

# Benjamin Franklin

## Fact or Fiction?

Benjamin Franklin had two birthdays  
but saw little reason to celebrate.



## Fact

Benjamin Franklin was born on January 6, 1706, under the Julian calendar which did not accurately document the time it takes Earth to circle once around the sun. On September 2, 1752, the British Empire switched to the Gregorian calendar and skipped 11 days ahead. The new year moved from March 25 to January 1.

Benjamin Franklin's new birthday was January 17. In 1773 Franklin wrote to his wife saying he thought of January 6 as his real birthday.

During Franklin's lifetime most people treated birthdays like any other day. If he did celebrate it might have been with a dense fruitcake or yeasted cakes. Nothing like our modern birthday cakes today.



# Benjamin Franklin

## Fact or Fiction?

Benjamin Franklin was an only child  
born to wealthy parents.



# Fiction

Benjamin Franklin came from a family of ten children. He was the eighth child and youngest son. His parents Abiah and Josiah Franklin raised their family in Boston and sold candles and soap to support the family. Benjamin Franklin's youngest sister Jane was his lifelong pen pal and they exchanged letters until Franklin's death in 1790 at the age of eighty-four.



# Benjamin Franklin

## Fact or Fiction?

Benjamin Franklin received a college degree for his scientific achievements.



# Fact

Benjamin Franklin called himself “Doctor Franklin.” Franklin received honorary doctorates from prominent universities for his success in science. Yet his formal schooling ended at the age of ten. In 1753 Harvard University awarded Franklin its first honorary degree, a Master of Arts.



# Benjamin Franklin

## Fact or Fiction?

Benjamin Franklin published an almanac called Poor Richard's Almanack, but it had few readers and went out of print after one year.



# Fiction

Benjamin Franklin published the first issue of Poor Richard's Almanack in 1773 and produced a yearly copy for the next 25 years. Poor Richard's Almanack was Franklin's greatest financial success. Franklin wrote the almanac for common people who could not afford books. Each issue contained recipes, calendar, weather predictions, advice, poems, and proverbs about working hard and saving money. Almanacs were available in Britain long before they became a best seller in the colonies. Almost 10,000 almanacs were published each year for sale.



# Benjamin Franklin

## Fact or Fiction?

Benjamin Franklin once said, “A penny saved is a penny earned.”



# Fiction

Benjamin Franklin was careful with his money, but never offered this advice. What Franklin did write in the 1737 Poor Richard's Almanack was "A penny saved is two pence clear." Pence meaning a sum of money and more than one penny. One side of the Franklin cent (Fugio) says "We Are One" while the other side states "Mind Your Business." Franklin urged people to pay attention to their own business. "We Are One" with the thirteen links represented the thirteen colonies. This was the United States' first official circulation coin.



# Benjamin Franklin

## Fact or Fiction?

Benjamin Franklin wrote articles for Poor Richard's Almanack under a fictional name. He called himself Richard Saunders.



# Fact

Benjamin Franklin used the name Richard Saunders who was an English physician and astrologist who also had a “pen name” Cardanus Rider. Poor Richard’s Almanack was an example of Benjamin Franklin mixing pieces of other calendar material with his own writing skills and wit! Even the name Poor Richard was adapted from an earlier British almanac called Poor Robin.



# Benjamin Franklin

## Fact or Fiction?

Benjamin Franklin contributed to early written documents that established America's identity and how elected leaders will govern the country.



# Fact

Benjamin Franklin had a role in important political documents that helped form today's United States of America. He played a key role in writing the Treaty of Paris that officially ended the Revolutionary War, helped edit the Declaration of Independence, and was a respected voice at the Constitutional Convention that created the United States Constitution.



# Benjamin Franklin Fact or Fiction?

Benjamin Franklin wrote the  
Declaration of Independence.



# Fiction

In June 1776, the Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia where delegates called for a Declaration of Independence. Serving as Pennsylvania's delegate, Franklin was a member of the Committee of Five that drafted the Declaration of Independence. John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Robert R. Livingston, and Roger Sherman also served on the Committee.

Franklin's role was as an editor of the first draft written by Thomas Jefferson and presented to Congress on July 2. The Continental Congress approved the document's wording on July 4, 1776.



# Benjamin Franklin

## Fact or Fiction?

Benjamin Franklin was the oldest statesman at the Constitutional Convention and influenced other delegates to vote for the United States Constitution.

---



# Fact

At 81 Benjamin Franklin was the oldest statesman at the Constitutional Convention. He earned an important reputation of helping delegates compromise on key issues by using his prestige, humor, and diplomatic skills. None of Franklin's major ideas made it into the written Constitution. These included an executive board instead of a single president, service in public office without pay, and a single chamber legislature. Franklin encouraged delegates to strive for a unanimous vote and "put his name to the instrument."



# Benjamin Franklin Fact or Fiction?

Benjamin Franklin chose the turkey to  
be the national bird of the new United  
States.



# Fiction

In a letter to his daughter Sarah, Benjamin Franklin made a comparison between the eagle and turkey. He thought the turkey is “a much more respectable Bird, and withal a true original Native of America.” While Franklin did find the turkey to be courageous, the turkey was also a little vain and silly. Franklin did not suggest it should become a national symbol.



# Benjamin Franklin Fact or Fiction?

Benjamin Franklin was in favor of  
abolishing slavery.



# Fact

Since 1730 Benjamin Franklin favored those who sought the end of slavery. He became the first president of the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery. In one of his last public acts Franklin signed a memorial to Congress urging the abolition of slavery.



# Benjamin Franklin

## Fact or Fiction?

Benjamin Franklin was the first Postmaster General for the colonial mail service under the authority of the Continental Congress.



