspaper, at which time Ben would hire Webb. Webb told Keimer of Ben's plan, and Webb started a newspaper. Ben wrote a number of controversial letters to Bradford's newspaper (Keimer's rival) under an anonymous name. The letters were so entertaining, Bradford's paper became even more popular. Ben later bought Keimer's paper when it began to fail. Franklin's newspaper was not only informative, but entertaining and circulation grew. Meredith's father did not pay for the business as he had promised and Meredith and Ben agreed to go their separate ways; Meredith to farming, and Ben staying in the printing business where several friends helped him with the start-up debt that Meredith's father did not pay off.

Ben wrote a pamphlet called, "The Nature and Necessity of Paper Currency," a raging debate at the time. The house legalized paper tender and awarded Franklin the contract to print the money. Again, Ben's writing education and talent in convincing others of a path, paid off. Keimer's business failed, and he sold it to one of Ben's old apprentice's, David Henry. Henry turned down an offer of a partnership with Franklin, but eventually through poor money management, Henry had to close his business. Ben's last competition, Bradford, who not only had a print shop, but ran an unreliable postal service. This mention here of the postal service forshadows the eventual position that Franklin assumes as Postmaster General.

Ben dated and nearly married a woman, until her family decided that his print business was destined to fail and forbade the courtship. The Read family welcomed Ben, who regretted Miss Read's unfortunate marriage. Ben felt sorry for her and set to resume their old relationship. During one of the JUNTO meetings, the members decided to pool their books together in one place. Though this borrowing system failed, it sparked Franklin's interest and he eventually created the first public subscription library. This eventually became the public library system of today.

Chapter VI

Chapter VI Summary and Analysis

In his first library system, subscribers would pay the price of one book and sign a promissory note, agreeing to pay twice the value of any book they failed to return. The library became a popular hang-out for bored youth, who benefited greatly from their exposure to books. Ben took great pride in living frugally. Although Benjamin believed in God, he seldom attended church. One friend, a minister, convinced him to attend a few sermons. The church-serving sermons turned Ben off because his idea of a "good" human being was someone who treated others with respect, someone who was truthful, and someone who was hard working. So he stopped going to church and celebrated religion privately, in his own way.

The reader might notice that Benjamin Franklin was a perfectionist. Very rarely, if ever, did he give up. Ben fulfilled his personal promise of self-study by working to become a better person. He concentrated on the thirteen virtues, working his way to accomplish them all. He even set up a schedule for himself to perfect a different virtue each week. He discovered in the end was that he was not perfect and did not wish to be and was a happier man for that.

Chapter VII

Chapter VII Summary and Analysis

Benjamin Franklin wrote the Poor Richard's Almanac in 1732, and hardly a household in Philadelphia was without a copy. The Almanac, as the newspaper, was printed to provide information, not gossip or politics.

A new preacher arrived of whom Franklin approved because his sermons supported virtuous values. Ben wrote pamphlets in the preacher's favor and a few articles in the Gazette, but soon Ben and the rest of the community found out that the preacher's sermons were all plagiarized from English scholars. In the end, the preacher left Philadelphia. Franklin learned French, Italian, and Spanish during his lifetime. He says that it would make more sense to start at the beginning and first learn Greek. Knowing Greek would make Latin easier to learn, which makes it easier to learn other Romance languages. Ben visits Boston and sees his brother, James, who is dying and who asked Ben to take his ten-year-old son as a printing apprentice. Ben taught the boy everything there was to know about the business and sent him back to Boston with a new set of types. Franklin believes this was a debt repaid to his brother for running away so young. Ben's own son died of smallpox at age four and Ben was sorry he had not had the boy immunized.

In 1736, Benjamin Franklin was appointed clerk of the General Assembly, where he had a chance to follow the Assembly's activities closely. Ben assisted the postmaster of Philadelphia, a position that improved the circulation and distribution of his newspaper greatly. Franklin undertook the improvement of law enforcement, including appointing non-biased policemen and levying a city tax to pay them. Franklin then lobbied for a city fire department. Franklin boasts that though other cities quickly caught started fire departments, his was still the best.

Chapter VIII

Chapter VIII Summary and Analysis

A new preacher named Mr. Whitefield arrived from Ireland in 1739. He preached hell fire and drew a large following. He build a large building meant for anyone of any sect or reason who had something to say to a large mass of Philadelphia's people. He moved on to Georgia, where he set up an orphanage for children whose indentured servant parents had died. Franklin noted the absence of a defense system in Pennsylvania. Franklin established a militia to protect the English colonies against the Spanish and French. There were many Quakers did not believe in war, but surprisingly few opposed the militia because the militia was created for defense.

In 1742, Franklin invented the Franklin stove, which became extremely popular, and which he refused to patent, saying people should have free access to something that improves their lives. Eventually, another inventor modified Franklin's design and patented it.

Chapter IX

Chapter IX Summary and Analysis

Franklin instituted a public school system, which used the building that Mr. Whitefield built. The school was a great success and eventually it became the University of Philadelphia and much later, the University of Pennsylvania. By this time, Franklin had sold off most of his businesses, though he was still on the payroll to receive profit shares from them. He now had "leisure" to pursue his most obsessive interest——the pursuit of perpetual knowledge. Franklin was intrigued by "Dr. Spence's" demonstration of electrical power and set off to learn more for himself. He bought Dr. Spence's equipment to have better hands-on knowledge. Franklin's civic duties kept him from pursuing his studies.

In 1751, a friend of Franklin's, Dr. Bond, proposed the idea of a town hospital. Franklin spoke on the doctor's behalf. Benjamin appealed to the Assembly for funding. Franklin proposed that the Assembly contribute an amount equal to that of the subscribers. The Assembly agreed, and soon there were so many subscribers, the hospital funding was more than they initially planned. Next, Franklin set out to clean the streets of Philadelphia. He proposed the communal hiring of street sweepers and the use of street lamps He took a brief trip to London and proposed to clean their streets as well. Franklin was appointed the Postmaster and had the opportunity to travel around America. Cambridge College and Yale College awarded Franklin honorary degrees.

Chapter X

Chapter X Summary and Analysis

France had increasingly become a threat against the American colonies, so Franklin wrote a proposal for the colonies to join as one, under one government and as one nation. A group of men organized an agreeable plan. A grand-president would be appointed by the crown. The president would confer with a council, who would represent the people from the different colonies. The crown rejected the plan and proposed to fund an army, but America would have to repay the money through a special tax. The colonies rejected this idea and herein begins the tensions and conflicts that eventually lead to the Revolutionary War. The first problem occurred in Massachusetts, where France was most aggressive at the time. Massachusetts asked New York for assistance and the two colonies help each other without getting the crown involved.

