



LESSON 1:

Benjamin Franklin and the Way to a Good Life

OVERVIEW

Born into a large family of Boston tradesmen, Benjamin Franklin learned early the value of education and the importance of personal virtue. As a young man, Franklin's character evolved as he set out to improve himself and the world around him. At the age of twenty-seven, Franklin composed a list of thirteen virtues for living well. He carried the list in his pocket for many years and worked to live up to it all his life. The thirteen virtues that Franklin conceived were temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity, and humility.

This lesson asks students first to consider how Franklin did his best to live well by creating a list of thirteen virtues and then to compose their own lists of thirteen rules for living a good life.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Examine Franklin's list of thirteen virtues.
- Learn that a person can take measures to build character and to live well.
- Reflect on the meaning and importance of living a good life.
- Compose a list similar to Franklin's list of thirteen virtues.

TIME

This lesson and activity require two class periods.

MATERIALS

- Adler, David. *A Picture Book of Benjamin Franklin*. (New York: Holiday House, 2001).
- Classroom display board
- Paper and pencils

McREL STANDARDS

Civics

Standard 27. Understands how certain character traits enhance citizens' ability to fulfill personal and civic responsibilities

Life Skills/Self-Regulation

Standard 1. Sets and manages goals

Standard 2. Performs self-appraisal

Standard 5. Maintains a healthy self-concept

Language Arts

Standard 8. Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

LESSON AND ACTIVITY

1. Reading

Read to the class *A Picture Book of Benjamin Franklin* by David Adler. (If this book is not available, select a picture book about Franklin that mentions his list of thirteen virtues.)

Ask students to pay close attention to what the story says about Franklin's good character and to be ready to share their thoughts afterward.

2. Discussion

Guide a class discussion of good character traits. Ask such questions as:

- What does it mean to be a good person?
- What does a good person do?
- What does a good person say?
- How does a good person behave?

Explain that good people do their best to live a good life. For example, a good person might:

- Set good examples
- Learn from mistakes
- Show respect for others
- Act responsibly
- Work hard
- Work to help make the world a better place

(You may wish to display this list on a classroom chart, blackboard, or whiteboard.)

3. Recall Benjamin Franklin's thirteen virtues, as described in the picture book. Be sure to emphasize that Franklin did not always live up to every virtue, but rather kept the list close as a reminder of his desire to live well.

4. Group Work

Separate the students into pairs or small groups. Drawing on Franklin's thirteen virtues, ask the students to compose lists of thirteen rules that they will try to follow in living a good life. When students have completed their lists, one person from each group will report to the class.

Example:

13 Rules for Living a Good Life:

- Speak kindly to others.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Exercise regularly.
- Volunteer in the community.
- Help keep the Earth clean.
- Be truthful.
- Show love for family and friends.
- Spend money carefully.
- Try not to waste time.
- Be kind to animals.
- Learn as much as you can.
- Be a leader.
- Always do your best.

5. Students' lists can be displayed on a wall or bulletin board titled "13 Rules for Living a Good Life."

ASSESSMENT

The students are assessed on the quality of their cooperative work and on their understanding of the relationship between their lists and Benjamin Franklin’s thirteen virtues.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Benjamin Franklin began each day by asking himself, “What good shall I do this day?” Ask the students to mark their daily goals for living well on a calendar by referring to their thirteen rules for living well.