



### LESSON 4:

## B. Franklin, Printer and the Public Eye

### OVERVIEW

For Franklin, the printing trade provided more than just an income: he used his press to spread ideas and to influence public opinion. His witty and wise writings in *Poor Richard's Almanack* put a humorous spin on age-old advice, and many of his aphorisms are frequently referenced today.

As the threat from France and their Native American allies grew more threatening, Franklin urged the colonies to join together to defend against a French attack. He moved quickly to influence public opinion by publishing an editorial and adjacent cartoon in *The Pennsylvania Gazette* on May 9, 1754. His “Join, or Die” cartoon came to symbolize colonial strength and solidarity in the struggle for independence from Great Britain.

This lesson introduces students to two of Franklin’s most famous publications: the “Join, or Die” cartoon and *Poor Richard's Almanack*. In one activity, students will study the historical significance and message of Franklin’s “Join, or Die” cartoon and then create their own cartoons. A second activity asks students to discern the figurative and literal meanings of Poor Richard’s sayings.

### OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Understand the historical significance of two of Franklin’s most famous publications.
- Explore how meaningful messages are conveyed through cartoons and witticisms.
- Create their own cartoons and aphorisms to convey a message meaningful to them.

### McREL STANDARDS

#### Language Arts

Standard 6. Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts

Standard 9. Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

#### History

Standard 4. Understands how democratic values came to be and how they have been exemplified through people, events, and symbols

### ACTIVITY 1

#### “Join, or Die”

### TIME

This activity requires one class period.

### MATERIALS

- “Join, or Die: The First Political Cartoon” handout
- Pencils
- Drawing paper

**LESSON AND ACTIVITY**

1. Introduction

Begin a lesson on the roles that newspapers served in the colonies. Explain that many homes had only two books: the Bible and an almanac. As a result, newspapers were a primary source of reading material for many colonists. Franklin often used his newspaper to promote his own ideas, both in writing and in pictures.

2. Distribute copies of the “Join, or Die” handout to students. As a class, discuss the meaning of the cartoon. Direct the discussion to deal with the importance of using pictures to convey important messages. (In fact, Franklin is credited with creating the first political cartoon.)

3. Activity

Students create their own cartoons to communicate their ideas on issues affecting their own lives (i.e., cafeteria food, school transportation, recess, community service, etc.).

4. Students will share their cartoons with the class and all students’ cartoons can be displayed in the classroom.

**ASSESSMENT**

Students are assessed on the quality of their participation in class discussion and on how effectively the cartoons they create communicate a message through pictures.

**EXTENSION ACTIVITY**

Ask the students to find political cartoons dealing with contemporary issues in newspapers, in magazines, or online. This can be done either as a classroom activity or as homework. In pairs or small groups, students take turns discussing the messages conveyed in the cartoons.

**ACTIVITY 2**

**“Poor Richard Says...”**

**TIME**

This activity requires one class period. Preparation includes transferring the *Poor Richard’s Almanack* image onto a transparency.

**MATERIALS**

- Overhead projector
- *Poor Richard’s Almanack* image transparency
- “Poor Richard Says” handout
- Pencils

**LESSON AND ACTIVITY**

1. Show students the *Poor Richard’s Almanack* transparency on an overhead projector.

2. Explain to students the roles that printed materials (e.g., newspapers, pamphlets, broadsides) played in colonial American society. Emphasize that for many people in the colonies an almanac was only one of two books owned.

3. Describe an almanac as a useful book containing information that related to the everyday lives of people in the colonies—advice for farmers, weather forecasts, riddles, recipes, and poems. If available, show the students a contemporary almanac.
4. Introduce *Poor Richard's Almanack* to the students. Talk about Benjamin Franklin's pseudonym Richard Saunders and his witty and wise sayings. Select one or more of Franklin's aphorisms to talk about with the class, paying special attention to the literal and figurative meanings of the sayings.
5. Distribute the "Poor Richard Says" handouts to students. Students may work individually or in groups. Note that there are several versions of the handout; therefore, not all students will interpret the same sayings.
6. Review Poor Richard's sayings with the class by asking students to share their interpretations.

