

## PICTURING AMERICA LESSON



*Bust of Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790), 1779*  
Jean-Antoine Houdon, French  
Marble  
21 x 13 1/2 x 10 inches (53.3 x 34.3 x 25.4 cm)  
125th Anniversary Acquisition. Purchased with a generous grant from The Barra Foundation, Inc., matched by contributions from the Henry P. McIlhenny Fund in memory of Frances P. McIlhenny, the Walter E. Stait Fund, the Fiske Kimball Fund, and with funds contributed by Mr. and Mrs. Jack M. Friedland, Hannah L. and J. Welles Henderson, Mr. and Mrs. E. Newbold Smith, Mr. and Mrs. Mark E. Rubenstein, Mr. and Mrs. John J. F. Sherrerd, The Women's Committee of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Marguerite and Gerry Lenfest, Leslie A. Miller and Richard B. Worley, Mr. and Mrs. John A. Nyheim, Mr. and Mrs. Robert A. Fox, Stephanie S. Eglin, an anonymous donor, Mr. and Mrs. William T. Vogt, and with contributions from individual donors to the Fund for Franklin, 1996

### Franklin: The Man, the Myth, the Legend

Benjamin Franklin has been regarded as one of the greatest minds of his age. Throughout his life, Franklin enjoyed international acclaim for his ideas, inventions, and personality. In death, this fame quickly rose to mythic proportions. This lesson challenges students to examine the birth of Franklin's legend by comparing portraits and sculptures that were created both during his life and after his death.

### Grade Level

For grades 6–12

### Common Core Academic Standards

#### SOCIAL STUDIES (HISTORICAL CONTEXT), LANGUAGE ARTS

- Reading Informational Text: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media #7
- Research to Build and Present Knowledge: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation #7
- Listening and Speaking: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats #2
- English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects, Text Types and Purposes: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences #3

### Art Images Required

Click on the Museum object titles below to view high-resolution photographs on the Philadelphia Museum of Art website. Click on the Picturing America object title to view that resource on the National Endowment for the Humanities website. Images that are also available in the ARTstor Digital Library are

For more information, please contact Division of Education and Public Programs: School and Teacher Programs by phone at 215-684-7580, by fax at 215-236-4063, or by e-mail at [educate@philamuseum.org](mailto:educate@philamuseum.org).

# PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

indicated by an ID number or search phrase. Entering that number or phrase into the ARTstor search bar will direct you to the corresponding image in that database.

## RELATED PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART OBJECTS:

- [Bust of Benjamin Franklin \(1706–1790\)](#), 1779, by Jean-Antoine Houdon  
ARTstor search: 1996-162-1
- [Benjamin Franklin Drawing Electricity from the Sky](#), c. 1816, by Benjamin West  
ARTstor search: 1958-132-1
- [Portrait of Benjamin Franklin](#), 1778 or 1779, by Anne-Rosalie Bocquet Filleul  
ARTstor search: not available on ARTstor

## RELATED PICTURING AMERICA OBJECT:

- [Benjamin Franklin](#), 1862, by Hiram Powers  
ARTstor search: powers franklin carnegie

## Lesson Process

1. Take some time, either as a class or in small groups, to look closely at each work, reading the background information provided online. (Be sure to review the “Teacher Resources” on the Museum website.) Discuss what you have discovered, including any questions you may still have about the paintings.
2. List the four art works on the board, indicating which were created during Benjamin Franklin’s lifetime and which after his death. What does each artwork tell you about Franklin’s career? His personality? His character? His interests? What details support your ideas?
3. Describe Franklin’s expression in each work. What insights into his character can you see in his appearance?
4. Look closely at each of the four representations of Franklin. Which one do you think tells us the most about his accomplishments? Which one tells the most about his personality? In each case, why did you make that selection?
5. How big is each work of art? How do you think the scale (or size) of the work might affect the viewer, and were you surprised about the size of any of the works?
6. If you were Franklin, which piece would you like the most and which would you like the least? Why?
7. Now that you have examined and discussed these works, go back to the list on the board. What differences can you see between those created during his lifetime and those created after his death? What conclusions can you reach about the evolution of Franklin’s legend?

## Assessment

1. Write an informational/expository essay comparing Franklin’s myth and reality. Use the works of art from this lesson as evidence in your essay.
2. Choose a character from history who you feel has reached “legendary” status. (For example, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, or Dr. Martin Luther King.) Without conducting any research, write a paragraph about what you know about your chosen historical figure. Next, conduct some basic biographical research on your selection, and reflect (in writing or through a classroom presentation) on how your research has either changed your initial beliefs or supported them.

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# PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

## Enrichment

1. Imagine you were hired to create a painting of Benjamin Franklin for an upcoming exhibition of the Founding Fathers. What aspect of his rich and complex life would you show in your artwork?
  - Conduct additional research into his life, accomplishments, and inventions.
  - From your research, choose an aspect of Franklin's life that you find interesting.
  - Create a proposal describing the attribute of Franklin that you have chosen and explaining why you think it is an important one to highlight.
  - In your proposal, include a description of the painting you plan to create providing specific information about your image (the size, setting, Franklin's costuming, expression, props, and pose).
  - Include a simple sketch to accompany your proposal and description.
2. Select a person from pop culture (music, movies, etc.) who died young. Research information written about that person during their career and compare it to information written after his/her death. Look for the creation of modern legends.