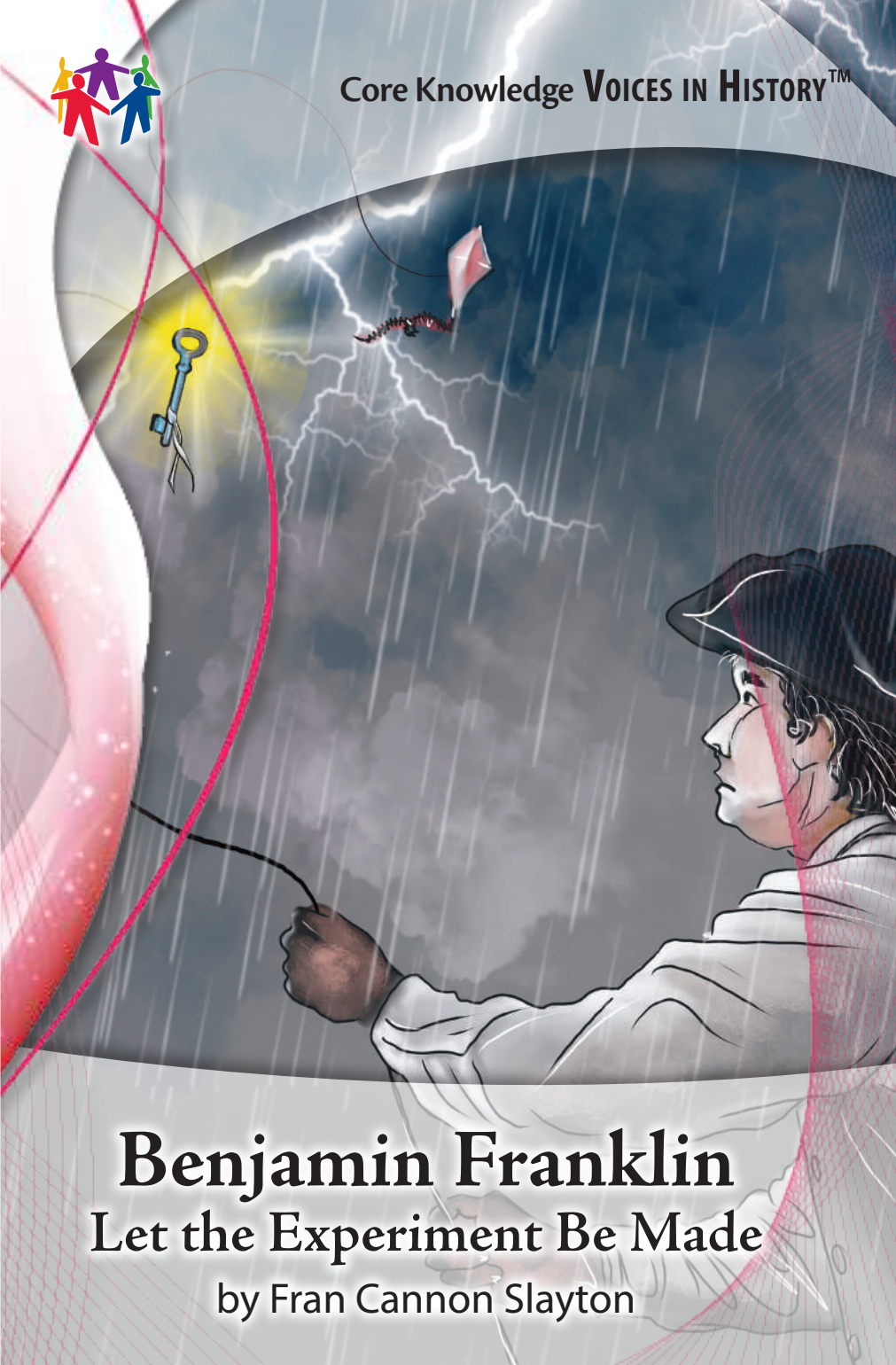




Core Knowledge **VOICES IN HISTORY™**



Benjamin Franklin

Let the Experiment Be Made

by Fran Cannon Slayton

We are pleased that our materials in the Core Knowledge Curriculum Series™, Core Classics® Series, Voices in History™ Series, Collection of Tales™ Series, and Adventures in History™ Series available on our [website](#), are made available through a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.



Through the license, the user is free:

- To share: to copy, distribute, and transmit the work
- To remix: to adapt the work

Under the following conditions:

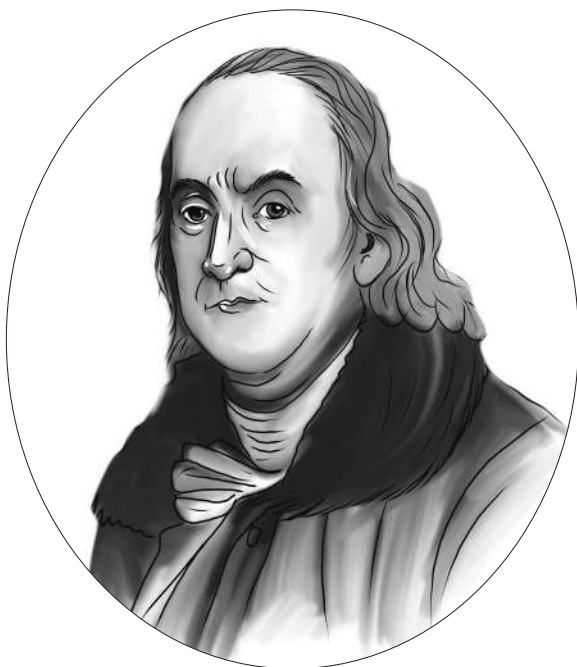
- You must attribute the work in the following manner:

This work is based on an original work of the Core Knowledge® Foundation made available through licensing under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. This does not in any way imply that the Core Knowledge Foundation endorses this work.

- You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
- If you alter, transform, or build upon this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under the same or similar license to this one.