#### ASSESSMENT

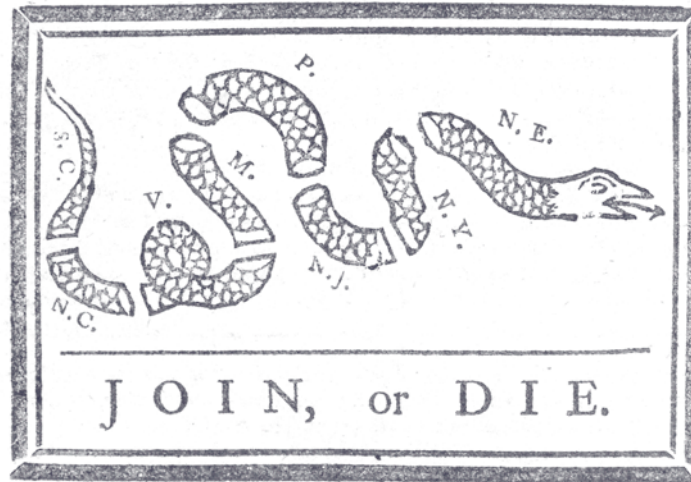
Students are assessed on the quality of their class participation, group work (if applicable), and on the extent to which their interpretation of the aphorisms demonstrates understanding of the distinction between literal and figurative language.

#### EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Students create pseudonyms and characters to write sayings that offer useful information to classmates, teachers, family members, etc.
- Create a class almanac akin to *Poor Richard's Almanack* and relevant to contemporary times. This also may be created by groups of students.

## “Join, or Die:” The First Political Cartoon

Benjamin Franklin printed the first political cartoon in *The Pennsylvania Gazette* on May 9, 1754. At the time, the colonies faced threats from both the French and Native Americans. Franklin created this illustration of a disjointed snake with the phrase “Join, or Die” underneath it. Each segment of the snake represents a colony. With this cartoon, Franklin was one of the first people to suggest that the colonies must join together or else be taken over by stronger powers.

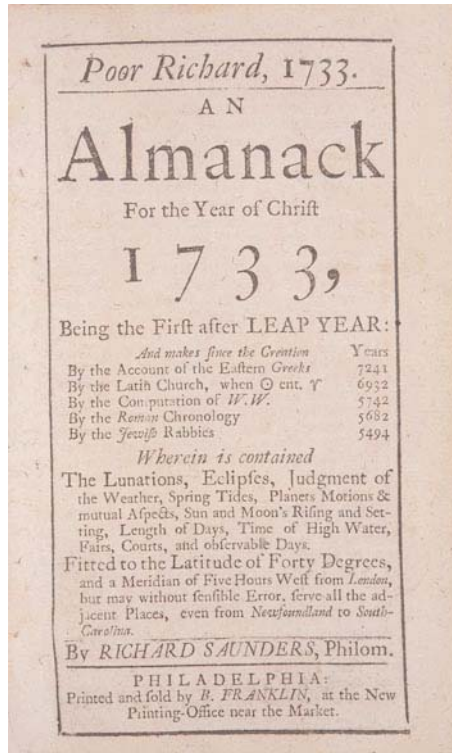


Benjamin Franklin

“Join, or Die” woodcut cartoon in *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 9, 1754

The Library Company of Philadelphia

## Poor Richard's Almanack



Details from *Poor Richard, 1733: An Almanack For the Year of Christ 1733*, Richard Saunders (Benjamin Franklin), Rosenbach Museum & Library, Philadelphia, Peter Harholdt, photo.

## Poor Richard Says...

POOR RICHARD SAYS...	POOR RICHARD REALLY MEANS...
<p><b>“A penny saved is a penny earned.”</b></p>	
<p><b>“Never leave for tomorrow that which you can do today.”</b></p>	
<p><b>“Great talkers, little doers.”</b></p>	
<p><b>“Early to bed, early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.”</b></p>	

## Poor Richard Says...

POOR RICHARD SAYS...	POOR RICHARD REALLY MEANS...
<p><b>“A lie stands on one leg, truth on two.”</b></p>	
<p><b>“The doors of wisdom are never shut.”</b></p>	
<p><b>“A true friend is the best possession.”</b></p>	
<p><b>“Lost time is never found again.”</b></p>	

## Poor Richard Says...

POOR RICHARD SAYS...	POOR RICHARD REALLY MEANS...
<p><b>“The sleeping fox catches no poultry. Up! Up!”</b></p>	
<p><b>“An apple a day keeps the doctor away.”</b></p>	
<p><b>“There are no gains without pains.”</b></p>	
<p><b>“Haste makes waste.”</b></p>	