

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA, BEN FRANKLIN?

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by Jean Fritz, ill. by Margot Tomes
Theme: American History, Biography
Grade Level: Grade 3-5
Running Time: 39 minutes

This is a humorous and factual account of the personality and accomplishments of Benjamin Franklin. Children will marvel at Franklin's insatiable curiosity and numerous interests. While acknowledging Franklin's many idiosyncrasies, Jean Fritz also recognizes his important contributions to literature, science and government. A very full life can be had if one has the courage to explore, experiment and persevere like Ben Franklin did!

OBJECTIVES

- Children will explore the nature and accomplishments of Benjamin Franklin.
- Children will learn to appreciate the importance of experimentation and perseverance.
- Children will investigate the beginnings of many of our institutions and conveniences.

BEFORE VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Share the book *What's the Big Idea, Ben Franklin?* with children. Then ask:

- Which of Ben Franklin's inventions do you think were the most important? Why? The most interesting? Why?
- What kind of friend/father do you think Ben Franklin might have made? Why?

Have children use the school library to research some of Franklin's inventions. Then have children take turns describing these inventions to their classmates. Encourage

children to be as specific as possible about these inventions so that other children in the class have a clear understanding of the workings of these inventions.

Give children the opportunity to create their own inventions and share them with the class. You might provide an assortment of art materials, cardboard boxes, cellophane, string, wire, etc. that children might use. Later, have children write brief descriptions of their inventions and display them, along with the inventions on a tabletop for classroom visitors to enjoy.

AFTER VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Remind children that Ben Franklin was the first to publish an almanac. Provide a list of subjects for children to research using an almanac. Assign one subject to each child. Have children report their findings to the group. Later ask: What did you enjoy most about the almanac? What other interesting things did you discover? In what other ways might an almanac be useful?

Have children pair up and take turns dramatizing the role of Ben Franklin and a visitor to Franklin's home. Encourage the child playing the role of the visitor to inquire about Franklin's inventions, his family life, his travel, etc. Ask the child representing Franklin to try and be as accurate as possible about his/her responses based on what he has learned about Franklin from the story.

Have children explore further about what life might have been like in the mid 1700s. Encourage children to explore building materials used, cooking utensils, games played by children, occupations, etc. Then have children use pieces of cardboard, craft paper or other simple materials to create props, making the classroom resemble a typical city street or home interior. You might also want to have children collect some adult clothing from home -- hats, large jackets, aprons, etc. to wear in their depiction of this time in America's history.

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