



Ingenuity Backstory

"If you would not be forgotten as soon as you're dead and rotten, either write things worth reading or do things worth the writing," said Benjamin Franklin. The United States has never forgotten Benjamin Franklin because he did both. He lived these words of wisdom by writing profusely and being a scientist, inventor, statesman, printer, philosopher and economist.

Franklin was born on January 17, 1706. He attended school for only a few years before becoming an apprentice printer to his older brother at the age of 12. When his brother's paper was looking for original stories, Franklin was too young to submit articles. Therefore he created a fictional widow who slipped "her" stories under the door at night so no one knew who 'she' was. The stories were very popular. After several, Franklin admitted he wrote them, but his brother was not happy. The troubles continued to grow between the two and at age 17, Franklin ran away, which was illegal at the time.

In Philadelphia, Franklin continued to be a print apprentice for many years. Later, he married and with his wife ran a print shop, book store and general store. Franklin thrived on work and eventually printed an almanac and a newspaper, contributing a great deal of the material himself. His paper carried the first political cartoon.

In the 1730's and 1740's, he worked to improve life in Philadelphia. He was the force behind the first public hospital, lending library, fire-fighting company and fire insurance. He invented many things, including bifocals and a heat-efficient stove. He refused to take out patents so that the items would be available to all. In the 1750's, he was retired from the printing business, and was very interested in electricity. In June 1752, he conducted the kite experiment. He suspected that lightning was an electrical current in nature and wanted to see if it would pass through metal. He put a metal key on a kite to prove his theory. This helped him realize the danger in lightning and led to another invention still in use today: the lightning rod.

Also, in the 1750's, Franklin became very interested in politics. He served as the Colonial representative for several states in England from 1757 to 1775. After his return to the colonies, he started working actively for independence. Franklin participated on a committee of five that helped to draft the Declaration of Independence, where he contributed a great deal. In 1776, Franklin signed the Declaration, and then went to France to represent the United States.

In his late seventies, Franklin returned to America and served as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention where he signed the Constitution. One of his last public acts was writing an anti-slavery treatise in 1789. He stands alone as the only person to have signed all four of the documents which helped to create the United States: the Declaration of Independence (1776), the Treaty of Alliance, Amity, and Commerce with France (1778), the Treaty of Peace between England, France, and the United States (1782), and the Constitution (1787).

Franklin died on April 17, 1790 at the age of 84. Twenty-thousand people attended the funeral of the man who was called, "the harmonious human multitude." No other individual was more involved in the birth of our nation. His legacy is filled with act after act of bold curiosity, brash risk-taking, and raw ingenuity.

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