The Social Studies curriculum for the New Haven Public Schools in grade 6 is a year long study of the State of Connecticut. In conjunction with the study of Connecticut, I believe that it is important to teach Language Arts, not in an isolated area, but in the content areas, in this case Social Studies, the study of Connecticut. I want the children, through the use of the Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, to interpret how it was to live in colonial times, what was going on during that time period, and why Franklin felt it was important and necessary to write his autobiography. Using the Franklin book, the children will read about his life and through it be able to get some sense of Connecticut history by learning about a similar colonial life.

This unit is specifically for grade 6 students as an alternative to the basal series used to teach Language Arts for a period of 6 weeks. Many of the Language Arts objectives and strategies are in the area of basic grammar skills; however, it is necessary to show the children that correct grammar and usage is a universal form and not only in the basal texts we use. In addition, in order to acquire a full view of Franklin, I believe, it is necessary to use an interdisciplinary approach including the areas of Music, Art, History, Geography and Science.

In the schools, we are locked into certain time spaces, according to the schedule given to us by the administration. The use of this unit, however, can be adjusted to fit any circumstances. The Language Arts component can be taught exclusively during your Language Arts/Reading time by simply finding passages that cover the objectives of this unit and any other you intend on covering. In the areas of Art, Music and Science, I would enlist the aid of those teachers asking them to incorporate this unit into their plans. (You must be willing to give these teachers a great deal of help to insure success). History and Geography can be taught under the veil of Social Studies and be used along with the study of Connecticut.

If you are in a self-contained classroom and do not have the special area teachers, this unit can be used in two different ways. You could use a thematic study approach incorporating all the areas at one time concentrating on Franklin, or by taking the unit in parts filling it in to your curriculum when it coincides with areas you are teaching. I would keep the Language Arts component together for the full 6 weeks.

I chose the book the Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin because it is a book which will fulfill the needs of the children we teach in grade 6. Franklin’s style and content in his writing will enable teachers to stimulate children of all levels and abilities. Franklin’s overall appeal to such a wide range of interests and likes, his time period, his scientific achievements, his success in business, his writings, his life as a politician, all make his
autobiography a natural choice to accomplish the objectives of this unit.

I intend in using the *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, in three main areas. One practice will be taking excerpts from the book and after reading them with the children, have an open discussion relating to the topic of the day: Language Arts, Science, History, etc. Another device will be to have the children find answers to assigned questions using the book. My main goal, however, will be to have the children interpret Franklin’s style, his ease of writing and content, using this to inspire, motivate and guide the children to do more writing.

**Language Arts:**

**Objectives The child will be able to:**

1. define autobiography;
2. write a journal;
3. interpret and describe voice;
4. write diaries;
5. write letters;
6. write wills;
7. outline
8. use basic grammar (nouns, verbs, adjectives, punctuation, sentence structure etc.)

Language Arts, in particular, writing is an area the children need to improve in greatly. An emphasis is put on Reading and Math skills. While writing as a form other than letter formation is falling behind. Children treat writing as a form of punishment, not something easy, enjoyable, or fun. Many of the Language Arts activities as stated in my objectives above are very basic. It is necessary to show the children that correct grammar, usage, and sentence structure are universal forms not only taught in school. In illustrating Franklin’s easy going style, it would show the children that good writing does not have to be long, involved, or filled with long words, just easy to read. The children would then see that good writing is well within their capabilities and write more. The diversity of the subject matter alone will motivate children to write.

Before one could really get into depth on the autobiography, it would be very useful to discover what the children know about the subject. A simple assignment of having the children write their definition of autobiography would be an excellent way to start and compare this at the end of the unit.

Writing must be made enjoyable to the students and something that they feel they can do. What could be easier than writing about themselves, they are the experts! An easy way to start the children writing about themselves is to keep a diary. It is important to give the children time every day to write, assuring them that
no person or teacher will read it, it will remain private. Will writing would be fun and different, for after reading how Franklin wrote his the children’s attempts would be interesting. (243-44, 266-67) Journal writing in this unit will be used as a means to correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, and any other writing mistakes. Twice weekly the children will be given assignments to write in their journals. Samples of assignments might include: noting changes in scenery coming to school, noting the differences in the school building week to week, or any other topic of interests after it was discussed with the teacher. You would then, after giving the children their assignments, tell them the specific area you are going to correct this work for: spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc.

The teaching of basic skills and sentence structure can be done by using any passage of the autobiography. An easy way to keep interest up is to let the children decide the passage to use, since it will be their choice they will participate freely. Outlining, a skill necessary and important, could be handled by using a long letter or passage (107, 121) Franklin has written. The children would make an outline of what he was trying to say to the reader and learn as much from that exercise as any workbook on the market.

