



LESSON 2:

Benjamin Franklin and Learning a Lesson

OVERVIEW

Benjamin Franklin loved to tell stories. As an adult, he recalled incidents from his boyhood in Boston to illustrate moral points. One such story is “The Whistle.” The story relates how the seven-year-old Franklin’s delight in a new toy turns to dismay when he learns that he has paid far too much for it. Franklin crafted the tale into a moral lesson urging others to question the undue value attributed to material possessions.

The students will read “The Whistle” and discern the moral lesson illustrated in the story. Then they will be asked to think of a time when they learned a lesson from making a mistake and write a brief narrative describing the incident and the lesson learned.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Explore how stories can be used to convey meaningful messages.
- Reflect on incidents in their own lives.
- Share a lesson that they have learned with others.

TIME

This lesson and activity require one class period.

MATERIALS

- “The Whistle” handout
- Composition paper
- Pencils

McREL STANDARDS

Life Skills/Self-Regulation

Standard 2. Performs self-appraisal

Standard 5. Maintains a healthy self-concept

Language Arts

Standard 1. Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process

LESSON AND ACTIVITY

1. Reading

Distribute “The Whistle” handout to students. Read the story aloud with the class and discuss the moral point it illustrates.

2. Ask the students to answer the questions following the story, either individually or in pairs. After all students have completed the handout, discuss the questions as a class.

3. Writing

Ask the students to compose a short narrative describing a time when they learned a lesson from making a mistake. The assignment may be completed as homework.

4. Students may share their stories with the class.

ASSESSMENT

Students are assessed on the quality of their class participation and on their narratives.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Students illustrate scenes from “The Whistle.”

“The Whistle”

BY BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

When I was a Child of seven Years old, my Friends on a Holiday fill'd my little Pocket with Halfpence. I went directly to a Shop where they sold Toys for Children; and being charm'd with the Sound of a Whistle that I met by the way, in the hands of another Boy, I voluntarily offer'd and gave all my Money for it. When I came home, whistling all over the House, much pleas'd with my Whistle, but disturbing all the Family, my Brothers, Sisters & Cousins, told me I had given four times as much for it as it was worth, & laught at me so much for my Folly that I cry'd with Vexation; and the Reflection gave me more Chagrin than the Whistle gave me Pleasure.

As I grew up, came into the World, and observed the Actions of Men, I thought I met many who gave too much for the Whistle. If I knew a Miser, who gave up every kind of comfortable Living, all the Pleasure of doing Good to others, for the sake of Accumulating Wealth, Poor Man, says I, you pay too much for your Whistle.

When I saw a beautiful sweet-temper'd Girl, marry'd to an ill-natured Brute of a Husband; What a Pity, says I, that she should pay so much for a Whistle!

In short, I conceiv'd that great Part of the Miseries of Mankind, were brought upon them by the false Estimates they had made of the Value of Things, and by their giving too much for the Whistle.

—The Whistle, written for Mme. Brillon
Passy: Benjamin Franklin, 1779
Rosenbach Museum & Library, Philadelphia

DIRECTIONS: After you have completed the reading, answer the following question about “The Whistle” in complete sentences.

What is the moral point that Benjamin Franklin makes by telling this story?