With the understanding that for reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work. The best way to do that is with a link to this web page:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>



Benjamin Franklin

Let the Experiment Be Made

by

Fran Cannon Slayton

VOICES IN HISTORY: BIOGRAPHY SERIES™

ISBN 978-1-68380-913-5

COPYRIGHT © 2023 CORE KNOWLEDGE FOUNDATION

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

PRINTED IN CANADA

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR:

ROSIE MCCORMICK

CORE KNOWLEDGE FOUNDATION

801 EAST HIGH STREET

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA 22902

www.coreknowledge.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1:	
Kite Swimmer.....	1
CHAPTER 2:	
Tall Ships and Printed Words.....	3
CHAPTER 3:	
The Water American.....	12
CHAPTER 4:	
Making Sparks Fly.....	19
CHAPTER 5:	
Mail, Taxes, and War.....	25
CHAPTER 6:	
Wise Words.....	33
CHAPTER 7:	
The Rising Sun.....	38
MORE EXTRAORDINARY	
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN FACTS	43
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS	48
MEET THE AUTHOR	51
MEET THE ILLUSTRATOR	52

1

Kite Swimmer

Young Benjamin Franklin watched his kite fly up into the air. As he unwound the string, it flew higher and higher. The way it bobbed in the breeze amused Benjamin—for a while. But soon, his attention drifted to a nearby pond. The water looked cool and inviting, so he decided to take a swim.



Benjamin wondered where he would put his kite while he swam? He tied the kite's string to a stake in the ground. That way, his kite could fly, and Benjamin could swim at the same time. Problem solved. Benjamin loved solving problems!

He splashed into the water. The pond was large, maybe a mile wide. That was okay. Benjamin loved to swim.

Soon, Benjamin noticed his kite was flying even higher. He wanted to play with it again. But he also wanted to keep swimming.

So Benjamin decided to experiment. He would swim and fly his kite at the same time!

He got out of the pond, grabbed the kite string, and got back into the water. While the kite was still flying, he floated on his back.

Then something wonderful happened. The kite began pulling Benjamin across the surface of the water! He didn't have to swim at all—the kite did all the work for him. He sailed to the other side of the pond using only wind power!

Today, some people say Benjamin Franklin is the “founding father”—or maybe the “founding boy”—of one of today's extreme sports: kitesurfing. But who was this young boy with a head full of ideas? To find out, let's go back to the very beginning of his story.

2

Tall Ships and Printed Words

Benjamin Franklin was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on January 17, 1706. His family lived in a little wooden house on Milk Street.

Milk Street could be a busy place. That's because Boston was a busy city. In 1706, the United States didn't exist yet. Boston was an important seaport in the British colonies. Many ships sailed in and out of Boston Harbor each day. Benjamin's house on Milk Street was close to the harbor. He grew up smelling salty ocean air and watching the large sailing ships being loaded or unloaded before sailing off to another part of the world.

The Franklin house could be a busy place, too. Benjamin was one of seventeen children. Children were everywhere! Benjamin's mother, Abiah, stayed very busy looking after them.

Benjamin's father, Josiah, stayed very busy as well. He was an immigrant from England who became a tallow chandler and soap boiler. That meant that he made candles and soap out of tallow, a substance made from

animal fat. To make the tallow, Josiah cooked the fat in large pots. It smelled terrible. But selling the soap and candles he made was a good way to support his family.

Life in the Colonies

In the colonies, many women died after giving birth. Josiah's first wife, Anne, died after giving birth to their seventh child. Josiah's second wife, Abiah, had ten more children, including Benjamin.

Many children in the colonies also died young. Four of Benjamin's siblings died before they grew up.



One day, Benjamin and his friends went to play in their favorite salt marsh. They waded into the water, looking for little fish. But the marsh was too swampy to find fish that day.

Benjamin suggested they build a wharf to stand on. That way, they wouldn't get their feet too muddy. He showed his friends a pile of stones they could use to construct the wharf. He knew the stones weren't his. Someone else was using them to build a house. But he took them anyway.

The boys followed Benjamin's lead. Together, they lugged the stones to the marsh. After they were done, they stood back to admire their work. They had built an impressive little wharf. Now they wouldn't get muddy!

The next morning, the workers discovered the missing stones. They complained to the boys' parents.

Benjamin's father was not happy. He told Benjamin it was wrong to have taken the stones. What was he thinking?

Benjamin tried to explain that he had done so because the wharf that he and his friends built would be useful for everyone.

But in the end, his father made him understand that, as Benjamin later wrote, "nothing was useful which was not honest."

Benjamin's father wanted him to become a minister. But Benjamin could be a bit of a rascal. He was quite often up to some kind of mischief. Josiah began to wonder if being a minister was the best choice for Benjamin.

Benjamin went to school for two years. He was very smart, even if he didn't do well in math. And he loved to read about many different subjects. He once read a book called *The Art of Swimming*. The pictures in the book showed Benjamin all the different ways of swimming. Benjamin was someone who liked to put learning into practice. So he put the book down, got into the water, and practiced all the swim strokes. Then he invented some strokes of his own! He taught his friends how to swim too.

Eventually, Josiah decided that Benjamin should learn a trade instead of continuing in school.

So at age ten, Benjamin became his father's apprentice. For two years, he worked in his father's shop, learning how to make candles and soap.

He cut wicks for the candles. He filled candle molds. He went on errands. And he tended the shop.

But Benjamin hated it all. He wanted to be a sailor. He wanted to sail away on one of those tall ships and go on adventures and make amazing discoveries.

minister: religious leader

apprentice: a person who learns a skill from an expert

wicks: pieces of material that are lit to burn candles

“My dislike to the trade continuing,” Benjamin later wrote, “my father was under apprehensions that if he did not find one for me more agreeable, I should break away and get to sea.”

One of Benjamin’s older brothers had died at sea. His parents did not want to lose Benjamin too. Josiah wisely realized that his son needed work that could keep him interested.

So Josiah took Benjamin on long walks around Boston to learn about different trades. There were so many to choose from. Together, they watched bricklayers lay bricks. They watched joiners carefully fit pieces of wood together. And they watched cutlers make knives. But Benjamin was not interested in any of those.

What did Benjamin like to do? He liked to read—a lot.

“All the little money that came into my hands was ever laid out in books,” Benjamin wrote in his autobiography.

And so Josiah decided his son should become a printer. Benjamin became an apprentice to his older brother James. Benjamin would learn how to use a printing press.

He would also discover that he had a very special hidden talent.