Letter writing to a friend is a skill that has numerous examples in the autobiography (61, 133, 136). Discuss the content, were there hidden meanings, how did he convey his thoughts, were they clear in an orderly fashion? Have the children write, explore, and experiment with these forms of writings, with you acting as guide, motivator, stimulator and cheerleader.

To guide the children into developing their own style in writing, it is important for children to understand the concept of “voice”. This can be accomplished through the use of the Franklin autobiography and those of others. Voice is how an author conveys his meaning and message by the words he uses and doesn’t use. This task is the most difficult yet most rewarding when helping children to write about themselves or any topic developing their style. This can be done by reading passages from Franklin and others, interpreting and discussing style, intent vocabulary, and meaning with the children. Another way to accomplish this goal is to encourage the children to explore with their own writing. Children describing the same event would show examples of different “voices”, it would be explored and discussed eventually leading to having the children describe something different ways themselves.

History

Objective The child will be able to:

1. list Franklin’s civic accomplishments (5);
2. list Franklin’s political accomplishments (5);
3. name 4 documents he signed;
4. interpret how he felt about his accomplishments.

As we read more and more about Franklin, we find as we turn the pages that he has assumed more and more responsibilities. It appears, at times, that as Benjamin Franklin goes, so goes the United States of America, Franklin gave many descriptions and accounts of his feelings concerning the revolution and the events
preceding it. Using excerpts from the book, it would be very interesting for the children to read them and interpret how Franklin must have felt at the time. The excerpts that I would use for these activities are: Franklin being put in front of the Privy Council (cockpit) (187-193), how he dealt with the fact that Lee and Izard were talking behind his back while he was in France (223-24), and his feelings on the differences of political opinions he and his son had (200).

While in Philadelphia, after his retirement at age 42, Franklin devoted a great deal of time, energy, and money into civic improvements, many of which we are still benefiting from. Franklin tells in his autobiography the many things that he did to improve the situation for the people in Philadelphia. Included in these were: starting the first circulating library, forming the first fire department in Philadelphia, starting the first American fire insurance company, reforming the police department, building forts to protect the people on the frontier, helped organize the first hospital in the Americas, and started the Academy of Pennsylvania which was to become the University of Pennsylvania. The children, after reading these accounts in the autobiography, will discuss and write essays on what it would be like to live without these things. I would like the children to put themselves in colonial times and understand what it would be like not to have a fire department, hospital or library.

**Geography**

**Objectives The child will be able to:**

1. find England, France and America on a map;
2. make a map showing England, France and the thirteen colonies;
3. make a map showing the sailing routes of Franklin;
4. draw Franklin’s route when he ran away from home.

In the area of Geography, there are many skills that can be taught while using the *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. Most children at one time or another have talked about and maybe even tried to run away from home. Benjamin Franklin, at the age of 17, decided that he could no longer live and work under his brother and decided to leave Boston and go to the nearest place that had printing shops, New York. Finding no work in New York, Benjamin set off to Philadelphia where he was promised a job. Franklin left Boston because he had taken over the print shop and newspaper when his brother was put in jail and did it quite successfully. He does admit that he overstepped his boundary (15) and was also quite vocal enough to upset many powerful people. At this point he decided to leave and later these series of events were considered by him to be his first errata in life.

The children could read the passage (16-22) to discover where he went and then make a map tracing the route he might have followed. Along the same lines, the children could make a map showing the 13 colonies, England and France including the routes his ship most likely took on its journey across the Atlantic Ocean.

**Art**
Objectives The child will be able to:

1. Make parchment, smoke and marbleized paper;
2. make candles;
3. block print, preparing their own patterns;
4. make books of their work.

The area of Art in the body of this unit would be used primarily in conjunction with Geography and as a culminating activity. Using the passages about his crossings of the Atlantic, the children would research what a colonial vessel was like, what was in it, what it carried, and draw, paint, or make it.

Franklin's life and successes could be directly attributed to his early beginnings as a printer and the resourcefulness and good judgment he displayed. An exercise to allow the children to discover printing can be done easily with your class.

Printing Materials potato, tempera paints, knife, paper.

Procedure

1. cut potato in 1/2;
2. carve design on the inside of the potato;
3. dip carved potato into paint;
4. print on paper;
5. allow to dry.

Another exercise that the children will enjoy and also give them a feel for the period will be making their own parchment paper. This type of paper is easily recognizable to the children because it is like the paper our early government documents are on.

