

Benjamin Franklin and American Diplomacy

Grade Level: 10-12

Time Required: 1 class period and homework

Historical Thinking Skill: Application

Objective: Students will learn about Benjamin Franklin’s interesting and wildly successful career as the American ambassador to France starting in 1776. In this assignment, students will explore how Franklin leveraged his celebrity status and channeled it – along with his ambition – into the service of his strong sense of civic duty. Finally, they will create an interview where they can explore some of the challenges and triumphs of Franklin’s work in France.

Required Materials:

1. Reading: Excerpt from *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* by Walter Isaacson
2. Video: “Benjamin Franklin France Diplomacy” (6 minutes long)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rg6q_f-JD4M&start_radio=1&ab_channel=TheHistoryTV
3. Optional: Students may do additional research on Benjamin Franklin as a homework assignment or if there is time in class.

Activity (30-45 minutes): After reading the handout and watching the video together, organize the students into groups of 3-4 and assign each group a topic from the list below. Have them create a 5-minute interview of Franklin centered around one of the provided topics. They can use their phones to record the interview and submit it to you through a submission portal or email. For the interview, one student will role-play Franklin, and the other students will interview him or her. The questions and answers can be informal and include or introduce fictional scenes and characters to make the points. Encourage students to make it creative and humorous!

This lesson can also be expanded into a two-day plan. Additional research and planning can be completed in the first class session, and students can meet to complete the group project for homework. On the second day, the class can watch the interviews and have a class discussion about them.

Topics for students to address:

- Franklin’s trip over and arrival in France
- Franklin’s social life in Paris
- The goals and challenges of American diplomacy in France
- Franklin’s relationship with Foreign Minister Vergennes
- The 1778 Treaty of Friendship and Alliance