The British government was suspicious of the colonies, worried they would unite and become too powerful, so they sent two military troops led by General Braddock, both for defense from hostile countries and to keep the colonies in line. Franklin met the General in Maryland and gained the general's trust and gave his assurance that the colonies had no menacing plans against the British government. Supplies were in short supply for Braddock and his troops. Franklin found provisions for the officers of Braddock's troops, something about which the general was very pleased. Earlier in the book, Franklin wrote that if you perform an act of kindness for a person, that person will return the favor when a future need arises. Franklin and the others realized that something was stirring between them and the British, so Franklin acts to diffuse the situation.

Franklin finds that the General Braddock is overconfident, who scoffs at Franklin's advice. The British troops' march was disastrous where most of the men were killed or wounded, and the rest fled back to Philadelphia. Franklin notes that this was the biggest indication of how well British forces could defend the American colonists. Additionally, British troops were barbaric toward the inhabitants. Unlike the French, they stripped farms and homes of all their food and other goods, abusing them if they refused or complained. The French only confiscated a pig or a chicken along their route. All the people who loaned horses and carriages to the British at Franklin's behest sued Franklin for twenty-thousand pounds. Fortunately, the British army released the payment; otherwise, Franklin would have gone broke. Another expense that the people wanted returned was for a firework display that the Americans had funded for the British troops' victory. Franklin implied that the fireworks might be needed sometime in the future. The reader can probably guess for what the fireworks would soon be used.

Chapter XI

Chapter XI Summary and Analysis

After the failure of the British army, the colonies were even more anxious to develop and fund a private militia. The people once again appealed to the Assembly, who agreed to a taxpayer supported militia. The first task was to defend the northwest territories, where enemies were plenty. When they got there, however, they found that those territories had already taken it upon themselves to set up a defense system. The bishop there implied that not all the people were entirely trusting of England's word, and common sense told them to look out for themselves. In leaving this area, they were approached by eleven farmers asking for guns for protection. Franklin's men complied, but it rained shortly afterward, and ten of the farmers were killed by Indians because their guns got wet and wouldn't go off.

Franklin's troops moved on to Gnadenhutten, where they found most of the inhabitants dead. They built a fort for protection and buried the dead more properly. Franklin was then summoned back to Philadelphia by both the governor and the Assembly. At this time, England was becoming more suspicious of the colonies' intent to form their own government, especially when Franklin was escorted to a ferry one day by an honor guard, something that was only seen in royalty.

Franklin takes a moment here to talk about his electrical experimentation. He goes into a bit more detail about his encounter with Dr. Spence and how the concept of electricity intrigued Franklin enough to purchase his own equipment in order to learn more. He wrote papers of all his discoveries. His papers became famous all around the globe, so much that renowned scholars began to doubt the very existence of a man called Benjamin Franklin. He wrote a book about his findings, one which gained fast popularity and made Franklin a celebrity. He mentions his kite experiment, which he was proud to see written about many electricity history books. Furthermore, he was given an honorary membership in the Royal Society in London and a gold medal.

Chapter XII

Chapter XII Summary and Analysis

Captain Denny was the new governor sent over from England. He brought Franklin's gold medal with him, presented it to Franklin, then pulled him aside to have a heart-to-heart. He confided that he was asked by the British government to make friends with Franklin because he was a person of influence. Franklin made no promises to the governor, but said he would follow his usual policy of advocating any cause in which he believed. While getting acquainted with Captain Denny, Franklin found out that his friend Ralph was not only still alive but considered one of the best political writers in England.

There was soon much hostility and frustration between the Assembly and the governor, and Franklin was chosen to travel to England to appeal to the King's court regarding the matter of who was in charge. But as Franklin was readying to leave, Lord Loudoun arrived from England, saying that he was sent to settle things without bothering the King. The governor and Franklin sat down with Loudoun to discuss their arguments. For the Assembly, Franklin argued that the colonists had certain rights, and the governor argued that he was assigned specific duties, and the Assembly must follow his instructions. Things were not settled satisfactorily, so Franklin set out on his voyage anyway. Unfortunately, all his belongings had already sailed to England with the ship that Franklin missed because of Loudoun's visit. Not only did he lose his belongings, but he was detained in New York for months, another unexpected expense. While stuck in New York, Franklin presented Loudoun with an account of all the expenses he incurred supporting Braddock and his troops. He was not repaid for any of these hardships.

When they finally set sail, it was a long and slow journey, full of ship delays and other problems. Franklin describes the captain's pride of his ship and all the ironic flaws that caused their delay. Whatever happened in England was not recorded, however. The autobiography ends with the sentence, "We arrived in London the 27th of July, 1757."

Characters

Benjamin Franklin

Benjamin Franklin is the author, narrator , and main character of his autobiography. He was a printer by trade, but a major contributor to the development of the United States. By hobby, Franklin was a writer, until his writing became so influential, he was called upon to write many important documents throughout his lifetime. Benjamin Franklin was an advocate for further learning. To contribute all his knowledge to others, he wrote public pamphlets on every thought and idea that came into his head. Franklin ran a newspaper, where he wrote more informational pieces. Additionally, he wrote a number of books. One book was an almanac of interesting facts and how-to's. Later in his life, he wrote a book on the experimentation of electricity.

Franklin was also someone who brought constant improvement to the new world. He started a public school system, a community fire department, a subscription library, and a local police department that was paid for with taxes. He was one of the influences that called for a unified defense army when the colonies were under attack from France. He improved street sweeping and street lighting and invented a more efficient indoor stove than was available at the time. Franklin invented bifocals when he got tired of changing his glasses all the time. Of his most memorable contributions were his experiments regarding electricity, where he proved that electricity could be attracted and confined.

Benjamin Franklin was inquisitive and resourceful, using social networking skills to accomplish his many goals. Although he tries to be modest in his autobiography, Franklin's pride shines through as he describes his many accomplishments to an already-impressed reading audience. Benjamin Franklin was also a perfectionist, a trait that can be annoying in some people, but definitely earned Franklin an admirable character.

James Franklin

James Franklin was Benjamin Franklin's older brother. Benjamin apprenticed with James in his early printing career, but Ben believed his brother to be hard-headed and abusive. James was not one to praise Benjamin and often got angry and even physically violent with him. Although Benjamin did not get along well with James, he did enjoy the printing business and did what he could to improve it. This was especially possible when James was arrested for writing a controversial article in his newspaper and refusing to reveal his source. Benjamin took charge of the print shop in James' absence, making improvements that James did not appreciate.

When he was fifteen, Benjamin ran away, creating long-term animosity between himself and his brother. It wasn't until many years later, when James was on his deathbed, did the two make up. Benjamin promised James that he would apprentice James' son in the

printing business. First, he sent the boy to school for a few years before teaching him the trade. He did this to make up for leaving James without a helper for all those years.