Becoming an Apprentice

An apprentice is a person who learns a trade from a skilled craftsman. Benjamin signed papers to be his brother's apprentice from age twelve to twenty-one.

At James's print shop, Benjamin learned to compose pages. He set one letter of type at a time. He pounded ink onto the type with ink balls. And he pulled a long lever on the printing press, known as the "devil's tale," to print each page.

Soon, James started his own newspaper. Benjamin was excited because he wanted to write for it. But he was sure James wouldn't let him. How could he win James over?

Benjamin set to work. He wrote an essay for the newspaper. But he disguised his handwriting and didn't use his own name. Instead, he signed it "Silence Dogood"—a pseudonym. Benjamin wrote the essay pretending to be a middle-aged woman!

Then Benjamin secretly slipped the essay under James's door.

James found it the next morning. As it turned out, James was impressed and published it in his newspaper. Benjamin was thrilled!

James printed thirteen more Silence Dogood essays before Benjamin let him in on the secret of who wrote them.

James was not at all happy that Benjamin had deceived him. And that caused problems. The brothers were at odds. They began arguing.

Who Wrote That?

A pseudonym is a pretend name signed to an author's work. It is used when an author doesn't want readers to know who wrote the work.

James thought Benjamin was too proud of himself after his Silence Dogood success. He also thought that Benjamin wasn't working hard enough.

Benjamin, on the other hand, thought that James was too hard on him. After all, they were brothers. James should be a little nicer.

James wasn't being very nice, though. "My brother was passionate," Benjamin later wrote, "and had often beaten me."

Even so, Benjamin had to keep working for James. He had no choice. He had signed papers saying he would be James's apprentice until he turned twenty-one. It was a commitment. If Benjamin left, he would get into big trouble.



As it turned out, James was the one who got into big trouble. He printed an opinion in his newspaper that made the colonial government, the Massachusetts General Court, mad. In fact, the government was so mad that they threw James into jail for a whole month!

While James was in jail, Benjamin kept printing the newspaper. When James was released, the General Court ordered that “James Franklin should no longer print the paper called the *New England Courant*.”

What would James do? He didn’t want to stop printing his newspaper. So he came up with an idea. He would continue to print the newspaper. But he would list Benjamin as the printer instead of himself.

This seemed like a good plan. But there was one problem. Benjamin hadn’t completed his apprenticeship with James yet. Everyone in Boston knew that Benjamin was still just an apprentice, not a printer.

To get around this problem, James signed a paper saying that Benjamin had finished his apprenticeship. That made the transfer of the newspaper seem real. To the world, Benjamin was now a real printer.

But James was no fool. He also made his brother sign secret papers saying Benjamin would still be James’s apprentice for four more years.

3

The Water American

Things got worse between the brothers. James kept beating Benjamin. And Benjamin got more and more tired of being beaten.

Benjamin was seventeen now. He was tired of James always telling him what to do.

So Benjamin decided to run away. He had papers saying he was no longer an apprentice. Would he get in trouble if he used them? He might. But he decided to take his chances.

Secretly, Benjamin boarded a ship and sailed away.

Benjamin arrived by boat in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1723. He wasn't a pretty sight to see. He hadn't bathed in days. And his pockets were stuffed with dirty socks and shirts. But no matter—he'd made it there! Now what?

As Benjamin walked down a street in the city, chewing a big, fluffy piece of bread, he noticed a girl standing in a doorway. Her name was Deborah Read.

“She, standing at the door, saw me,” Benjamin later wrote, “and thought I made, as I certainly did, a most awkward, ridiculous appearance.”

Benjamin could tell that the girl thought he looked scruffy. But he didn't let it bother him. He would change her mind. Soon, he found work with a printer. And he and Deborah Read became friends. In fact, they began courting. After a while, they planned to get married.

Benjamin also lucked into meeting the governor of Pennsylvania. The governor liked Benjamin and encouraged him to set up his own print shop. He even offered to pay for Benjamin's printing equipment. Benjamin just needed to sail across the vast ocean to London to get it!

It all seemed too good to be true. And sadly, it was. Benjamin sailed across the Atlantic Ocean, all the way to London. But once there, he discovered that the governor hadn't sent any money to pay for the equipment. Now what? How would Benjamin survive in London?

Benjamin did what had worked for him in Philadelphia. He found work in a print shop. The other

workers there drank beer all day long. They thought it made them strong.

Benjamin drank water instead. The others nicknamed him the “Water American” because he didn’t drink beer.

But Benjamin was stronger and got a lot more work done than the other workers did. Benjamin explained to them that there was more grain in bread than there was in beer. He worked so well because he was getting better nutrition.

Soon, many of the other workers began eating and drinking what Benjamin ate and drank!

Benjamin only wrote to Deborah Read once during the eighteen months he was in London. But eventually he was ready to go home.

On the voyage back to America, Benjamin did an experiment with seaweed. He had found a piece of seaweed with strange, small shellfish attached to it. He described them in his journal as “a fruit of the animal kind.” Benjamin kept the seaweed in some salt water to see what would happen. In this way, he discovered that the “vegetable animals” attached to the seaweed grew into tiny crabs.

While sailing home to Philadelphia, Benjamin also wrote out a list of rules he wanted to live by:

- ✦ to spend little until he paid what he owed to others
- ✦ to be honest
- ✦ to work hard
- ✦ to never speak badly about anyone