Parchment Paper Materials Linseed Oil, turpentine, lemon juice, oak tag.

Procedure

1. mix 3 parts linseed oil, 1 part lemon juice, 2 parts turpentine;
2. soak oak tag 45 min.;
3. dry 24 hours in the sun.

Music

Objectives The child will be able to:

1. sing a colonial song;
2. describe how music reflected the times.

Since Franklin talks about his youth (2-10) and most autobiographers start out recounting their youth, I believe, it would be interesting to explore with the children music and songs of the colonial period.

Before the 1770’s there were few records of the folk songs that were sung in the colonies. Up to that point, most of the songs were religious in nature with the newer ones being psalms fitted to existing music. (Could this have influenced Franklin’s religious beliefs?) Some examples of this religious music is “In Dulci Jubilo”, “Old Hundreth”, and “The Pilgrims Melody”.¹

When religious groups had control of the community and what people did and did not do, music and dancing were not allowed; to get around this, other forms of music and dancing were used by the people. Examples of this are “Pop Goes the Weasel” and “Skip to My Lou”² which are songs that had no musical instruments playing; the people hopped, jumped, clapped and sang, cleverly avoiding the label of dancing.

The work ethic was a strong and driving force during the Franklin era and as one might expect, there are a number of songs written about it. Two examples of this type of song would be “Whiskey Johnny” and “The Oven Song”.³

What the children would have to do is find passages that address themselves with the different types of musical themes mentioned above: the religious, patriotic, work ethic and fun times.

Science

Objectives The child will be able to:

1. list 5 Franklin inventions or discoveries;
2. define patent;
3. describe the importance of the almanac.
Benjamin Franklin was one of this country’s earliest and most prolific inventor and scientist. His many inventions and scientific discoveries are still very much a part of life today. His inventions includes: the lightning rod, heat stove, bifocals and the platform rocker.

Franklin, the scientist, can be attributed to work in many different areas. His work in electricity had a far reaching effect that is felt even today. His discovery that you need ventilation to help prevent the spread of disease undoubtedly did much to save lives in the 1700’s. A testimony to his scientific achievements was his acceptance into the European scientific community and also the popularity of his “Poor Richards Almanac” which helped farmers and promoted good clean living, (as Franklin would have it).

As you use this unit, read the autobiography, you will find that the brief introduction above hardly begins to do justice to his long list of achievements. There are many ways that I would treat this part of Franklin, the inventor and scientist. The children could make a list of the passages where he talks about his inventions or scientific discoveries (5, 35-40, 81, 89-91, 105-112, 235-239, 263) and read them. They will then compare his style of writing them to each other illustrating the similarities of expression in each.

Another way the children could explore Franklin, the scientist, would be to pick an experiment or invention that he discusses having the children describe how it was done, (it will require the use of outside sources) what benefits it had on society, and finally making an oral presentation to the class. Reports by two or three children working together adding drawings or actual demonstrations would be very exciting. This would also be a good way to bring in discussion of his almanac.

On page 81, Franklin describes his feelings about patents when he states, “that as we enjoy the great advantages of others we should be glad of an opportunity to serve others by any invention of ours, and we should do freely and generously”. It would be interesting for the children to approach this passage in two different ways. One would be to have the children discuss if this is an attitude we would find in 1982. If it is not, why isn’t it? The children could get into the motives of why people do things: money, power, greed, goodwill, etc. As another activity the children could cite other examples of Franklin’s generosity and unselfishness.

Quest

As we are all aware, there are children in our classrooms who will devour all of the material presented and want to further their study in this area. In this section of the unit, I have developed activities that will take the child beyond the presented curriculum. In order for the children to complete these activities, it will be necessary to enlist the aid of the school librarian or media specialist to instruct the children in proper researching techniques.

The Businessman

Benjamin Franklin displayed a great deal of cunning, skill, knowledge and aptitude in the business world during colonial times. Franklin was very adept at setting up goals, seeing a problem, solving it, and figuring out dilemmas to a generally beneficial result. His keen mind and sense of orderliness was a quality that made people seek him out for advice and counsel.

My task for the children in this section would be to look at several of the numerous lists that Franklin has set down for himself, examine them and equate them to 1982 making comments on their application or non-application. If the children feel that they would not be applicable in today’s society, how would they modify
them to fit. An example of this activity would be to take Franklin’s thirteen virtues (63) and rewrite them using modern terms adding or deleting any of them they decided were not needed.