Josiah Franklin

Josiah Franklin was Benjamin Franklin's father. As Benjamin describes, he was an "agreeable man." Josiah was the father of seventeen children, seven from his first wife and ten from his second. Because he had so many children, he was constantly worried about their welfare and early on, planned each child's trade in advance. His plans for Benjamin were never quite right. First, he planned to give Ben to the clergy, but then decided to train him in the candle and soap making business. This didn't work out very well either. Ben constantly talked about going out to sea. Worried that his son would run off to the sea, making a very poor life choice, Josiah sent Benjamin to apprentice with his brother, James.

Benjamin Franklin describes his father with great admiration. He remembers his father as having many friends, all of whom came to him regularly for advice. Josiah was a respectable man, but also strict and serious. When Benjamin returned home as a teenager after having run away years earlier, his father refused to support Ben's quest to start his own print shop. He believed his son was too young and irresponsible to run his own business successfully. At the same time, Josiah admitted that he was impressed that Benjamin had gotten along so well while he was gone and had become acquainted with so many important people. In Benjamin's early years, Josiah was very supportive of his son's desire to perfect his writing and debating skills. He helped the process a bit by proofreading Ben's work and making suggestions for improvement.

John Collins

Collins was Benjamin's best friend in his youth. Both boys were avid readers and aggressive debaters. Often the two boys would get together for no other purpose than to argue about some point of public interest. Their debates were so in depth, they began writing the arguments to each other in letters. This is the point when Benjamin Franklin sought to improve his writing. He believed he could be more influential in his debating skills if his writing was more professional.

It was Collins who helped Franklin run away at age fifteen. They continued to write to each other, until Franklin returned to his home town a few years later. Collins decided to go back to Philadelphia with Franklin, but by that time, Collins was a gambling, irresponsible drunk. Franklin supported Collins financially for a while, but the two got into a heated fight one day and parted ways forever.

Samuel Keimer

Keimer was one of two printers established in Philadelphia when Franklin ran away there as a teenager. He worked for Keimer for years until Franklin was ready to branch

out on his own and posed a threat to Keimer's business. The two got along very well at first, but Franklin thought Keimer's printing skills were poor. Keimer seemed to be aware of this, too, because he used Benjamin by offering him high wages for just long enough to clean up the business. Then he complained that the wages were too high, and he and Franklin argued and parted ways. Every so often, Keimer would try to spark up the friendship when he saw Franklin's success as a benefit to himself. Keimer and Franklin became competitors in the printing business and also in the newspaper business. But Keimer's success relied on old customers, while Franklin's was based on pure talent.

Andrew Bradford

Andrew Bradford was one of the two printers established in Philadelphia when Franklin moved there as a teenager. Although he did not have work for Ben, he allowed him to board at his home, while Bradford's father helped Ben get a job with the competitor, Keimer. Like Keimer, Bradford's printer skills was not up to par according to Franklin. When Franklin started his own print shop, Bradford became a fierce competitor.

James Ralph

Franklin met Ralph in Philadelphia when he returned after visiting his hometown of Boston for a brief time. Ralph was a fair poet but a terrible writer overall. Like Franklin's friend Collins, Ralph became an alcoholic, a freeloader, and a burden. With no money on hand, he went to England with Franklin when Franklin sought to order printing supplies for his new print shop. But no one would hire Ralph in England, so he continued to mooch off of Franklin. He borrows a lot of money from Ben, but never paid it back. At some point, Ralph left town to look for work. He left his girlfriend behind. He found a job at a university, but only because he used Benjamin Franklin's name and credentials. In his memoir, Franklin seemed more amused by this than angry.

In his absence, Ralph's girlfriend turned to Franklin for comfort (it is not clear from Franklin's evasive account, whether it was an innocent friendship or something more). When Ralph returned, he and Franklin argued over the girl, causing their friendship to end.

John Read

John Read was Franklin's landlord in Philadelphia. When Franklin worked for the printer, Keimer, he originally lived with another printer, Andrew Bradford. Keimer did not like Franklin living with his competitor and arranged for his housing with Mr. Read. Mr. Read was the father of the girl who would one day become Franklin's wife.

Governor William Keith

Keith was one of Franklin's first upper-class acquaintances. The governor saw great potential in Ben Franklin. He encouraged the boy to open up his own print shop and to return home to ask his father to support his endeavor. When Josiah Franklin refused assistance, the governor promised Ben that he would fund the business himself. He sent Ben to England to purchase whatever printing supplies he needed, promising to send a letter of credit with Franklin to pay for it. Unfortunately, when Franklin arrived in England, he found out that Governor Keith was known for making promises he could not keep. The Governor's credit and his reputation was worthless in England. Because of this, Franklin was stuck in England for eighteen months before he could afford to return to Philadelphia.

Miss (Deborah) Read

Referred to as only "Miss Read" in his autobiography, Deborah Read was Franklin's wife. He met her when he first went to Philadelphia and lived under the same roof with her when he boarded at Mr. Read's house. When Franklin left for England, he promised Miss Read he would return and marry her. But while he was there, he only wrote one letter. She eventually gave up and married another man. The marriage was a disaster and her first husband eventually went missing and then died. Franklin regretted that he neglected Miss Read, noting that if he had written her more or returned sooner, she would not have had to go through such a rough time with her first husband.

Mr. Denham

A Quaker man who Franklin met on the ship to England. When Franklin discovered that he had been misled by Governor Keith, it was Denham that advised and mentored Franklin, helping him make the right decisions to survive alone in England. He was the one who encouraged Franklin to return to Philadelphia after his year and a half absence. He worked for Denham until Denham's death a few years later.

Objects/Places

The New England Courant

The New England Courant was the newspaper that Franklin's brother started in Boston. According to Franklin's autobiography, it was the second paper to start in America. It was in the Courant where Franklin first tested his persuasive writing skills. He wrote letters to the paper under a false name. The letters were printed in the Courant and became very popular. When Franklin's brother, James, was arrested for printing a controversial issue and not revealing his source, he was forbidden by law to run a newspaper in his name. So James continued to run his paper, but changed the name to Benjamin Franklin's.

Print Type

Because metal was not yet made in America, printing supplies had to be ordered from England. The print type was a set of tiny metal letters that were arranged to spell out words and sentences. If the quality of the type deteriorated, it would be weeks before a printer could receive another set. The type was stored in a wooden case, with the capital letters in the upper case and the small letters in the lower. This is where the terms "upper case" and "lower case" came from.