## Fact

In 1737 Benjamin Franklin was appointed postmaster of Philadelphia. He became co-Postmaster General of the North American colonies for the British from 1757 – 1774. Postmasters most often used their homes or printing offices for business. Franklin made improvements in bookkeeping, delivery routes and more to create an improved postal system.

As Postmaster General Franklin served under the authority of the Second Continental Congress from 1775-1776 where he oversaw the creation of the United States Post Office. In 1789 President George Washington appointed Samuel Osgood as the first American Postmaster General.

The first official USPS opened in the United States in 1792 after the ratification of the United States Constitution authorized Congress to establish Post Offices and Roads under the executive branch.



# Benjamin Franklin

## Fact or Fiction?

Benjamin Franklin invented Daylight Savings Time, the act of moving time forward one hour in spring.



# Fiction

Benjamin Franklin did not invent Daylight Savings Time. What Franklin did suggest to Paris residents where he sometimes lived, was to change their sleep schedules to save money on candles and lamp oil. Franklin wrote an essay in 1784 “An Economical Project” in the Journal de Paris about the thrifty benefits of daylight verses artificial (candle) light.



# Benjamin Franklin

## Fact or Fiction?

Benjamin Franklin wanted people to be early risers so he proposed a regulation that as soon as the sun was up, all the church bells would start to ring.



# Fact

Benjamin Franklin also suggested to fire cannons in every street to wake up sleepy heads who were wasting their days by sleeping in.



# Benjamin Franklin Fact or Fiction?

Benjamin Franklin invented the  
“second hand” on the clock.



# Fact

In 1772 Benjamin Franklin constructed a clock called the “Three Wheel Clock.” It had a single hand and three wheels and runs for 30 hours. The top dial showed the seconds, and the main dial shows the minutes past the hour. Franklin designed the second hand into sixty units to provide for more accurate measurement of how long it took electricity to travel from the kite to the key on the kite’s tail.



# Benjamin Franklin

## Fact or Fiction?

Benjamin Franklin established the first hospital in the American colonies.



# Fact

In 1751 Benjamin Franklin along with Dr. Thomas Bond founded the nation's first hospital, the Pennsylvania Hospital. Its mission was "to care for the sick-poor and insane who were wandering the streets of Philadelphia." The new idea of a local hospital in the colonies was necessary to meet the medical needs of a growing population, yet Dr. Bond was unable to pay for it. Franklin organized a petition and successfully brought it to the Pennsylvania Assembly. The hospital received funding after Franklin raised 2000 British pound sterling from private citizens with an additional 2000 British pound sterling matched by the Pennsylvania Assembly. The Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia exists today.



# Benjamin Franklin

## Fact or Fiction?

Benjamin Franklin invented the swim fins that swimmers use today.



# Fact

Throughout his life Franklin was an avid swimmer and encouraged others to start the sport. When he was just 11 years old Franklin invented swim fins to help push him through the water. Franklin considered the swim fins one of his earliest inventions.



# Benjamin Franklin

## Fact or Fiction?

Benjamin Franklin helped found the Union Fire Company of Philadelphia, one of America's first volunteer fire department.



# Fact

On December 7, 1736, the Union Fire Company of Philadelphia was formed, and Benjamin Franklin's signature appears as an original signee of the founding articles. Limited to twenty-five members, the articles stated that each member must provide two buckets and four bags of rope. Members were required to respond all hours of the night and fined for breaking the rules. Unlike other fire societies who responded only to paying members, the Union Fire Company helped anyone in need.

Benjamin Franklin was an active firefighter. He advertised the need for fire engines and firefighters in his newspaper the Pennsylvania Gazette and published the events of the Union Fire Company. Franklin recognized the danger of fire as he experimented with electricity and invented the lighting rod. He championed fire prevention by calling for better chimney care, digging proper hearths, avoiding wood moldings to line fireplaces and much more.



# Benjamin Franklin Fact or Fiction?

Benjamin Franklin invented bifocal  
glasses.



# Fact

In 1784 Benjamin Franklin requested an optician to cut the lenses of his reading glasses in half. He asked that they be put together again with the reading lenses on top and the long-distance lenses on the bottom. Franklin called them his “double spectacles” but today we know them as bifocals.



# Benjamin Franklin

## Fact or Fiction?

Benjamin Franklin learned how to control lightning during a thunderstorm. He discovered its connection to electricity and felt an electrical current.

---



# Fact

Benjamin Franklin introduced the lightning rod that when placed on building roofs direct the electrically charged lightning to the ground. In colonial America, the threats of massive fires were very real. With no warning lightning could cause an entire village to catch fire. Today's buildings still use lightning rods to prevent fires.

Benjamin Franklin did not discover electricity but experimenting with a specially designed kite he showed the connection between lightning and electricity. Franklin's kite design picked up the storm's surrounding electrical current.



# Benjamin Franklin

## Fact or Fiction?

In Philadelphia, June 1752, Benjamin Franklin's electrical experiment used a kite made from a bed sheet, wire, and silk thread.



# Fiction

While Benjamin Franklin did conduct his experiment in June 1752 during a thunderstorm his kite materials were chosen for specific reasons. The body of the kite was made from a large silk handkerchief. Attached to the top of the kite was a wire to act as a lightning rod and attract electricity. For the kite's tail Franklin used a hemp string and to the hemp he attached a silk string. The hemp in the rain would quickly conduct an electrical charge. The silk string kept dry by Franklin standing out of the rain would not conduct an electrical charge and protected Franklin from harm. Franklin attached a metal key to the hemp string. Once the kite was in the air Franklin noticed that loose hemp threads were sticking straight out. When Franklin moved his finger near the key the negative charge in the metal key attracted the positive charge in his hand and he felt a spark!