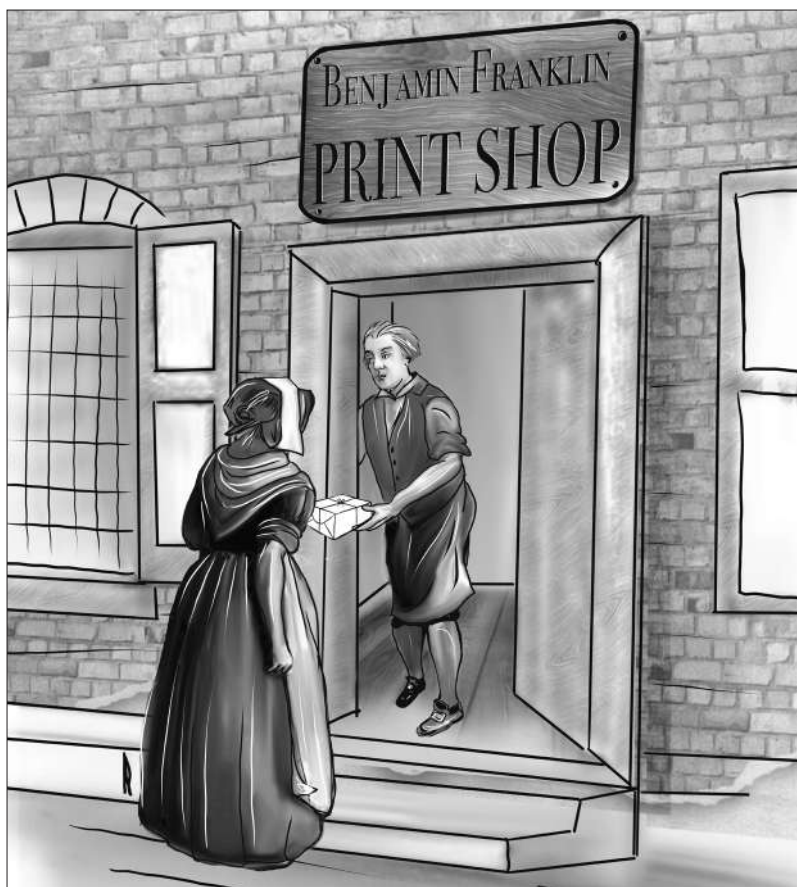
When Benjamin arrived back in Philadelphia, he discovered that Deborah Read had married another man. But Deborah soon learned that her husband was dishonest and already had a wife, in England. She left her husband and moved back in with her mother. But she was still legally married to him, so she was not able to remarry.

Benjamin set to work to build a life. Soon, he had his own print shop. He worked incredibly hard. He also made sure other people *noticed* he was working hard.

“I see him still at work when I go home . . . and he is at work again before his neighbors are out of bed,” one of Benjamin’s neighbors said about him.

Benjamin’s hard work established his good reputation and helped him succeed.

Benjamin’s interest in writing continued, and he wrote a number of essays. He continued to use pseudonyms for his work. One of the pseudonyms he used was “Busy-



Body"! Sometimes, Benjamin used pseudonyms to make a point in a crafty way. Sometimes, he used them to stir up a little trouble!

Benjamin began writing essays as *Busy-Body* because he was annoyed at a printer he used to work for. Benjamin had planned to start his own newspaper. There was only one other newspaper in Pennsylvania, the *American Weekly Mercury*, and he didn't think it was very good.

But his former employer heard of his plans and rushed to put out a new newspaper before he could.

As revenge, Benjamin began writing his Busy-Body essays—for the *Mercury*! They were so popular that nobody paid much attention to the new newspaper. Soon, the printer gave up and sold the new newspaper to Benjamin. Benjamin changed its name, from the *Universal Instructor in All Arts and Sciences and Pennsylvania Gazette* to just the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, and turned it into a huge success.

After a while, Benjamin and Deborah Read revived their engagement. But they couldn't legally get married because Deborah's first husband had disappeared, and they didn't know if he was alive or dead. So they lived together as a married couple without an official marriage ceremony. This kind of relationship is called a *common-law marriage*.

Together, Benjamin and Deborah raised a baby named William. William was Benjamin's son. No one knows who his mother was.

Later, Benjamin and Deborah had two children of their own. Their son, Francis, nicknamed Franky, was born in 1732. He died of smallpox when he was only four years old. Losing Franky made Benjamin very sad.

Benjamin and Deborah's daughter, Sarah, nicknamed Sally, was born more than a decade later, in 1743.

Deborah helped in Benjamin's print shop. They also sold paper goods. They were careful to save the money they made.

Benjamin began writing books. His most famous book was *Poor Richard's Almanack*. The Richard of "Poor Richard" was Richard Saunders, another pseudonym that Benjamin used. People loved *Poor Richard's Almanack* for its folksy sayings. Benjamin published it every year for twenty-five years. It made him wealthy enough to be able to retire at a young age.

Benjamin also formed a club called the Junto. *Junto* is a Spanish word that means "together." The club was made up of Benjamin and eleven of his friends, all tradesmen. They met once a week to help each other succeed.

The Junto also helped their community. Benjamin and the Junto helped organize a library, a police force, and a volunteer fire company.

4

Making Sparks Fly

Life moved along, and Benjamin became very successful. The young boy whose head was filled with all kinds of ideas and questions had become a man who still had an incredible thirst for knowledge. One thing that Benjamin was interested in was electricity. He often invited his friends to “electricity parties” so he could show them electrical tricks. Once, Benjamin rigged a painting of King George III to shock people when they tried to take off his crown!

Who Is in Charge?

King George III (1738–1820) was the king of Great Britain and Ireland. Because Benjamin lived in the one of the thirteen colonies, King George was his monarch too.

Benjamin had fun with electricity. He wanted to discover more about it. So he began doing electrical experiments.

In one experiment, Benjamin rubbed a glass tube with a cloth. Then he touched the tube to a wire in a special jar called a Leyden jar. The Leyden jar collected the electricity and stored it.

When a Leyden jar contained electricity, Benjamin said it was *charged*.

Benjamin linked Leyden jars together to store even more electricity. He called this a *battery*. In Benjamin's day, the word *battery* usually described a group of weapons, often cannons. Benjamin was the first person to use the term *battery* to describe a way of storing electricity. He was also the first to describe electrical charges as *plus* (positive) and *minus* (negative).

In another experiment, Benjamin electrified a small iron ball. Then he held a long, pointy piece of metal near it. Zap! A spark of electricity flew from the iron ball to the point of the piece of metal. A non-pointy piece of metal would have to be much closer to cause the same effect.

Benjamin had discovered that electricity, as he wrote in his notes, "is attracted by points"!

Benjamin found this very interesting. But how could sharp points that attract electricity help people in the real world? What Benjamin needed was a flash of inspiration.

People feared lightning in colonial times—and for good reason. When lightning struck a home or church, it often burned down.

Benjamin noticed that lightning was a lot like the electrical sparks he'd been experimenting with. They both gave off light. They both made a *crack*! And they both happened quickly.

Benjamin formed a hypothesis: maybe lightning and the electrical sparks he drew from an electrified iron ball were the same thing.

He decided to find out.

