



How Ben Franklin LEARNED

Four Short Stories for Young Readers
by
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I. FRANKLIN, HIS OWN TEACHER.

Few people ever knew so many things as did Benjamin Franklin. Men said, "How did he ever learn so many things?" For he had been a poor boy who had to work for a living. He could not go to school at all after he was ten years old.

His father made soap and candles. Little Ben Franklin had to cut wicks for the candles. He also filled the candle molds. And he sold soap and candles, and ran on errands. But when he was not at work he spent his time in reading good books. What little money he got he used to buy books with.

He read the old story of "Pilgrim's Progress," and liked it so well that he bought all the other stories by the same man. But as he wanted more books, and had not money to buy them, he sold all of these books. The next he bought were some little history books. These were made to sell very cheap, and they were sold by peddlers. He managed to buy forty or fifty of these little books of history.

Another way that he had of learning was by seeing things with his own eyes. His father took him to see carpenters at work with their saws and planes. He also saw masons laying bricks. And he went to see men making brass and copper kettles. And he saw a man with a turning lathe making the round legs of chairs. Other men were at work making knives. Some things people learn out of books, and some things they have to

see for themselves.

As he was fond of books, Ben's father thought that it would be a good plan to send him to learn to print them. So the boy went to work in his brother's printing office. Here he passed his spare time in reading. He borrowed some books out of the stores where books were sold. He would sit up a great part of the night sometimes to read one of these books. He wished to return it when the bookstore opened in the morning. One man who had many books lent to Ben such of his books as he wanted.

It was part of the bargain that Ben's brother should pay his board. The boy offered to board himself if his brother would give him half what it cost to pay for his board.

His brother was glad to do this, and Ben saved part of the money and bought books with it. He was a healthy boy, and it did not hurt him to live mostly on bread and butter. Sometimes he bought a little pie or a handful of raisins.

Long before he was a man, people said, "How much the boy knows!" This was because

He did not waste his time.

He read good books.

He saw things for himself.

II. HOW FRANKLIN FOUND OUT THINGS.

Franklin thought that ants know how to tell things to one another. He thought that they talk by some kind of signs. When an ant has found a dead fly too big for him to drag away, he will run off and get some other ant to help him. Franklin thought that ants have some way of telling other ants that there is work to do.

One day he found some ants eating molasses out of a little jar in a closet. He shook them out. Then he tied a string to the jar, and hung it on a nail in the ceiling. But he had not got all the ants out of the jar. One little ant liked sweet things so well that he staid in the jar, and kept on eating like a greedy boy.



At last when this greedy ant had eaten all that he could, he started to go home. Franklin saw him climb over the rim of the jar. Then the ant ran down the outside of the jar. But when he got to the bottom, he did not find any shelf there. He went all round the jar. There was no way to get down to the floor. The ant ran this way and that way, but he could not get down.

At last the greedy ant thought he would see if he could go up. He climbed up the string to the ceiling. Then he went down the wall. He came to his own hole at last, no doubt.

After a while he got hungry again, perhaps. He thought about that jar of sweets at the end of a string. Then perhaps he told the other ants. Maybe he let them know that there was a string by which they could get

down to the jar.

In about half an hour after the ant had gone up the string, Franklin saw a swarm of ants going down the string. They marched in a line, one after another. Soon there were two lines of ants on the string. The ants in one line were going down to get at the sweet food. The ants in the other line were marching up the other side of the string to go home. Do you think that the greedy ant told the other ants about the jar?

And did he tell them that there was a string by which an ant could get there?

And did he tell it by speaking, or by signs that he made with his feelers?

If you watch two ants when they meet, you will see that they touch their feelers together, as if they said "Good-morning!"

One day Franklin was eating dinner at the house of a friend. The lady of the house, when she poured out the coffee, found that it was not hot.

She said, "I am sorry that the coffee is cold. It is because the servant forgot to scour the coffeepot. Coffee gets cold more quickly when the coffeepot is not bright."

This set Franklin to thinking. He thought that a black or dull thing would cool more quickly than a white or bright one. That made him think that a black thing would take in heat more quickly than a white one.

He wanted to find out if this were true or not. There was nobody who knew, so there was nobody to ask. But Franklin thought that he would ask the sunshine. Maybe the sunshine would tell him whether a black thing would heat more quickly than a white thing.

