



LESSON 6:

Franklin's Philadelphia: Another Point of View

OVERVIEW

Benjamin Franklin was a very talented, hardworking, and ambitious man who achieved fortune and fame in colonial Philadelphia. He is often cited as the classic example of the “rags-to-riches” American success story. Not all were so fortunate. Philadelphia grew quickly in Franklin’s long life, absorbing many new immigrants, migrants, slaves, and indentured servants. Many did well in the growing Quaker City; others did not. This lesson looks at the Philadelphia landscape encountered by another tradesman who arrived in the 1720s, just a few years after Franklin’s arrival.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Develop an understanding of daily life in colonial Philadelphia through the experiences of an indentured servant, William Moraley.
- Read a brief scholarly essay describing Moraley’s 1729 arrival in Philadelphia.
- Analyze the social and economic conditions of what was one of the Western world’s most multicultural cities.
- Reflect on why Moraley was not able to achieve the fame and fortune that Franklin achieved.
- Research the lives of other groups living in the Philadelphia region alongside Franklin: landowners, European immigrants, Native Americans, and African slaves, including women and children.

TIME

This lesson and activity require approximately two to three class periods, with additional time needed to complete the assignment at home.

MATERIALS

- Billy G. Smith. “Walking Moraley’s Streets: Philadelphia.” Available at www.common-place.org/vol-03/no-04/philadelphia/.
- Library and/or Internet resources

McREL STANDARDS

History/Historical Understanding

Standard 2. Understands historical perspective

History/United States History

Standard 3. Understands why America attracted Europeans and why they brought enslaved Africans

Standard 4. Understands how the values and institutions of European economic life took root in the colonies and how slavery reshaped African and European life in the Americas

LESSON AND ACTIVITY

1. Reading

For homework, students read *Walking Moraley's Streets: Philadelphia* by Billy G. Smith.

2. Discussion

After the homework has been completed, lead a class discussion based on the Smith essay focusing on the physical, social, and economic conditions of colonial Philadelphia and the comparisons the author draws between Franklin and Moraley. You might ask the class one or more of the following:

- How would you describe William Moraley?
- What options did Moraley have upon his arrival in Philadelphia?
- What factors made Philadelphia a good city to live in during the 1720s?
- What factors made Philadelphia a difficult place to live in at that time?
- Why does the author say that Moraley characterized himself as a “voluntary slave?”
- What conditions favored an artisan’s success in Philadelphia?
- Why does the author keep comparing Moraley to Benjamin Franklin?

3. Research

Students use library or Internet resources to research the lives and living conditions of members of other groups living in Philadelphia during Franklin’s time. The class should study a wide range of groups, including landowners, European immigrants, Native Americans, and African slaves. Wherever possible, students should explore what the lives of men, women, and children were like. The goal should be to collect enough information to be able to write a short section from an autobiography for a fictional member of a chosen group.

4. Writing

Students prepare portions of an autobiography for a fictional member of a chosen group. The autobiography should include the fictional individual’s name, age, gender, ethnicity, and some event or series of events from their life...perhaps their arrival in Philadelphia or their reason for leaving their homes. Students can be encouraged to incorporate into their autobiographies some invention, innovation, or civic achievement by Franklin, such as:

- University of Pennsylvania
- Pennsylvania Hospital
- Street lighting, street paving, night patrols
- American Philosophical Society
- Union Fire Company
- Colonial post office improvements
- Philadelphia Contributionship
- Society for Promoting Abolition of Slavery
- Franklin’s Last Will and Testament donation
- The Franklin stove

Students can describe how one or more of the above may or may not have impacted the lives of their fictional character. This may require additional research.

Remind students to cite their sources in a bibliography.

5. Ask students to read aloud from their fictional autobiographies.

ASSESSMENT

Students are assessed on the quality of their participation in class discussion, the thoroughness of their research, and the details included in their writing assignments. Essays may be evaluated according to an established rubric.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Ask students to write an essay that compares and contrasts the experiences of Moraley with those of Franklin. They should use quotes from primary and secondary sources to support their points.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- Smith, Billy G. *The "Lower Sort": Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750-1800* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1990).
- www.ushistory.org/
- Brands, H.W. *The First American: The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin*. (New York: Doubleday, 2000).
- Nash, Gary B. *First City*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).
- The Writings of Benjamin Franklin: www.historycarper.com/resources/twobfl/contents.htm
- America in the 1770s: www.assumption.edu/ahc/1770s/default.html
- Franklin's Philadelphia: www.ushistory.org/franklin/philadelphia/
- History of U.S. Postal Service: www.usps.com/history/his1_5.htm
- Benjamin Franklin: An Extraordinary Life. An Electric Mind. www.pbs.org/benfranklin/
- Franklin Writings: E-Text depository: www.infomotions.com/etexts/literature/american/1700-1799/
- The Franklin Institute: <http://sln.fi.edu/>
- University of Pennsylvania Health System's Historic Collections: www.uphs.upenn.edu/paharc/collections/
- Map of Historic Philadelphia in the Late 18th Century: <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/convention/map/>