"Let the experiment be made," he wrote.

How Did That Happen?

A hypothesis is an idea that explains why something happens. It is more than a guess. And it must be able to be tested.

Benjamin knew that electric sparks were attracted to small, pointy pieces of metal. Would lightning be attracted to bigger pointy pieces of metal? He thought it would be.

How could he test his hypothesis? With an experiment, of course!

Benjamin wrote out a plan to put a sharp iron rod on top of a tall church steeple. If his hypothesis was right,

the iron rod would draw lightning from storm clouds when they passed by. It would then travel down a wire safely into the ground.

If lightning hit Benjamin's iron rod instead of the church, the lightning wouldn't burn the church down. Buildings and lives could be saved!

Benjamin wanted to perform this experiment on a tall church steeple. But the steeple he wanted to use was still being built, and Benjamin didn't want to wait.

So he decided to go fly a kite. After all, a kite had once helped him swim faster!

Benjamin made a kite. It wasn't a normal kite, though. Benjamin's kite was made of silk instead of paper to make it strong. He didn't want it to rip when he flew it in a thunderstorm!

Benjamin also fastened a metal wire to the top of the kite. It stuck out like an antenna. The wire ended in a sharp point—the kind that could attract electricity to it.

To the kite's string, Benjamin tied a metal key. To the metal key, he tied a short piece of silk ribbon.

Then he waited for a storm to come.

Finally, the sky grew dark, and storm clouds appeared. Just before the rain began, Benjamin and his son William flew the kite into the cloudy sky.



It was time to test Benjamin's hypothesis.

If the storm clouds had electricity in them, the electricity should be attracted to the pointy metal wire sticking out of the kite. The electricity would come down the string into the metal key. If Benjamin touched the key, he would feel a shock of electricity and see a spark.

The kite flew even higher. Benjamin reached up and touched the key. No shock. No spark. Nothing. He began to worry that his hypothesis was wrong.

Just then, he looked down and saw some of the loose threads standing straight out from the string. They looked electrified! This time, when Benjamin touched his knuckle to the key—*crack!* He felt a shock!

Benjamin had proved that lightning was electricity! He'd also proved that pointy metal objects could draw lightning from the sky.

Benjamin's hypothesis was correct. Iron rods could protect buildings from lightning!

Making Sparks

Benjamin's kite experiment with lightning was very dangerous. Don't try this at home! Benjamin could easily have been killed. He was lucky he wasn't.

Soon, people all over the world began using these iron rods, which came to be known as lightning rods. The French king was especially impressed. So were the French people.

Now Benjamin was famous!

Benjamin could have made a lot of money with his invention. But he never tried to patent it.

"As we enjoy great advantages from the inventions of others," Benjamin later wrote, "we should be glad of an opportunity to serve others by any invention of ours; and this we should do freely and generously."

It Belongs to Me!

A patent is a legal paper giving an inventor the right to stop others from making or selling their invention. Patents help inventors make money from their inventions.

5

Mail, Taxes, and War

During his life, Benjamin had become a successful printer, a highly respected member of Philadelphia society, and a self-taught scientist. But he also had two other important jobs: clerk and eventually member of the Pennsylvania Assembly, and postmaster of Philadelphia.

As clerk, Benjamin took notes about what the Pennsylvania Assembly members did. He later said that he believed it would “enlarge [his] power of doing good.”

As postmaster of Philadelphia, Benjamin handled the city’s mail. In 1753, his job became more demanding. The British government made him one of two postmasters general for all thirteen colonies. Now he was in charge of all of the mail!

As postmaster general for the colonies, Benjamin had to start thinking bigger. He began thinking of the colonies as a unified whole. This point of view came in handy when war broke out between the French and the British.

War on Two Continents

Between 1754 and 1763, France and Great Britain fought each other in a war called the French and Indian War. This war, fought in North America, was connected to a larger conflict being fought in Europe called the Seven Years' War, 1756-63.

For years, Britain and France had been fighting over who controlled the Ohio River valley territory in America. In 1752, the French attacked British traders. This eventually led to the French and Indian War.

People in the colonies wondered how they would protect themselves. They needed a plan.

Colonial representatives met in Albany, New York, in 1754 to figure it out. Benjamin represented Pennsylvania at what came to be known as the Albany Congress.

Benjamin believed that the thirteen colonies should join together to defend themselves. He printed a cartoon in his newspaper of a snake cut into pieces. It said, "Join, or Die."

Representatives in Albany agreed on Benjamin's plan to unify the colonies. But the colonial assemblies and the British government did not approve it.

Without unifying, how would the colonies fight the French? Britain sent troops to help. But supplying the British troops cost money. The Pennsylvania Assembly decided to raise money by taxing landowners.

But there was a problem. Two very wealthy landowners refused to be taxed.

William Penn had founded Pennsylvania in 1681. As the original proprietor of the colony, Penn controlled everything. His word was law.

William Penn's surviving sons, Thomas and Richard Penn, were the proprietors of Pennsylvania during the French and Indian War. They were rich and powerful and lived in England.

The Penns did not want to pay taxes on their land in Pennsylvania. So when the Pennsylvania Assembly passed the land tax, the Penns didn't pay it. This made the colonists angry.

Benjamin went to England to talk to the Penns. He brought his son William, who was about twenty-seven years old at the time. He also brought two enslaved men with him. Their names were Peter and King.

Benjamin tried to convince the Penns to listen to the Pennsylvania Assembly. But the Penns did not recognize the assembly's authority. They told Benjamin that they made the laws. The Pennsylvania Assembly could only give advice.

Who Owns the Land?

When the king of Great Britain gave a large piece of land to a person to develop in America, that person was called a proprietor. The land was called a proprietary colony. Proprietors had full control over their colonies, second only to the king's power.

While Benjamin argued with the Penn family, his son William studied law.

William loved England. He spent time with British nobility. And he spent a lot of money. He was becoming more of a British gentleman every day.

Benjamin was proud of his son, but he worried about him too. Benjamin had always thought of himself as a common person. Benjamin worried that William might not be focusing on the right things.

At the very end of their trip, and thanks to his father, William got a big surprise. The king appointed him governor of New Jersey. William was now part of the British government.

Benjamin sailed home to Philadelphia. And William sailed to New Jersey as its new governor.