Poor Richard's Almanack

Benjamin Franklin was always striving to improve life, through his inventions, his ideals, and his political opinion. To share his continued income of knowledge with the general public, he published a book called "Poor Richard's Almanack," a how-to book about everything. As with most of his earlier published works, Franklin used a pseudonym, Richard Saunders, as the narrator and knowledge-sharer of the book. "Poor Richard" was a regular, hard-working citizen, who provided tips on how to live well. It included proverbs and interesting quotes, along with how to save money and make a better life for oneself. All twenty-six of his almanacs were published and were very popular.

Franklin Stove

One of Franklin's earlier inventions, it is an iron stove that warms a room with less smoke. The stove was so highly regarded, he was offered patent rights to it. Franklin refused the patent, indicating that he invented things for the greater good of the people and that everyone should be able to enjoy them. A few years later, someone else claimed the patent for a stove of almost identical design.

Subscription Library

The subscription library was more like a book rental shop than a modern free library of today. Since there were very few book shops available in America during Franklin's time, he proposed and established a place where people paid a subscription to borrow as many books as they wanted for a short period of time. The catch was, if a subscriber did not return the book, he would have to pay twice the value of the book. Subscription libraries eventually led to tax-supported free libraries, but for an early American colony, this subscription library was a major accomplishment.

Junto

Juno began as a debate club between intellectual friends. The club had no other agenda but to present and discuss ideas. The members added interests such as poetry, reading, education, and community. Over several decades, Junto became an influential society that approved or disapproved political and public improvement. It got to the point where, every time Franklin had a new idea for improvement, he would propose and debate the idea with Junto. If the idea was approved, the whole group lobbied for its success.

Bifocals

This was another of Benjamin Franklin's inventions. He wore both near-sighted and far-sighted glasses. He grew tired of switching between them all the time and invented a pair of glasses that was half near-sighted correction and half far-sighted correction.

Fire Department

Franklin noted that most houses in his community were made of wood, which burned easily, with little or no help to save them. Franklin proposed a community fire department that would be on call, prepared with certain fire extinguishing equipment, to arrive as a group to put out whatever fire needed their help. Once the endeavor was successful in Philadelphia, other cities developed their own fire department.

Virtue

Benjamin Franklin, at some point in his life, had given up on organized religion. The teachings, he claimed, were too self-serving; the messages never quite right. It was Franklin's believe that people should work for the common good. They should be truthful, hardworking, and helpful. This is where his ideal of virtue began. Franklin set out to live a virtuous life—-basically to live life in the most positive, forward-moving manner possible. He published pamphlets of virtue, dared his friends to try it, and even

wrote a set of rules to abide by. Although he admitted it was very difficult to live by those rules, the experience really shaped him to be the successful icon he is known as today.

The Pennsylvania Gazette

When Benjamin Franklin and his former employer, Keimer, had reached the point of fierce business competitors, Franklin discussed the idea of starting his own newspaper. Keimer, wanting to beat Franklin to the chase, immediately started up The Pennsylvania Gazette, a newspaper that was meant to ruin Franklin and any attempt he made to further his business. But it was a failure. When Keimer's paper started dying out, Franklin bought it from him and turned it into a huge success. The reason it was so successful was because, by this time, Franklin had developed a reputation of being someone from whom people wanted to hear. Any word sent out by Franklin was a best seller. So his Pennsylvania Gazette was a success by popularity alone.

Electricity

Franklin became interested in electricity when a show man came to his town demonstrating the effects and elements of static electricity. Franklin purchases the man's equipment and did some experimentation of his own. He wrote a book about his discoveries, something that offended a renowned French scientist because Franklin's theories disproved his own. He wrote unanswered letters and other publishings to Franklin. Instead of Franklin replying, another famous scientist argued back, until Franklin's theories on electricity were among those most favored.

Themes

Social Networking

One of the strongest messages presented by Benjamin Franklin in his autobiography is the importance of social networking. Every chapter, every bit of information that is entered into this recount has the concept of social networking supporting it. It begins in his youth with young Ben's desire to read. He reads so much that he has a wealth of topics to discuss with other people. His first spell of social networking begins with his own childhood friends, particularly his friend, Collins. The two were avid readers and practiced their social and debating skills, working their way into a class of intellectuals. Collins and Franklin developed a whole club of readers to join them in intelligent social conversation regularly. As Ben matured, he made friendly acquaintances with everyone within his reach, "collecting" contacts that may prove beneficial for a later purpose. He made friends with governors, businessmen, preachers, apprentices, politicians, and a whole variety of influential personalities.

The reader can see how all these contacts contributed toward Benjamin Franklin's innumerable accomplishments. He seldom burned bridges, except when his acquaintances fell into a bad social light, such as his friend Collins, who became a stubborn, unemployed alcoholic, or his friend, Ralph, who plagiarized Ben's name and dishonored his girlfriend.

Without Benjamin Franklin's relentless attempts to become acquainted with all persons of influence and all persons of potential, he would not have been so easily successful in all things. The fact that so many people knew and trusted him is what awarded him their support in every endeavor. He was not an angel by any means, but from an early age, he knew the importance of having connections. His became a household name, and because of this, he was able to accomplish every goal that he set out to accomplish.

Virtue

Franklin dedicates large portions of his memoir to the practice of virtue. He does not mix virtue with religion, however. Early in his adult life, Ben decides that organized religions are more self-serving than helpful so he abandons specific religions and holds himself to his own beliefs. He believes that all men should be honest, hard working, self-reliant, and good to each other. He writes a number of papers and pamphlets, encouraging people to do all in their power to become good human beings. He constantly thrives for a better world, teaching by example rather than demand.

Ben's beliefs do pay off in the long run. He is a positive influence on his community, and he earns their trust in a variety of important matters. He is known to be a hard, responsible worker, which awards him with respectable employment and political positions. When Benjamin Franklin talks (or writes, for the most part), people listen. He

has not given them any reason to doubt or suspect him or his motives. This kind of rock-solid integrity is a very admirable characteristic and one that is difficult to fulfill for any normal human being.

But his belief of right and wrong, working for the good of one's neighbor and the honor of a friend, carried Franklin throughout his life, through his many inventions, his contributions to society, the revolution, and all the way up to his death.

Perseverance

This was Benjamin Franklin's greatest strength, the characteristic that helped him single-handedly change the world. Franklin persevered in everything he set out to do, never relenting until he reached his goals. He did not limit himself to trade or finance. When Franklin had an idea, he pursued it, and his percentage of accomplishments were high. In his autobiography, he even outlined how he arrived at each new idea and how he set out to achieve it. In fact, Franklin makes it look very simple for any average human being to get whatever it is he or she desires.

Franklin's perseverance began at a very young age, when he first learned to read. His goal then became, not only to read every book he laid his hands on, but to learn from every book as well. He set out to teach himself a wealth of skills and academic knowledge and did not stop until he was proficient. When Benjamin Franklin wanted a public library, he lobbied for one and received the needed prescriptions. When Ben wanted a police department, and later a defense force, he accomplished those as well. The lessons he has taught through perseverance are great. He shows the reader (and the world) that when people want things, they should go after them. Benjamin Franklin never sat back and waited for someone else to invent something or someone else to improve what needed improvement. He took it upon himself to change those things he wanted changed. All it required was will, action, and the ability to learn.