**Religion**

During the period of time in which Benjamin Franklin lived, although its importance was declining rapidly, religion played a major force in the lives of many people. Franklin, a man who did not openly attend religious services, did support the Presbyterian minister in Philadelphia in continuing to pay his annual subscription. Franklin, though, at the age of 32 felt a need to explain to his parents his religious beliefs. (61)

Franklin, as was stated above, did not openly attend religious services but devised for himself a tool in 1728 to practice “religion”. The children at this point will read the letter Franklin wrote his parents and find the passage describing how he practiced “religion”. Once this has been found and read, I would ask the children to find other passages that Franklin mentions anything about God, salvation, redemption, or religion and comment on it.

**Slavery**

In the middle to late 1700's slavery was an issue that was just beginning to become a hotbed of discussion and debate in the new world. Franklin, who had owned, bought, and sold slaves, wrote a letter to the editor of the “Federal Gazette” commenting severely on the condition of slavery in the Americas. (Franklin was also the first president of the first society for abolition of slavery in America). After reading this letter that he wrote to the editor, the children will pick out those passages which fully describe and demonstrate the flavor Franklin wanted to convey and comment on them. (It will be necessary for the children to research places, people, and events in the library to understand all that Franklin had intended).

**Family**

Franklin, throughout his autobiography, makes references to the numerous relationships that he had with his family, business, political and social friends. Any attempt to explore them all would be to undertake a monumental task, so for the purpose of this unit I am limiting myself to his wife and son.

In his earliest mentioning of his wife, Franklin tells how lucky he is that “he had one as much disposed to industry and frugality as myself”. (81) But as time passes and Franklin writes his wife at various times in his career, the tone of his letters often change. He is often short and curt, talking about her handling of money (153-56), and how she is raising the children (133-37). Also he speaks rarely of his love for her but makes his feelings of love for his daughter and son-in-law, Mr. Bache (175-76) very clear. Even his greetings to his wife change from My dear child, his usual start, to My dear love when he is telling her he is staying in England longer. I would like the children to examine samples of Franklin’s writings to his wife and try to detect a change in his “voice” towards her. If a change is found, how was it accomplished.

Franklin and his son had many ups and downs and did not agree on certain things. Some examples of this are when his son doesn’t marry Polly, he writes her a letter telling her he is sorry (138-39) and that he will always love her as a daughter. Another is when William asks his father to help him get a raise (182) but his father doesn’t pursue it very hard. The split and reconciliation (200-239) further illustrate the differences the two men had. It is your task to determine who was the unbending Franklin, William or Benjamin, and substantiate this opinion with facts.
Lesson Plan #1

This lesson will be the opening of the unit with the purpose of beginning on a positive note with activities that will be easy for complete success yet meeting future needs of the unit as will be discussed later. During the initial lesson, which will run 2 days 1 hour each day, we will be asking children to speak, draw, and write with no grading, marking, or evaluation.

Activity #1

Materials tape recorder, quiet isolated corner

Procedure

1. Let each child use the recorder to familiarize himself with hearing his/her own voice (2-3 min.)
2. Let each child tell you about something in their life—record it (2-3 min.)
3. Teacher—transcribe these verbatim onto ditto masters or transparencies—for future lessons
4. In future lessons these copies would be a valuable tool in discussing many areas: Language Arts, Art, Voice, detail in writing, etc. (The papers would serve as workbook pages).

*It would serve you well to enlist the aid of a paraprofessional and school secretary to help you tape and transcribe.

Activity #2

Materials paper, pencils

Procedure

1. Have children write
   a. Their definition of autobiography
   b. Why would a person write one—motivation
   c. What would the author expect after writing it
   d. What kind of autobiographical writings exist (journals, diaries, logs, essays, etc.)
2. This exercise would be scheduled for 10-15 min. depending upon the class with the answers compiled and put on ditto masters or transparencies. At the end of the unit you would repeat the procedure and compare answers.
Activity #3

Materials crayons, rulers, paper, pencils

Procedure

1. Tell the children that they will be drawing a cartoon of any ordinary event in their lives—they are the star.
2. Allow children to get material needed.
3. Remind them—no names if they prefer.

This exercise will be used in 3 ways:

1. We can get to know the children’s feelings about themselves through the drawings.
2. for later discussion on detail—putting cartoon under opaque projector.
3. for fun.

Lesson Plan #2

This lesson is to be used in the area of Science and last for 3 days beginning with the reading of the article and answering of questions, ending with the experiment and project. It will be necessary to get a copy of the book How did We Find Out About Electricity by Isaac Asimov and have the children read chapter 4 Positive and Negative. This chapter will explain how Franklin became fascinated with electricity and the many experiments he performed using the Leyden jar, men on wax blocks, and the kite/key experiment.

