

**BENJAMIN FRANKLIN AND MUSIC**  
A play based on information from SCORE: History/Social Studies  
By Carole L. Cooney

Setting: The Franklin house The Concert Hall

Characters:

Narrator

Benjamin Franklin

Chester

Narrator: Not many people know of Benjamin Franklin's love of music. He played the viola da gamba and composed music, but what Benjamin was most proud of was his creation of the armonica. How did Benjamin get the idea to invent a musical instrument? It happened in the year, 1761, while he was living in England.

Benjamin: Chester, are you going to the concert hall this evening? I've heard word that Handel's *Water Music* will be played on tuned wine glasses. This I've got to see!

Chester: It sounds like a grand idea, Benjamin. Let's have a quick supper and then walk over to the concert hall.

Benjamin: Splendid! I'll come by at 5 o'clock. That should give us plenty of time to have a hearty meal and a leisurely stroll.

Narrator: After supper, the men walked through the crowded streets to the hall. As the bell rang announcing the program was about to start, Benjamin and Chester quickly found their seats.

Chester: Ahh! That walk did me good! Now, let's see what these tuned wine glasses are about.

Benjamin: Here comes the performer now! Look how carefully he pushes the table to the center of the stage.

Chester: Yes! It would be a shame if he stumbled and everything came crashing down!

Benjamin: It's hard to count the number of glasses because they're all different sizes.

Chester: Look at that! Now he is filling them with some liquid.

Benjamin: It looks like water. Ahh! See how he is tuning them? He is passing his fingers around the rim of each glass. My goodness! That's amazing.

Narrator: Benjamin was thrilled by the music. That night he had an idea how he could create a musical instrument that would make the same sounds. He quickly grabbed some paper and sketched his plan. The next morning he called a glassmaker to come to his house to discuss his ideas.

Benjamin: Sir, I want you to create 37 half-spheres, made of glass. Each half-sphere shall be a different size and thickness and color coded as I have indicated on this drawing.

Narrator: The following week, the glassmaker arrived with boxes of colorful half-spheres. Benjamin quickly unloaded the boxes, stacked the half-spheres from largest to smallest and ran an iron rod through a hole in the top of each so they could nest together.

Benjamin: Now I'll attach a rod to this spindle which will turn when I push my foot on the treadle. That action will make the glass half-spheres rotate. Chester, bring me a bowl of water. I shall moisten my fingers and then push the treadle so that the half-spheres will spin as my fingers slide over them.

Chester: My goodness! Benjamin, you are making musical sounds even more beautiful than those played by the performer last week. Indeed, they are quite haunting. By the way, what is this instrument called?

Benjamin: It's called the armonica or the glass armonica!

Narrator: Benjamin beamed with joy! Once he mastered playing the instrument, he took it to dinner parties and other gatherings to perform for all the guests. Famous musicians like Mozart and Beethoven wrote music for the armonica. Marianne Davies, another famous musician, played the armonica all over Europe. While in France, she taught the French Queen, Marie Antoinette how to play.

Benjamin Franklin was very proud that the armonica became so popular. He once said, "Of all my inventions, the glass armonica has given me the greatest personal satisfaction."