The Power of the Written Word

Influential, educated writing skills played a huge part in Benjamin Franklin's life. In the beginning, Franklin was not a great writer. The fact that he could write at all was a big advantage over the rest of the community, most of whom were illiterate at the time. But Franklin worked relentlessly to perfect his writing. This ever-improving skill came in handy as a young boy, when he helped to improve his brother's newspaper. It helped him attract innumerable friends of high classes and influence. Benjamin Franklin's written influence made him a respected member of his community. With only two years of formal education, Franklin's published works helped to promote his remarkable intellect.

Style

Perspective

Franklin writes his autobiography, of course, from a first person narrative. His views are 100% biased (and mostly accurate), which is something he warns about in the introduction. His biases stem from pride of himself and his accomplishments. He had seen a lot of improvement in his lifetime, most of which he contributed to. Franklin's perspectives do not seem influenced by his family; in fact, they seem to be in spite of them. While Ben's father was strict and religious, Benjamin was freethinking. He was virtuous for himself, not for a church. His father also believed that a person's trade made the person who he was. Franklin, on the other hand, believed in choosing the trade that suited who he already was. Franklin's brother, James, was short-tempered, while Franklin was sensitive and mild-mannered. Although Franklin rarely degrades any character in his book, his actions indicate that he sees flaws in other people and sets out to be "not like them." When he can't change the people, he changes himself.

Tone

The tone of Franklin's autobiography is one of mostly humor. It is like Franklin is watching his life with a laugh track in the background. Many of the events were not funny, of course, and those are approached with a sense of having learned an important lesson. There were experiences that were outrageous and unfair, but Franklin is not bitter in his writings. All the moments in his life, good and bad, shaped him to become the great man the world has come to know. Instead of showing anger at some of his less cordial acquaintances, Franklin either looks upon them with forgiveness or otherwise points out a humiliating moment for that person, turning an unpleasant account into one of amusement. Something that was severely lacking in any of his recollections is a sense of love. Franklin barely mentions his children, and when he does, it is some kind of matter-of-fact comment with no emotional commitment. A few times he mentions his wife with a mild sense of regret that he did not begin their relationship sooner or in a better way. He discusses how she suffered by his lack of correspondence while he was away in England. But that is as far as it goes. He does not come outright and say that he loved her, nor does his emotion get any stronger than that. He shows great admiration for many people who crossed his path in his lifetime. But love for his family was a missing element, although, the lack of any mention of such emotion may be that Franklin did not express private feelings publicly, not necessarily that he did not feel love for his family and friends.

Structure

The structure of this book is somewhat chaotic. Some versions divide the book into four sections while this version (MacMillan, 1914), splits it into twelve chapters. The order of

events is not exactly linear. Franklin begins by discussing his childhood, but jumps back and forth to mention more current events or written papers that the reader can refer to for more information. The autobiography was actually written in three stages. The first section was written before the revolutionary war, when Franklin's career and popularity was at its peak. After researching his own genealogical background, Franklin decided to make it easier for his own descendants by writing a memoir. He addresses this first section to his son, William, who was governor of New Jersey at the time. The next section was written after a ten-year gap, after the Revolution (which was not mentioned in the book). This portion mostly covered his quest for world and self improvement, including his goal for virtuous living. The third section covered a brief portion of his political involvement and events which led to the revolution. Because Franklin died before the memoir was finished, he never revealed his viewpoint of the American Revolution, the signing of the Declaration of Independence, and many other important events.

Throughout the book, Franklin would suddenly recall a past event or something more current; therefore, the time line tended to jump off track and jump back in the wrong place.

Historical Context

Franklin's America

The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin is still considered a literary treasure, two hundred years after its publication, for a number of reasons. First, it provides a close view of eighteenth-century colonial America through the eyes of a man who was not only present for many critical events of the time, but who made several of those events happen. *The Autobiography* is especially prized because a large segment of the population at the time could not read or write, and many of the documents that were written did not survive long enough to be studied by historians. Franklin's descriptions of eighteenth-century life give an intimate view of the intellectual, scientific, political, and religious changes that took place. Specifically, *The Autobiography* reflects eighteenth-century idealism. Franklin's intellectualism and his devotion to scientific inquiry and political advancement reflect the values of the Age of Reason. This eighteenth-century movement focused on the optimistic belief that mankind could be advanced through political and scientific means.

Because Franklin was devoted to the betterment of society, the reader learns much about the cultural and societal needs of the time. His development of a street-cleaning, street-paving, and street lighting system allows the reader to imagine what the streets of Pennsylvania in the 1720s and 1730s must have looked like. His development of the Junto shows how the intellectual elite spent their free time and how important the formation of the group would be to the United States as a whole many years later. For instance, without them, Benjamin Franklin may not have been able to get the University of Pennsylvania built or the idea of colonial unity to be widely supported. Franklin's religious beliefs change throughout the autobiography, which leads readers to ascertain that religious freedom was alive and well in the colonies. Franklin was respected for his religious views, partly because he was intellectually curious and open to a wide range of thought. His scientific experiments and inventions made plain those things eighteenth-century Americans did not have—such as heated rooms before the invention of the Franklin stove—and an understanding of electricity. Finally, the detailed record of his military experiences affords readers the opportunity to trace a proud English American's political dissention with his king, a leader he had previously respected and paid loyal service to. This is key in understanding the historical overview of the times. It is striking to consider a time when Americans, who, for the most part, willingly left the mother country to seek their fortune in a new land, still felt a connection and loyalty to England. Though Franklin does not delve deeply into the American Revolution, it is interesting to read detailed accounts of those events leading up to it.

Though books similar to *The Autobiography* had been written, the autobiographical format had yet to catch on outside the realm of religious tracts in the eighteenth century. This means that Franklin's memoir defined an entirely new literary genre that has gone on to influence every generation after him. It could be said, too, that his insistence on

treating the book as a guide to assist others in bettering themselves, as he had done, influenced a whole other genre: the self-help book.

The Enlightenment

The Enlightenment was a seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuryintellectual movement that celebrated the power of human reason. Enlightenment philosophy posits that human beings can ascertain certain objective truths about the universe by approaching science, government, religion, ethics, logic, and aesthetics systematically. Enlightenment thinkers sought to eradicate tyranny—especially religious and governmental tyranny—and superstition with their methodological approach, believing that irrational thought kept the world from progressing forward. Prominent Enlightenment thinkers include Isaac Newton, Thomas Paine, David Hume, Benjamin Franklin, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant. The Enlightenment and its principles inspired the American and French Revolutions, informed the tenets of classic liberalism and capitalism, and influenced many of the movements of the modern period.