Activity #1

Materials paper, pencil, copy of book How Did We Find Out About Electricity

Procedure

1. Children read Chapter 4 Positive and Negative.
2. Answer questions:
   a. Describe in detail Franklin’s experiments with the Leyden jar.
   b. What did he do with 2 men? Why?
   c. What conclusions did he come to? Were they correct? Why, Why not?
   d. Describe the kite experiment.
   e. What is a lightning rod and how does it work?
Activity #2

This activity will allow the children to work with electricity and make a complete circuit. It will also have the benefit of being a game they can play further motivating them. Since Franklin was a prime researcher in the early discovery of electricity it is only fitting to devote a science lesson on it. (Teachers who feel unprepared or uneasy about science experiments should speak to the science teacher securing their help).

**Materials** paper fasteners, copper wire, drycell battery, car bulb (small) scissors, pliers, cardboard, nail

**Procedure**

1. push paper fasteners through cardboard—attach with copper wire different ones in each group of 2.
2. attach bulb to cardboard connect with copper wire directly to drycell.
3. attach nail to another copper wire and connect to drycell.
4. when nail touches fastener with copper wire attached—light goes on because circuit is complete—by changing wires attached to fasteners sequence can be changed.
5. Using true-false questions—children can quiz themselves by changing pattern and question sheets.

*Board below should be much larger—10-20 sets of 2.
(figure available in print form)

Lesson Plan #3

Throughout his life, Benjamin Franklin never stopped recording, observing, measuring, commenting or sharing his knowledge and ideas with people. His notes on his voyage (35-40) give a vivid example of his observatory powers. This activity will involve the observatory powers of the children. They will be required to observe, measure and maintain records. They will record rainfall, measure temperature and record observations on our plants.

Activity #1

**Materials** thermometer, ruler, glass jar, funnel, plants, wire, paper, pencils, graph paper

**Procedure**

1. Make a rain gauge by
   a. cutting a hole through the top of the jar
   b. insert funnel into the top
c. attach ruler to the outside

2. Measure and graph daily rainfall

3. Measure and graph daily temperature 9:00 A.M.

(figure available in print form)

Activity #2

Procedure

1. Each day write your observations concerning the plants in your journal—including watering, sunny days, etc., amount of growth, # of leaves, flowering.

(figure available in print form)

Rainfall

(figures available in print form)

Temperature

Notes

2. Ibid., pgs. 240, 242.
Teacher Bibliography


This book is a specific guide to integrate Language Arts and Social Studies. It provides a multitude of lesson plans, illustrations, and suggestions to help the teacher.


Songs for periods in history with appropriate historical explanations for the songs.


A collection of short tales and folklore about people who lived in New England during colonial times.


Songs for periods in history with appropriate historical explanations for the songs.


This book is a guide for editing, excessive jargon use, organizing yourself, developing a way with words, etc.


Songs for the colonial period with short historical information.


A history of printing, from its inception to present.


A book that shows you how to use children’s literature to stimulate writing. Chapters deal with all facets: storytelling, plot, conflict, etc.


A view of Benjamin Franklin’s life by using certain excerpts from the Autobiography.
Student Bibliography


This book gives short paragraphs on the discovery of electricity. Chapter 4 deals directly with the contribution of Benjamin Franklin.


This is a book showing basic electrical experiments for children.


A book of games that will motivate children to read and write. Games are easily and inexpensively made from materials readily available to teachers.


An autobiography written to fill in areas of a previous journal. A glimpse into early century education.


A book that depicts the life of Frederick Douglas and the life he led in slavery. His story continues on his learning to read continuing through to his eventual trip to freedom.


This is a textbook on Connecticut history.


A book showing early colonial crafts, pictures and instructions.


A simple book describing weather conditions and experiments for children.


Pictures and short descriptions of early American Crafts, tools and materials, set up like an ABC Book.

Classroom Materials—Material can be found in New Haven School System—through Audio-Visual Department.

National Geographic Society
Geography of New England—filmstrip—cas.
Life in Colonial America—filmstrip—cas.
New England and Middle Colonies—filmstrip—cas.
The Making of Maps—16mm film
The Reading Laboratory, Inc.
How to use an Almanac—filmstrip—cas.
Eyegate Media Incorporated
Techniques of Paragraph Writing—filmstrip—cas.
How to Develop Reading Skills—filmstrip—cas.
Society for Visual Education, Inc.
Basic Writing Skills Set 2—filmstrip—cas.