In 1764, the Pennsylvania Assembly sent Benjamin back to England to deal with a new problem. They wanted him to protest against two new acts passed by Parliament, the Sugar Act and the Currency Act.

Benjamin was still loyal to Britain when he arrived. But he wanted British colonists in America to be treated the same as people in Britain. People in Britain elected members of Parliament. Benjamin thought colonists should be able to do that too.

But in 1765, the British Parliament passed the Stamp Act. The Stamp Act taxed the colonists on things made of paper, like newspapers and almanacs. Benjamin didn't like the tax one bit, but he didn't fight too hard against it. He was trying to be a friend to both Britain and the colonies. He still believed they could work out their differences. The problem was that the colonists didn't have any say in the new tax at all.

In America, the colonists flew into a rage! They hated the Stamp Act and thought it was very unfair. What was Benjamin doing in London? Why hadn't he used his influence to fight harder against it?

A mob gathered outside of Benjamin's house in Philadelphia. They threatened to burn it down. Deborah sent their daughter, Sally, away to keep her safe. The mob told Deborah to leave too, but she stayed. She and her relatives saved their home.



The mob's reaction was a big wake-up call for Benjamin! He got right to work making a strong case against the Stamp Act. He told the members of the British Parliament that they must repeal it. He presented his case, and he answered 174 questions in a single afternoon!

Thanks in large part to Benjamin, Parliament repealed the Stamp Act in 1766. The colonists were happy. But the British Parliament wasn't finished yet.

Parliamentary Representation

Parliament was (and still is) the lawmaking body in Great Britain. In colonial times, members of Parliament were elected by British citizens. Colonists in America could not elect members of Parliament. So the colonists did not feel that Parliament represented their interests.

Parliament passed more taxes on the colonies in 1767. Again, the colonists were furious. They had no say in these decisions. And again, Benjamin tried to find a peaceful way to solve the problem.

But Benjamin was slowly changing his mind about Britain's role in the thirteen colonies. He wanted to be a loyal British subject, but he also knew he was an American. He was beginning to realize he couldn't be both.

In America, colonists became more and more angry about the unfair decisions being made three thousand miles away in Parliament. They began to organize. The First Continental Congress met in 1774 at Carpenters' Hall in Philadelphia. Representatives discussed what they should do about Britain.

Meanwhile, things in London were not going well for Benjamin. This time, Parliament wouldn't listen to him. Important people who had been his friends insulted him. He was fired from his job as postmaster general for the colonies. And his common-law wife, Deborah, had died while he was away.

There was nothing left for him to do. Benjamin sailed home to Philadelphia in 1775. Another gathering of representatives would soon begin. The Second Continental Congress had been called. Benjamin became its oldest member the day after he arrived home. He was almost seventy years old.

6

Wise Words

In America, everyone was arguing about whether the colonies should become an independent nation or stay loyal to King George III. Benjamin just listened and kept quiet.

Younger members of the Second Continental Congress wondered what Benjamin's silence meant. After all, his son was a governor who was loyal to the king. Was Benjamin loyal to the king too? Was he a spy for Britain? No one was sure what Benjamin stood for.

But Benjamin knew. The time for talking was over. He wanted independence. Benjamin was now a patriot.

As colonists and members of the Congress kept debating, Benjamin took steps toward independence. He became the first postmaster general of the United States. He also helped create the paper currency that would be used in the colonies.

Benjamin wanted his son William to be a patriot too. But William was still loyal to the king. Eventually, they met to talk about their differences. Both were angry and held on to their own points of view.

Continental Congresses

The Second Continental Congress was a meeting of colonial representatives during the Revolutionary War. There were two Continental Congresses. The First Continental Congress (1774) met to decide how the colonies would oppose British taxes. The Second Continental Congress (1775–81) voted in favor of independence and established a provisional government.

As the weeks went by, it began to look like the Second Continental Congress would vote to break away from Britain. And if it did, the delegates would need to tell the world exactly why.

In June 1776, Congress chose five members for a very important job—to write a statement explaining why the colonies had voted for independence.

Congress picked Benjamin, Thomas Jefferson, and three other men for the job. Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence. Benjamin helped him with some of the wording.

Congress voted for independence on July 2, 1776. They adopted the Declaration of Independence on July 4. The United States of America was born.

delegates: people authorized to represent others

Signing the Declaration of Independence was a dangerous act for the delegates. The signers had betrayed the British king. They had bet their lives on founding a new nation.

John Hancock was the president of the Second Continental Congress.

“We must all hang together,” he told the signers. He meant that they needed to stay united to fight against Britain.

“Yes, we must indeed all hang together,” Benjamin is said to have replied, “or most assuredly we shall all hang separately.”

At last, the colonies were united in a war against Britain.

But the path they had chosen would not be easy. For one thing, the new country needed money and soldiers to win the war. Benjamin was sent to France to ask for help.

France welcomed Benjamin as a famous celebrity. In contrast to French style of the time, he wore simple clothes and a fur hat instead of fancy suits and a wig. The French people already knew and loved him for his discoveries about electricity. They loved his style even more! Women wore wigs inspired by Benjamin’s famous fur cap.

Men bought portraits of him to hang in their homes.

Benjamin was amused by this, and he encouraged it. His fame could help him succeed in his mission. If he failed, the United States might lose the war.

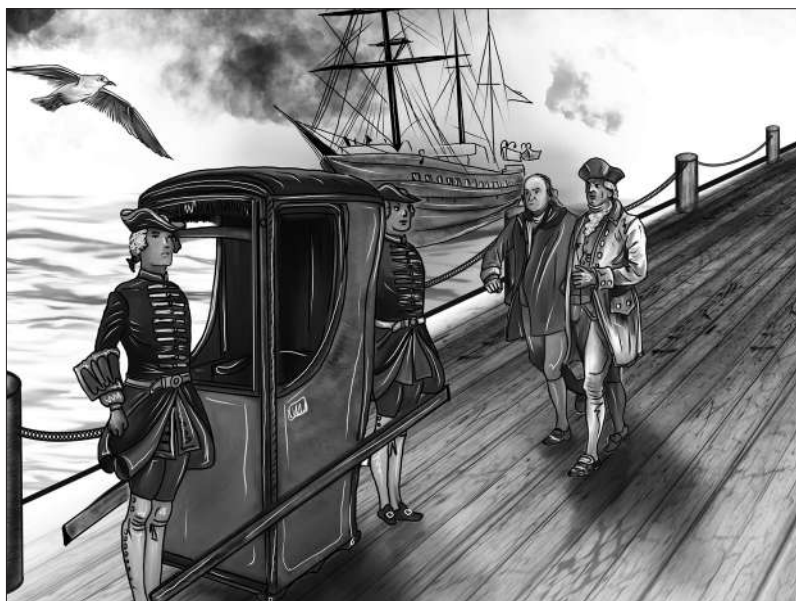
Spies surrounded Benjamin in France. A British secret service agent wrote letters in invisible ink telling the British government about the United States' plans.