The seeds of Enlightenment can be traced all the way back to the thirteenth century when Thomas Aquinas used Aristotelian logic to defend certain tenets of Christianity. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a group of French and Italian thinkers known as "humanists" emerged. They declared that proper worship of God involved worship of His finest creation: humanity. To them, anyone who celebrated human intelligence—artists, painters, scholars, architects—celebrated God's glory. Michel de Montaigne, in the sixteenth century, looked to robust non-Christian cultures and realized that morality was relative. He reasoned that non-Christians were not necessarily morally inferior to Christians just because they held different beliefs. This was a monumental shift in thinking at the time, and Enlightenment thinkers were profoundly influenced by the idea that one could borrow philosophies and laws from other cultures to improve one's own.

The Enlightenment was influenced by these philosophical events, but it was years of warfare and repression in Europe—including religious wars, witch-hunts, widespread censorship, and slavery—that finally compelled Voltaire to write about how reason could change the world and Rousseau to espouse "deism." The Enlightenment took hold in France and England in different ways, but both countries were equally affected by it. In France, the movement sparked the Revolution; in England, it caused the power of religion and of the aristocracy to gradually diminish. Intellectual leaders across the Atlantic in America, however, saw the language of Enlightenment as their language, the language of freedom, self-determination, and natural law. The foundations of the Enlightenment are, essentially, the foundations of America. The colonists, responsible for shaping a whole new country, were in a perfect position to put the ideals of the movement into effect. The "Common Sense" and "Crisis" pamphlets and the Declaration of Independence are proof of how powerfully Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson were influenced by both the English and French Enlightenment.

Pre-revolutionary America

The thirteen original American colonies originated with the settlement in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607. Georgia, the last colony settled, was established by 1732. Each was organized and governed on the authority of the king of England usually through appointed and hereditary governors with often divided loyalties. By Franklin's time, most were established and autonomous enough to resent neglect and meddling from abroad. With England and France warring on two continents by the 1750s—in Europe in the Seven Years War and in North America in the French and Indian War—the British government considered its American colonies a ripe source for fundraising through taxation. This is precisely the conflict that sent Franklin to England in 1757.

By 1763, the American colonies had advanced to the extent that ties with England seemed extraneous. The harder the Americans tried to demand independence, though, the tighter Parliament's grip. For instance, the British government imposed taxes on Americans to cover part of the cost of keeping a standing British army on American soil, supposedly to protect the colonists. In actuality, the colonists could protect themselves and saw that the presence of the "Redcoats" merely infringed on their rights and interests. They bitterly resented having to pay for that. This particular dispute officially began with the Stamp and Sugar Act and ended ten years later with the Boston Tea Party—an act of rebellion carried out by a group of Bostonians who dumped a shipment of British tea in to the harbor to protest Parliament's attempt at taxation. England countered with a series of measures known on these shores as Intolerable Acts and ordered that Massachusetts be ruled by British military leader Major General Sir Thomas Gage. Armed revolt soon followed.

This battle for freedom from England was also referred to as the American War of Independence. In his *Autobiography*, Franklin recounts very little of the war that began in 1775 and ended in 1783, despite the fact that he is considered one of its greatest statesmen, was chosen as a delegate of the Continental Congress, and was appointed to the committee that drafted the Declaration of Independence—which he signed after the Revolution was won. His influence prior to, during, and after the war cannot be overemphasized.

In 1774, the first Continental Congress met in Philadelphia and drew up non-importation and non-exportation petitions and addressed them to the king and Parliament. This was an attempt to coerce these entities to repeal the many measures known as the Intolerable Acts. The Congress also encouraged every one of the colonies' cities, towns, and counties to form committees that would serve as local authorities, or foundational revolutionary organizations, that would work closely with overseeing assemblies to take control of the militias. By shaping these forces, the colonists prepared themselves to take control of their country before the British had a chance to organize against them.

Critical Overview

At least two early readers of Franklin's "Notes of My Life" urged its author to complete and publish the work. Abel James, after having read an early manuscript, wrote a letter to Benjamin Franklin in 1782, positing,

What will the World say if kind, humane and benevolent Ben Franklin should leave his Friends and the World deprived of so pleasing and profitable a Work, a Work which would be useful and entertaining not only to a few, but to millions…. I know of no Character living nor many of them put together, who has so much in his Power as Thyself to promote a greater Spirit of Industry and early Attention to Business, Frugality and Temperance with the American Youth.

Another friend, Benjamin Vaughn, wrote in 1783,

All that has happened to you is also connected with the detail of the manners and situation of a *rising* people; and in this respect I do not think that the writings of Caesar and Tacitus can be more interesting to a true judge of human nature and society. But these, Sir, are small reasons in my opinion, compared with the chance which your life will give for the forming of future great men; and in conjunction with your Art of Virtue … of improving the features of private character, and consequently of aiding all happiness both public and domestic.

The two letters, published in the final version of *The Autobiography* at Franklin's request, do much to dissuade Franklin from believing his "several little family Anecdotes of no Importance to others" should go unpublished. Critics would later deem the work an admirable representation of eighteenth-century literature as well as an important and revolutionary memoir chronicling an entirely new historical era. Even Franklin's wooden prose would, one hundred years later, be praised by the likes of Woodrow Wilson. He writes in an early introduction,

[*The Autobiography*] is letters in business garb, literature with its apron on, addressing itself to the task, which in this country is every man's, of setting free the processes of growth, giving them facility and speed and efficacy.

The Autobiography has received its share of negative criticism, too. D. H. Lawrence, for one, faulted Franklin's materialism in Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature*:

Why then did Benjamin set up this dummy of a perfect citizen as a pattern to America? Of course, he did it in perfect good faith, as far as he knew. He thought it simply was the true ideal. But what we think we do is not very important. We never really know what we are doing. Either we are materialistic instruments, like Benjamin, or we move in the gesture of creation, from our deepest self, usually unconscious. We are only the actors, we are never wholly the authors of our own deeds or works. It is the author, the unknown inside us or outside us.

The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin was released in an unabridged audio CD entitled *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin: A Fully Rounded Portrait of the Many-Sided Franklin, Notably the Moralist, Humanitarian, Scientist, and Unconventional Human Being* on December 10, 2005. It is available through The Audio Partners.

Less specifically, modern critics have taken issue with Franklin's rampant arrogance—an annoying trait especially in one who claims to be wholly committed to humility. Others, including German sociologist Max Weber, disagree with Franklin's blatant capitalism.