But how could he ask the sunshine?

There was snow on the ground. Franklin spread a white cloth on the snow. Then he spread a black cloth on the snow near the white one. When he came to look at them, he saw that the snow under the black

cloth melted away much sooner than that under the white cloth.

That is the way that the sunshine told him that black would take in heat more quickly than white. After he had found this out, many people got white hats to wear in the summer time. A white hat is cooler than a black one.

Some time when there is snow on the ground, you can take a white and a black cloth and ask the sunshine the same question.



FRANKLIN'S EXPERIMENT, JUNE 1752.
Demonstrating the identity of Lightning and Electricity, from which he invented the Lightning Rod.

III. FRANKLIN AND THE KITE.

When Franklin wanted to know whether the ants could talk or not, he asked the ants, and they told him. When he wanted to know something else, he asked the sunshine about it, as you have read in another story. That is the way that Franklin came to know so many things. He knew how to ask questions of everything.

Once he asked the lightning a question. And the lightning gave him an answer.

Before the time of Franklin, people did not know what lightning was. They did not know what made the thunder. Franklin thought much about it. At last he proved what it was. He asked the lightning a question, and made it tell what it was. To tell you this story, I shall have to use one big word. Maybe it is too big for some of my little friends that will read this book. Let us divide it into parts. Then you will not be afraid of it. The big word is electricity.

Those of you who live in towns have seen the streets lighted by electricity. But in Franklin's time there were no such lights. People knew very little about this strange thing with a big name.

But Franklin found out many things about it that nobody had ever known before. He began to think that the little sparks he got from electricity were small flashes of lightning. He thought that the little cracking sound of these sparks was a kind of baby thunder.

So he thought that he would try to catch a little bit of lightning. Perhaps he could put it into one of the little bottles used to hold electricity. Then if it behaved like electricity, he would know what it was. But catching lightning is not easy. How do you think he did it?

First he made a kite. It was not a kite just like a boy's kite. He wanted a kite that would fly when it rained. Rain would spoil a paper kite in a minute. So Franklin used a silk handkerchief to cover his kite, instead of paper.

He put a little sharp-pointed wire at the top of his kite. This was a kind of lightning rod to draw the lightning into the kite. His kite string was a common hemp string. To this he tied a key, because lightning will follow metal. The end of the string that he held in his hand was a silk ribbon, which was tied to the hemp string of the kite. Electricity will not follow silk.

One night when there was a storm coming, he went out with his son. They stood under a cow shed, and he sent his kite up in the air.

After a while he held his knuckle to the key. A tiny spark flashed between the key and his knuckle. It was a little flash of lightning.

Then he took his little bottle fixed to hold electricity. He filled it with the electricity that came from the key. He carried home a bottle of lightning. So he found out what made it thunder and lighten.

After that he used to bring the lightning into his house on rods and wires. He made the lightning ring bells and do many other strange things.

IV. FRANKLIN'S WHISTLE.

When Franklin was an old man, he wrote a curious letter. In that letter he told a story. It was about something that happened to him when he was a boy.

Here is the story put into verses, so that you will remember it better. Some day you can read the story as Franklin told it himself. You will hear people say, "He paid too much for the whistle." The saying came from this story.

TOO MUCH FOR THE WHISTLE

As Ben with pennies in his pocket
Went strolling down the street,
"Toot-toot! toot-toot!" there came a whistle
From a boy he chanced to meet,

Whistling fit to burst his buttons,
Blowing hard and stepping high.
Then Benny said, "I'll buy your whistle;"
But "Toot! toot-toot!" was the reply.

But Benny counted out his pennies,
The whistling boy began to smile;
With one last toot he gave the whistle
To Ben, and took his penny pile.

Now homeward goes the whistling Benny,
As proud as any foolish boy,
And in his pockets not a penny,
But in his mouth a noisy toy.

"Ah, Benny, Benny!" cries his mother,
"I cannot stand your ugly noise."
"Stop, Benny, Benny!" says his father,
"I cannot talk, you drown my voice."

At last the whistling boy remembers
How much his money might have bought

"Too many pennies for a whistle,"
Is little Benny's ugly thought.

Too many pennies for a whistle
Is what we all pay, you and I,
Just for a little foolish pleasure
Pay a price that's quite too high.