Benjamin succeeded anyway. France sent money and troops to the United States. After many long, weary years of war, the British finally surrendered on October 19, 1781, at Yorktown, Virginia. It had been a long and costly war, but the United States had won.

When the fighting ended, Benjamin was one of the people who signed the peace treaty with Britain, officially ending the war.

Finally, in 1785, it was time to go home. All of France was sad to say goodbye to Benjamin. The king sent him off with a gift—a small painting of the king himself, surrounded by diamonds. The queen gave him a fancy ride in a royal litter to the ship's port.

Benjamin sailed to England first. There, he said goodbye to old friends. He also saw his son William.



Benjamin was still angry with William for staying loyal to Britain. William tried to make up with his father. But Benjamin could not forgive him. The division caused by the war was too deep. They never saw each other again.

Benjamin sailed to Philadelphia. A happy crowd met him at the dock.

"The affectionate welcome . . . from my fellow citizens is far beyond my expectation," he later wrote to friends.

It was well deserved. Without Benjamin's work in France, the United States might have lost the war.

7

The Rising Sun

The new country needed a new government. Once again, representatives gathered in Philadelphia. The Constitutional Convention was held to decide the rules that would govern the United States. Benjamin represented Pennsylvania. At eighty-one, he was the oldest person there.

When the convention began in May 1787, Benjamin noticed the chair that George Washington was sitting in. A sun was carved on the back of it. Benjamin looked at that sun throughout the whole convention. Was it a rising sun or a setting sun? Benjamin wasn't sure.

The delegates disagreed about many things. Should there be a strong national government or a loose partnership of independent states? Should representatives be elected based on population, or should each state have the same number of delegates?

Sometimes, arguments became angry. But Benjamin was a diplomat. He was wise. No one representative could get everything they wanted, he told them. They needed to work things out together. They needed to compromise.

diplomat: someone skilled in settling disagreements

Benjamin calmed down delegates when they got too angry at each other. He invited them to take breaks in his garden, relax, and get to know each other. Benjamin also showed them how to compromise by his own example. He was willing to consider new ideas. He even offered to give parts of Pennsylvania to other states if it would help! His generosity kept others from walking out.

The delegates kept talking. Together, they learned to compromise. And together, they wrote the Constitution of the United States of America.

Benjamin didn't like every single part of the Constitution. He had to compromise, like everyone else. But he also didn't think they could make a better Constitution. No one is perfect, he said, so no Constitution can be perfect. But to Benjamin, it was nearly perfect. It was as close as they could get at that moment in time. And that was pretty amazing.

"We are making experiments in politics," he wrote to a friend.

At the end of the convention, Benjamin looked at George Washington's chair again. As the delegates walked up to sign the Constitution, he decided it was a rising sun after all.

The sun was rising on a brand new nation.



Benjamin Franklin was a Founding Father, a printer, an author, a scientist, an activist, a politician, a diplomat, and an inventor. He was the living definition of a polymath.

But he was more than that.

He was an experimenter. He was a problem-solver. He always tried to make himself and his community better.

polymath: a person who is an expert in many areas

But he also made mistakes.

In colonial days, when a printer made mistakes, those mistakes were called errata. As Benjamin got older, he wanted to correct some of his own errata. One of these was his views about slavery.

Benjamin's views on slavery changed during his life. As a printer, he published ads for the sale of enslaved persons in the newspaper he owned, the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. And he enslaved several people himself.

Benjamin came to believe that slavery was simply wrong. He began to publish antislavery essays. In the last years of his life, he became an abolitionist. But as part of the Constitutional Convention, he compromised about slavery.

The year he died, Benjamin tried to correct this error. He presented a petition to Congress to abolish slavery in the United States. Congress refused. Two months later, Benjamin died.

Benjamin was an amazing person in many ways. He was also imperfect. All people are.

But Benjamin always tried to learn and understand more. He took steps to improve himself. He was willing to change. And he took actions to correct his errata. Perhaps these are Benjamin's greatest lessons for the United States today.

The United States is not perfect. It never has been. It never will be. It is a work that will always be in progress. It is Benjamin's ongoing experiment.

More Extraordinary Benjamin Franklin Facts

Benjamin Invented Swim Fins

When he was a boy, Benjamin taught himself to swim. He learned all the swim strokes.

But Benjamin wanted to swim faster. So he made two paddles, one for each hand. They looked like artist's palettes. He used them to push harder against the water.

The paddles made him swim faster! But they also made his wrists tired, so he stopped using them.



Benjamin also made paddles for his feet, but they didn't work very well.

He didn't realize it at the time, but Benjamin had invented the world's first swim paddles and swim fins!

Benjamin Electrocuted Himself

Benjamin loved experimenting with electricity. But once, he electrocuted himself. Fortunately, he lived to tell about it!

"I have lately made an experiment in electricity that I desire never to repeat," he wrote to his brother John.

Benjamin was checking to see if his Leyden jars were charged. He was distracted for a moment and suddenly felt a "universal blow thro'out [his] whole body from head to foot which seem'd within as well as without."

Benjamin's friends later told him they saw a great flash and heard a "crack as loud as a pistol." But Benjamin didn't see or hear a thing. His senses left him completely. When they returned, his whole body was shaking violently. His hand felt like "dead flesh," his arms and neck felt numb, and his sternum, or breastbone, felt sore and bruised for days.