Despite the criticism, Franklin's provincial, soil-based prose engagingly chronicles a critical moment in American history while revealing the thoughts of a man who played a major part in its evolution. It is important to note that *The Autobiography* is the first literary account of the American dream. Little wonder the book is often referred to as a uniquely American book, one that has helped define a nation and a people during its emergence.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

In the following excerpt, Baker argues that the self-promotion of which many critics accuse Franklin is more of a paradigm for American prosperity.

After reading the first installment of Benjamin Franklin's memoirs, Benjamin Vaughan concluded that his friend's life story would offer a fitting paradigm of American upward social mobility. "All that has happened to you," he wrote to Franklin in 1783, is "connected with the detail of the manners and situation of a *rising* people." Vaughan's insistence that Franklin's was a prototypical story of success and self-making suggested that the memoir was representative of the American experience. While the limitations of this prototype are clear to the modern reader—Vaughan spoke specifically of a "rising people" of Euro-American males with access to economic opportunities not available to others—critics have recognized nonetheless a presumption of representativeness in this text. In the words of Mitchell Breitwieser, Franklin "aspires to representative personal universality," creating a rhetorical personality by cultivating "characteristics he felt were in accord with what the age demanded." Franklin's *Autobiography*, according to William Spengemann, attempts to "represent the conclusions of his experience as being universally true and hence applicable to every life, rather than peculiar to his own case."

Recent criticism especially has located this concept of representativeness in the economic and political culture of early America. Michael Warner has maintained that Franklin effaces the particularities of his own personality in order to achieve a "republican impartiality"—refuting his own personal authority and embodying, through writing, the legitimacy of a public statesman. Grantland Rice argues that Franklin, by producing and circulating written representations of himself, suppresses the idiosyncrasies of his personality in favor of a disembodied self constituted in print; this "objectified self" (realized in letters, public proposals, treatises, newspaper articles, and, of course, the autobiography itself) takes its cues, he emphasizes, from a burgeoning capitalist economy in which the exchange of goods and money replaces interpersonal relationships.

A different concept of representativeness, I would argue, is at work in this text. In the third section of the *Autobiography*, Franklin recalls that, upon his retirement from the printing business, he repeatedly lent his own name to governmental financial schemes and projects for public improvement. His memoir, by implication, is one of those projects that bears this valuable endorsement. As both a tale of his own rise to wealth and social prominence as well as a more speculative archetype of the success *other* Americans might achieve, the *Autobiography* ultimately operates as a financial instrument—a national letter of credit endorsed by Franklin himself—that attests to the economic promise of America. As with the later public projects that depend upon the visibility, rather than the effacement, of Franklin's name, the efficacy of this national voucher derives from his personal authority. In this sense, the *Autobiography* is representative not as a generic tale of an ordinary American experience but rather as a story of *exemplary* success that uses Franklin's experience to advocate, like a celebrity endorsement, the possibilities of American life.

This representativeness, in fact, takes as its model a philosophy of public credit through which prominent individuals might help ensure the strength of governmental credibility. According to a notion that circulated during the colonial era and later during Alexander Hamilton's tenure as treasury secretary, governmental credit instruments, though technically vouchers for civic fiscal reliability, might be supported by individuals willing to sign instruments and thus lend their names for public credit (I speak of this *theory* of patronage because, in practice, such support was not necessarily successful in countering economic downturns). In the *Autobiography*, an elder Franklin uses his name to support paper financial instruments, and this model applies to his endorsement of all public projects. Having established himself as financial representative, moreover, Franklin encourages the reader to read his *Autobiography* with a speculative spirit. Through early tales of his own rise by means of credit, Franklin emphasizes how vital it is for creditors to support fledgling entrepreneurs; and so these stories illustrate, by implication, the importance of the reader's willingness to credit Franklin's representation of the American experience.

While Franklin does, in the earlier phases of his career, create and exploit an abstract, generalized persona for his own advancement, once he achieves civic prominence, the success of his endorsements ultimately depends upon the particularities of his experience. This is not to say that the later, more visible incarnation is any less a rhetorical persona but rather that it is different in that it trades on Franklin's name. It must, like a bill of credit, assume a measure of personal authority in order to work effectively. Franklin's individual credibility, in other words, enhances the credibility of America.

Franklin drew a figural relation between his own biography and that of the nation; according to Christopher Looby, he rehearses in the story of his own life "both the past and the (predicated) future of America." Franklin wrote the four parts of the *Autobiography* over the two decades from 1771 to 1790, and the maturation and independence chronicled in the text parallels America's own coming of age. To this thinking I would add that there is, in particular, an analogy drawn between Franklin's own rise on credit as a budding entrepreneur in the first half of the text and the enterprising use of public credit for funding community development in the second half. With this shift, Franklin's role changes: in the first two installments of the memoir, he relies on the willingness of patrons to grant him credit; in the third and fourth parts, Franklin, having benefited from those who invested in him when he was young, lends his patronage to fledgling public projects.

Franklin signals the fact that the *Autobiography* itself is such a project in the opening of part 2, where he inserts personal letters from Abel James and Vaughan, written in 1782 and 1784, respectively. These letters reinforce Franklin's narrative transition from familial letter (an epistle to his son, William) to a document "intended for the public." In particular, the letters emphasize that his memoir itself is a public project that could benefit the new nation. Vaughan's letter, for example, predicts that Franklin's story will not only promote desirable qualities in young businessmen (industry, frugality, and the patience to await one's advancement) but also "tend to invite to [America] settlers of virtuous and manly minds." Vaughan adds, "And considering the eagerness with which

such information is sought by them, and the extent of your reputation, I do not know of a more efficacious advertisement than your Biography would give." While Vaughan claims that the *Autobiography* is representative in the sense of being typical of—or "connected to"—the "rising people" of America, his very term "advertisement" suggests another process at work: the publicizing of an extraordinary story designed to arouse desire and patronage. Vaughan's letter identifies the memoir's potential to boost economic confidence and to promote America in the eyes of prospective immigrants; moreover, the letter serves as a fitting prelude to the more publicly oriented sections of the *Autobiography*, in which Franklin—as a protagonist within the narrative and as author of the autobiographical advertisement—works to promote civic ventures.

In part 3, these activities as civic spokesman begin to differ markedly from his earlier public service. In the first two sections, Franklin recalls that in his earlier years he tended to submit project proposals anonymously or under the auspices of a group so as not to arouse suspicions of his own interests: "The Objections, and Reluctances I met with in Soliciting the Subscriptions, made me soon feel the Impropriety of presenting oneself as the Proposer of any useful Project," he writes, explaining his decision to put himself "as much as [he] could out of sight." This strategic self-effacement exemplifies how Franklin, as the critical tradition maintains, uses depersonalized print media to construct a universal, archetypal life. Another well-known illustration of this self-effacement, which comes about a third of the way into part 3, is Franklin's anonymous proposals for an academy. He writes, "I stated their Publication not as an Act of mine, but of some *public-spirited Gentleman*, avoiding as much as I could, according to my usual Rule, the presenting myself to the Public as the Author of any Scheme for their Benefit."

