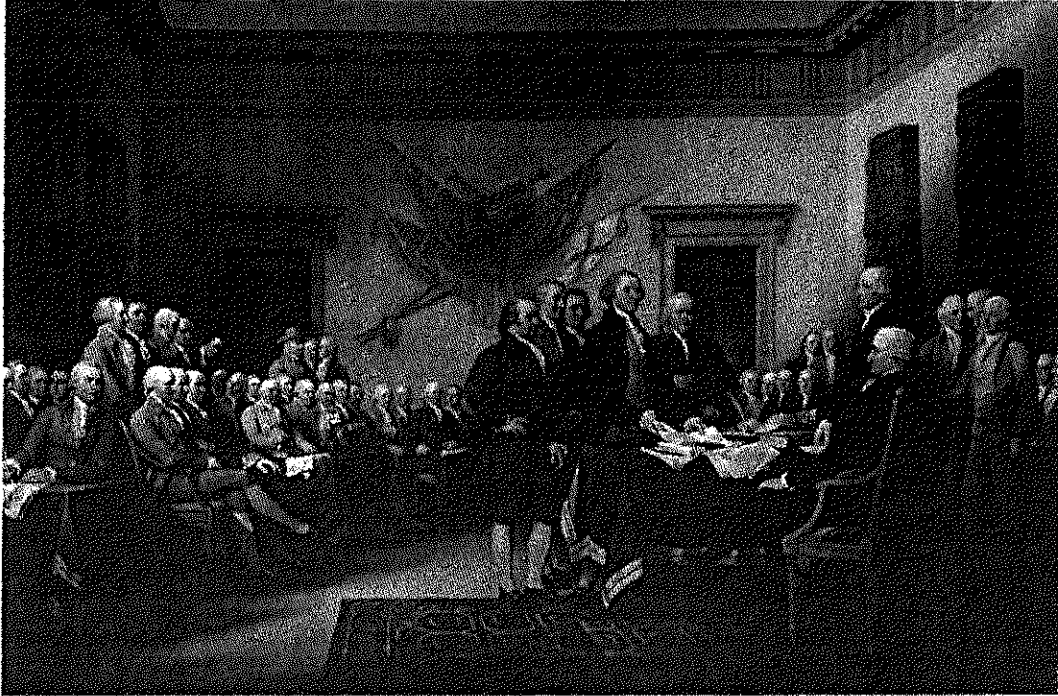


Lexile: 1180

## 53. The First American



*Benjamin Franklin as a part of the five-member committee in John Trumbull's painting Declaration of Independence. Do you know who the others in the painting are? There are as many as 42 founding fathers in the painting. The person on the left of Ben Franklin is Thomas Jefferson, the 3<sup>rd</sup> President of the United States.*

Have you ever wondered what the “united states” in the United States of America is? Originally, the term referred to 13 colonies under the British Empire that overthrew colonial rule and signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776, forming the United States of America. The men who participated in the revolution, signed the Declaration of Independence, and contributed to drafting the Constitution are known as “founding fathers.” Benjamin Franklin, who is portrayed on the 100-dollar note, was one of the “Committee of Five” men

who were appointed to draft the Declaration that was eventually signed by the other founding fathers.

### Franklin's Early Life

Benjamin Franklin was born in 1706 in Boston to a soap maker named Josiah Franklin. His father could not afford full schooling for all his children, but Benjamin loved books and worked in his elder brother's printing business. He worked in the trade for many years before buying the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1729, which was a new publication at the time. He also wrote and made cartoons for the newspaper. In addition, he worked toward improving living conditions in the city of Philadelphia: improving the efficiency of street lights, cleaning the roads and starting libraries. In the 1740s, Franklin retired from his printing business and turned to science with great success. He was a very smart man and his work on electricity for instance, such as the "kite experiment" which confirmed the nature of lightning, made him famous all over the American colonies.

### Benjamin Franklin as the First American

Now you might be wondering how this printer and scientist ended up on the \$100 bill. Franklin earned the title of the "First American" for his efforts to unite the 13 American colonies, and for his long campaign for American independence from England. This part of the story starts in London. He went to London as a representative of Americans to get the British to keep assisting American colonies. In London, he became a member of the "Club of Honest Whigs" (who also wore wigs!) and began interacting with important political thinkers and activists of the time.

When he returned to Pennsylvania, he led a struggle against the powerful Penn family over their control of the colony, and was elected the Speaker of the Pennsylvania House in 1764. In 1765, he opposed the Stamp Act, which was a direct tax by the British Parliament on American colonies. He continued to write and campaign against British injustices in America.

When the American War of Independence began in the 1770s and every colony was required to send one delegate to represent its interests in the "Second Continental Congress," everyone in the Pennsylvania assembly chose Franklin. He was one of five people who wrote the final Declaration of Independence.

After the United States of America was established, Franklin held several important positions such as the first United States Postmaster General, Ambassador to France and sixth President of Pennsylvania. He is also famous today for his wise sayings, including "a penny saved is a penny earned" and "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Who were the "founding fathers"?

- A 13 colonies under the British Empire that overthrew colonial rule in 1776
- B Benjamin Franklin and George Washington only
- C men who participated in the revolution, signed the Declaration of Independence, and contributed to drafting the Constitution
- D five men who were appointed to draft the Declaration of Independence

2. What does the author describe in the passage?

- A the life of Benjamin Franklin and his involvement in the American Revolution
- B a breakdown of battles in the Revolutionary War
- C how Benjamin Franklin discovered electricity and lightning
- D the changes Benjamin Franklin made to the United States Postal Service

3. Benjamin Franklin was opposed to injustice. Which details from the text support this statement?

- A He was a member of the "Club of Honest Whigs."
- B His face is depicted on the \$100 bill.
- C He worked in his brother's printing business and eventually bought the *Pennsylvania Gazette*.
- D He led a struggle against the Penn family over their control of the colony and opposed the Stamp Act.

4. Benjamin Franklin was elected the Speaker of the Pennsylvania House and selected to represent Pennsylvania in the "Second Continental Congress." What conclusion can be made about Benjamin Franklin?

- A Benjamin Franklin was not well liked.
- B Benjamin Franklin was popular in Pennsylvania.
- C Benjamin Franklin did not care what people thought about him.
- D Benjamin Franklin was not interested in politics.

5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A the signing of the Declaration of Independence
- B how the founding fathers and Committee of Five were chosen
- C the formation of the United States of America and the Revolutionary War
- D Benjamin Franklin's life and why he is called the First American

6. Read the following sentences: "Benjamin Franklin as a part of the five-member committee in John Trumbull's painting *Declaration of Independence*. Do you know who the others in the painting are? There are as many as 42 founding fathers in the painting. The person on the left of Ben Franklin is Thomas Jefferson, the 3<sup>rd</sup> President of the United States."

Why does the author include this caption under the painting?

- A to describe the painting and introduce the topic of the passage
- B to confuse the reader with information that is unrelated to the passage
- C to introduce a major character, John Trumbull
- D to give the reader a short art history lesson

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Benjamin Franklin held many important positions in the newly established United States of America, \_\_\_\_\_ member of the Committee of Five, Postmaster General, and Ambassador to France.

- A therefore
- B but
- C including
- D first

8. Why did Benjamin Franklin go to London?

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