

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

By Carole L. Cooney

Of all the many occupations Benjamin Franklin had, he is probably most remembered as a brilliant inventor. He loved to experiment and when Benjamin was a young boy, his friends always knew they could depend on him to come up with ideas as to how they could spend their free time. Many days were spent fishing from a favorite ledge near their town but they soon grew tired of this adventure and they turned to Benjamin for a new idea. Some stone masons were building a house. When they left their work for lunch, ten-year-old Benjamin gathered his friends around to tell them how they were going to build a “real” wharf. Quickly, they took stones from the workmen’s pile and stacked them at the water’s edge making a little platform. This was their “real” wharf but it didn’t last very long. The workmen returned and discovered where their stones were taken. Benjamin’s father was told what happened and he had a long discussion with Benjamin. Mr. Franklin made sure that Benjamin knew he had a good idea using stones to make a wharf, however, an idea is only good if it is honest.

Setting: Outside by the river

Characters:

Narrator

Benjamin Franklin

Jonathan, a friend

Richard, a friend

Mr. Franklin

Narrator: It was a hot July morning when Benjamin and his friends walked to their favorite fishing spot.

Benjamin: Here we are, at last. Whew! It certainly is a hot morning!

Jonathan: I’ve already baited my line so let’s see what I can catch.

Narrator: As Jonathan threw in his line, the other boys began to bait their hooks.

Richard: Ow! That hurts.

Benjamin: What happened?

Richard: I stuck my finger with the hook. Look! It’s bleeding.

Benjamin: Just stick your finger in your mouth for a bit and it will heal.

Jonathan: Look! I have a big fish hooked. Help me, Benjamin. It’s putting up a fierce fight.

Narrator: By the time Benjamin reached Jonathan, the fish got away.

Benjamin: Better luck next time, Jon.

Jonathan: I know, I know. Now I have to start all over and bait another hook.

Benjamin: Are you tired of standing on this little ledge? It’s so hard to balance and fish at the same time. What we need is a real wharf with lots of room to move around on.

Richard: There’s the sound of the whistle for lunch. I feel like stopping, too.

Jonathan: But, you’ve just started.

Benjamin: Well, let’s just sit here until I think of something else we can do.

Narrator: The boys sat on the ledge and dangled their bare feet in the water. Benjamin looked around trying to think of a new adventure. He spied the pile of stones the workmen had been using to build a house and quick as lightning, he got an idea.

Benjamin: All right, men. Follow me.

Jonathan: Where to, Ben?

Benjamin: To the pile of stones. Let's use some of them to make a wharf so we won't be so cramped like we are on the fishing ledge.

Richard: That's a great idea, Ben.

Narrator: The boys worked swiftly, stacking stone upon stone until their wharf was almost complete. Then, Mr. Franklin appeared.

Mr. Franklin: Benjamin! Come here.

Benjamin: Yes, Father.

Mr. Franklin: What are you and the boys doing?

Benjamin: (very excited) We're making our own wharf so that we can fish and have room to move around.

Mr. Franklin: Did the stone masons give you permission to take the stones?

Benjamin: No, Father.

Mr. Franklin: Did you think of asking them for the stones?

Benjamin: No, Father.

Mr. Franklin: Well, Benjamin, you had a very good idea, building a wharf. However, that idea would only be good if you were honest and asked for the stones. Do you understand?

Benjamin: Yes, Father, I understand.

Narrator: Benjamin asked his friends to help return the stones to the pile. He apologized to the stone masons for his poor judgment. A very important lesson was learned that day – the importance of honesty. It was a lesson Benjamin Franklin would never forget.

Here are some of the useful inventions that Franklin created or improved upon:

1. **Lightning rod:** Lightning caused many buildings to be destroyed. Because he understood electricity, Franklin designed a rod, made of metal which was attached to the high point of a building. The metal rod or wire ran from the roof, down the side of the building and into the ground. When lightning struck the rod, the electricity ran down the rod into the ground preventing the building from being destroyed. It took three years for Franklin to perfect his invention. Benjamin Franklin believed that the lightning rod was his most important invention.
2. **Swim fins:** In order to increase his speed swimming, Franklin created fins that he wore on his hands. They were shaped like lily pads and helped the swimmer gain speed with each stroke.
3. **Street Lighting:** The street lights of long ago were actually lamps that burned oil, causing their glass globes to become dark with soot. Benjamin Franklin describes his improvement to street lights: “I suggested composing them of four flat panes, with a long funnel above to draw up the smoke, and crevices admitting air below, to facilitate the ascent of the smoke; by this means they were kept clean, and did not grow dark in a few hours, as the London lamps do, but continu’d bright till morning.”
4. **Odometer:** An odometer is a device that records the distance traveled. Benjamin Franklin was once a postmaster working at a post office. He wanted everything to be efficient and fast. Because he wanted to measure the distance between certain points so that he might establish more efficient postal routes, he created an odometer. It was a device attached to his carriage that counted the rotations of the wheels, thereby calculating the distance the carriage traveled.
5. **Bifocal glasses:** Bifocal glasses are that have lenses with sections that allow the user to see near and distant things. Benjamin Franklin had his optician take the lenses from his two sets of glasses, cut the lenses into two horizontally, and then mount them back into frames with the lens for close work at the bottom and the lens for distance at the top.