Critics, however, have focused on the narration of events before Franklin's retirement from his printing business, and this conclusion is simply not applicable to the latter parts of the *Autobiography*. Shortly following his anonymous proposal for an academy, Franklin's "usual rule" changes. Five paragraphs later, Franklin recalls that once he "disengag'd" himself from "private Business," a sudden change occurred: "the Public now considering me as a Man of Leisure," he writes, "laid hold of me for their Purposes; every Part of our Civil Government, and almost at the same time, imposing some Duty upon me."

In the narration of events after his retirement from printing in 1748, Franklin's service entails the public endorsement of projects, and his visible connection to such projects supposedly ensures their success; indeed, after his retirement there is no mention of the self-effacement strategies that he describes earlier. As Dr. Thomas Bond discovers when he tries to establish a hospital in Philadelphia, Franklin's name has become precious currency:

At length he came to me, with the Compliment that he found there was no such thing as carrying a public-spirited Project through with out my being concern'd in it; "for, says he, I am often ask'd by those to whom I propose Subscribing, Have you consulted Franklin upon this Business? and what does he think of it? And when I tell them that I have not,

(supposing it rather out of your Line,) they do not subscribe, but say they will consider of it."

Recognizing that this project will benefit from his signature, Franklin subscribes, enlists other subscriptions, petitions funds from the Pennsylvania Assembly, and even pens and publishes a signed article in its support. On account of this endorsement, according to Franklin, the plan is executed and the hospital soon erected.

While Franklin's retirement from private business may not, in fact, have marked such a clear-cut transition or satisfied those adversaries who accused him of harboring ulterior motives, the text nevertheless sets up the distinction, so crucial to classical republican ideology, between his life as a man of private interests and his life as a civic statesman. His retirement, which seemingly removes him from the business world, affords him the status of "disinterested" and enhances his reputation as civic-minded (his recollection that the public "laid hold" of him for "their purposes" after his retirement effaces his individual agency and emphasizes his status as civil servant). The social prominence he attains later in life transforms his name from a liability to an asset that can be exploited for public ends.

Franklin's text implicitly acknowledges that a candid equation of credit with appearance and perception inevitably unravels the reader's sense of certainty (these uncertainties of printed representation go hand-in-hand with the riskiness of a credit economy). I would argue, however, that it is precisely this economic ethos that works to resolve, rhetorically at least, the problems it raises. If Franklin's relish for credit schemes, inevitably raises doubts about the veracity of the *Autobiography*, it simultaneously encourages a faith in the speculative life that has been promised. In this narrative, doubts are self-fulfilling prophecies that lead to bank runs and financial collapse, and faith in his endorsement, as Franklin's own account demonstrates, keeps expectations in circulation and defers those redemptions that cannot materialize at that moment. As illustrated by Franklin's stories of war-time despair and the croaking Samuel Mickle, financial panic can sabotage potential profits. According to this financial paradigm, printed currency values and the kind of American success recalled in Franklin's memoirs are fictions for the present but may, with the reader's faith, be realized in the future.

The financial mechanisms at work in this text even make irrelevant, again at the rhetorical level, the common criticism that the *Autobiography* is thinly veiled self-promotion. Drawing from his own experience as financier, Franklin depicts a public credibility that is bolstered by his own credibility: the more reputable his own name and success story, the more viable is the American life for which he is a spokesman. By invoking a credit system that intertwines personal and civic interests, he makes self-promotion and national promotion mutually beneficial, enacting, in essence, a Franklinian pragmatism by which one could do good and do well at the same time.

Source: Jennifer Jordan Baker, "Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* and the Credibility of Personality," in *Early American Literature*, Vol. 35, No. 3, Fall 2000, pp. 274-93.

Quotes

"Man is sometimes more generous when he has little money than when he as plenty; perhaps to prevent his being thought to have but little." Chapter 2, p.25.

"...when he should be unwilling to have it known that he was once so meanly employed, he changed his name and did me the honor to assume mine..." Chapter 3, p.46

"Whatever is, is right. But purblind man Sees but a part o' the chain, the nearest links; His eyes not carrying to that equal beam, That poises all above." Chapter 4, p.60

"Seest thou a man diligent in his calling, he shall stand before kings, he shall not stand before mean men." Chapter 6, p.76

"He that would thrive must ask his wife." Chapter 6, p. 77

"He that has once done you a kindness will be more ready to do you another than he whom you yourself have obliged." Chapter 7, p. 100

"If we fail, let us move the purchase of a fire engine with the money. The quakers can have no objection to that; and then, if you nominate me and I you as a committee for that purpose, we will buy a great gun, which is certainly a fire engine." Chapter 8, p.114

"As we enjoy great advantages from the inventions of others, we should be glad of an opportunity to serve others by an invention of ours, and this we should do freely and generously." Chapter 8, p. 116

"The Great Spirit, who made all things, made every thing for some use ; and whatever use he designed anything for, that use it should always be put to. Now, when he made rum, he said, 'Let this be for the Indians to get drunk with; and it must be so.'" Chapter 9, p. 122.

"Thus if you teach a poor young man to shave himself and keep his razor in order, you may contribute more to the happiness of his life than in giving him a thousand guineas." Chapter 9, p.129

"Look round the habitable world; how few know their own good, or, knowing it, pursue! " Chapter 10, p. 132

Topics for Discussion

Discuss Benjamin Franklin's early relationship with his brother, James. How did they get along as adults?

What was Ben's first career goal, even before he worked for his brother, James?

What influence did reading have on Benjamin Franklin's life?

Was Benjamin Franklin always a good writer? What did he do to improve?

Why did Franklin write a public pamphlet for each of his new ideas and proposals?

Of inventor, writer, journalist, and political lobbyist, which do you believe was Ben Franklin's greatest influence on the world today? Explain.

Benjamin Franklin had approximately two years of formal education. Would you consider him an uneducated man? Why or why not?

Were Franklin's goals for virtuous living realistic? Did he stick to those goals at all times?

Discuss the importance of social networking as it applied to Franklin's accomplishments.

Discuss Franklin's involvement with electricity experimentation. How did he become interested in electricity and what did he do to understand it better? Were his discoveries accepted well by the public?

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's"For Students" Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently

studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals— helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man–the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children’s Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

“Night.” Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the “Criticism” subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on “Winesburg, Ohio.” Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335–39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. “Margaret Atwood’s “The Handmaid’s Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,” Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9–16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133–36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. “Richard Wright: “Wearing the Mask,” in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69–83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59–61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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