

Benjamin Franklin

Name: _____

Benjamin Franklin is one of the most famous Founding Fathers. We know that he was an inventor and writer, but did you know he was also a printer, diplomat, and civic leader? When he died at the age of 84, he had accomplished so much that he earned the nickname "The First American." He is the only Founding Father that signed all three major documents that founded the United States of America: the Declaration of Independence, the Treaty of Paris in 1783, and the United States Constitution.



Benjamin Franklin's signature from the Declaration of Independence.



Declaring Independence

Benjamin Franklin played an important role in creating the *Declaration of Independence*, the document that told Great Britain that the American colonies wanted to be independent. Franklin was part of a committee whose job was to write the Declaration.

Declaring independence was dangerous because the American colonists were still subjects of the King of England. By signing the Declaration of Independence, the committee members would be committing **treason**, or betraying their country. Treason was a crime punishable by death! But Franklin encouraged everyone to stand strong behind the Declaration. He said, "Yes, we must all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang [be put to death] separately."

An American in Paris

In 1776, during the Revolutionary War, Franklin went to Paris, France on behalf of the American colonies. The colonists hoped he could persuade France to support the colonies against Great Britain in the war. The French admired the work Franklin had done during his life, and he used that to his advantage. He convinced them to support the colonies. At the end of the war in 1783, Franklin and other American diplomats met in Paris with representatives of Great Britain. They signed the Treaty of Paris, and the United States of America became an independent nation.



This painting of the signing of the treaty was never finished because the British refused to pose for the artist!



Creating a Government

The first government the colonists created after the Revolutionary War didn't work very well. In 1787, they called a meeting to draft a new plan — the Constitution. At 81 years old, Franklin was the oldest in attendance. On the last day of the meeting, Franklin spoke to the delegates. He encouraged them to set aside any doubts about the new Constitution and trust that the new government they created would actually work. Franklin, along with 39 others, signed the Constitution of the United States on September 17, 1787.

Man of Many Talents

Politics was not the only thing Franklin was interested in. He was well known for publishing *Poor Richard's Almanack*, a yearly pamphlet that included a calendar, weather information, poems, and even Franklin's own sayings. He was the first Postmaster General of the United States. He started the first free libraries. And he invented all kinds of things, such as the lightning rod, bifocal glasses, and even swim fins!

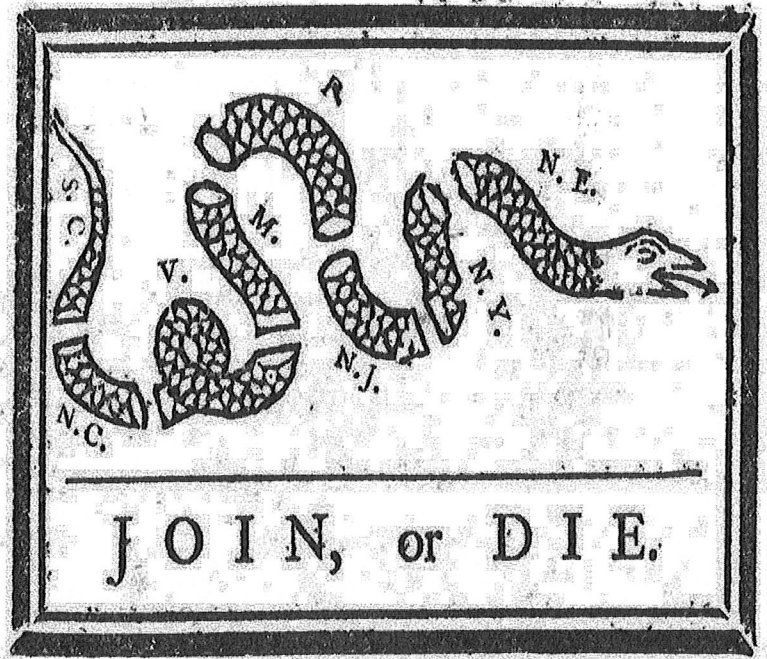


Franklin invented an odometer to measure how far his carriage traveled

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Stand United! During Franklin's time, there was a superstition that a snake that had been cut into pieces could come back to life if the pieces were put together before sunset. Benjamin Franklin created the "Join, or Die" political cartoon to encourage unity between the colonies. It became a symbol of colonial freedom during the Revolutionary War.



Study the cartoon:

- Put a **square** around words or letters.
- **Circle** the symbol you see.
- Answer the questions below.

What do you think the letters by the snake represent?

Given what you read about the snake superstition, how do the words Join or Die relate to the drawing in the cartoon?

Support the Constitution! Imagine you live in 1787 and you need to convince people to support the Constitution. Draw a political cartoon that will really get people on your side!

Include at least two objects or symbols and two words or phrases that help explain the symbols.

Newspapers used political cartoons to send a clear social or political message. They usually contain simple drawings that people will easily relate to and understand.