Benjamin Invented Bifocal Glasses

Benjamin wore two pairs of eyeglasses—one pair for reading and one pair to see things far away. He constantly had to switch them depending on what he wanted to see. This annoyed him. So Benjamin cut the lenses of both pairs of glasses in half horizontally, or from side to side, and assembled the halves into one pair of lenses. The halves for seeing far were on top, and the halves for reading were on the bottom. He called his new glasses double spectacles.



“By this means, as I wear my spectacles [glasses] constantly,” Benjamin wrote, “I have only to move my eyes up or down, as I want to see distinctly far or near, the proper glasses being always ready.”

Today, we still use Benjamin’s double spectacles. We call them bifocal glasses or bifocals.

Benjamin Invented a Musical Instrument

Have you ever dipped your finger in water and run it around the rim of a glass to make an eerie noise? Benjamin loved that sound! So he turned it into a musical instrument called the glass armonica. The instrument looked a bit like a small piano, but it was made with different-sized glass bowls, each of which made a differently pitched note.

The glass armonica became very popular for a while. Beethoven and Mozart even composed music for it! But the glass bowls could break easily. And it was hard to make the sound loud enough to hear in big concert halls. Some people who played the glass armonica became mysteriously ill, possibly because of lead poisoning from touching the glass bowls. As a result, fewer and fewer people played it. It is not usually used in orchestras today.

Benjamin Became Known as the “First American”

Some people call Benjamin the “First American” because he was one of the first to say the colonies should band together and become united states.

Others call him the First American because his life was a rags-to-riches story. Benjamin came from a plain, ordinary family. By the end of his life, he was rich and famous and had been in the presence of kings. That almost never happened to common people in colonial times.



How did Benjamin become so successful?

Throughout his whole life, Benjamin experimented with ways to become a better person. He read many books and newspapers. He studied other people's writing to become a better writer. He wrote down rules to live by. He formed clubs with friends who also wanted to become better people. And he started many organizations to help his community.

Benjamin's hard work helped him get ahead of where he began in life. Some go so far as to say Benjamin "invented" himself. Many Americans think this can be true for anyone in the United States.

Discussion Questions

1. Swimming and flying a kite at the same time might not seem like an “official” experiment. Have you ever done something just to find out what would happen? Would you consider it to be an experiment?
2. Anne Franklin, Josiah’s first wife, died in childbirth, and four of Benjamin’s brothers and sisters died when they were only children. Why do you think people often died young in the British colonies?
3. What are some things about Benjamin that made his father think he should learn a trade instead of continuing in school to be a minister?
4. Benjamin used the pseudonym “Silence Dogood” when he wrote his essay for James’s newspaper. What are some reasons a person might use a pseudonym instead of their own name?
5. Sometimes things happen by chance, as when Benjamin met Deborah Read and the governor of Pennsylvania. How might Benjamin’s life have been different if he hadn’t met these two people?

6. Why did Benjamin's coworkers in London call him the "Water American"?
7. How did Benjamin's hard work help him succeed?
8. What is a hypothesis? What makes it different from a guess?
9. Why do you think Benjamin experimented with electricity?
10. What questions did Benjamin want to answer by flying a kite in a thunderstorm?
11. How does a lightning rod work?
12. How did Benjamin's job as postmaster general for the colonies help him begin to see the colonies as united?
13. Why were the Pennsylvania colonists angry with the Penn family?
14. Why did the colonists feel like Parliament didn't represent their interests?
15. What did the Second Continental Congress do?
16. Why was signing the Declaration of Independence a dangerous act?
17. Why did Benjamin go to France during the Revolutionary War?

18. Why do you think Benjamin was able to help calm arguments during the Second Constitutional Convention? Why is the ability to compromise important?
19. Why do you think Benjamin called the new country “an experiment in politics”?
20. In what ways is the United States an amazing country? How is it imperfect?
21. What does “inventing” yourself mean?
22. What choices help make you who you are?
23. Do other people influence who you are? How?
24. What does being an American mean to you?

Meet the Author



Fran Cannon Slayton grew up in Manassas, Virginia, where she experimented with pogo sticks, unicycles, playing the trumpet, and hanging from monkey bars. Like Benjamin, she enjoys visiting other countries, eating fluffy pieces of bread, and swimming (actually, water aerobics). Fran worked as a lawyer before becoming a children's book author. She is the author of *Snowball Moon*, a rhyming picture book about playing at night in the snow. *Kirkus Reviews* hailed her debut middle-grade novel, *When the Whistle Blows*, as "an unassuming masterpiece." Fran lives in Virginia with her husband, a mischievous cat, and a very furry dog.

You can find Fran at francannonslayton.com.

Meet the Illustrator



Ivan Pesic was born in Blace, Serbia, in 1975. In 2000, Ivan moved to Belgrade, Serbia, where he studied graphic design in college. Unhappy with the political and economic situation in Serbia, Ivan emigrated to Virginia, USA, in 2005. Ivan and his wife, Alisa, have two children, Tara and Luka. His work can be seen in many galleries in Virginia, Washington DC, North Carolina, and Georgia. Ivan has also donated his paintings to public schools and charity organizations. The primary medium Ivan uses is acrylic and oil paints; however, he also likes to experiment with different mediums and techniques. Aside from painting, Ivan has done pencil drawings, wall murals, mixed media art, photography, graphic design, and more. In his work, he reconstructs dreams, fairy

tales, nursery rhymes, lullabies—the pieces of our lives and memories that are a part of us. Every piece of his artwork tells a story, stories with a hero, a villain, with action, movement, and other elements that give his work life and energy. Ivan's work can be viewed on his website: **www.ipartstudio.com**

Credits

Cover Illustration by

Ivan Pesic

Title Page Illustration by

Ivan Pesic

Text Illustrations by

In Courtesy of Fran Cannon Slyton / 51

In Courtesy of Ivan Pesic / 52

Ivan Pesic / 1, 4, 10, 16, 23, 30, 37, 40, 43, 44, 45, 47

Voices in History is a Core Knowledge Biography Series that encourages young readers to learn about real superheroes in history. As a result of acts of extraordinary bravery, ingenuity, strength, and determination, these people made a difference and changed the world. Perhaps their remarkable stories will inspire young readers to become the superheroes of the future.

Core Knowledge VOICES IN HISTORY™

These books are suitable for readers aged 8 and up.

ISBN: 978-1-68380-913-5

