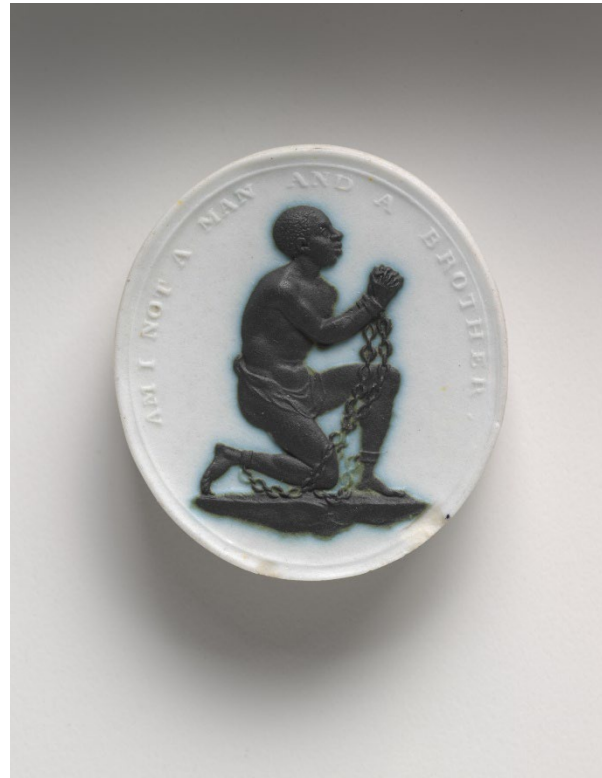


Introduction paragraph- Students will use critical thinking skills to analyze primary source documents related to the life of Benjamin Franklin and his relationship with slavery. This lesson plan includes a longer version (11 documents) and a shorter version (8 documents). See the annotated bibliography at the end of each version for the answer key for teachers.

Benjamin Franklin: How Did Franklin's Views on Slavery Change Over Time?



American History

Essential Question- How did Franklin's views on slavery change over time?

N.C.S.S.

D2.His.1.9-12. Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical concepts.

D2.His.8.9-12. Analyze how current interpretations of the past are limited by the extent to which available historical sources represent perspectives of people at the time.

D2.His.10.9-12. Detect possible limitations in various kinds of historical evidence and differing secondary interpretations.

D3.3.9-12. Identify evidence that draws information directly and substantively from multiple sources to detect inconsistencies in evidence in order to revise or strengthen claims.

Note for Teachers:

You have the option to use a shorter and easier to use document set or a longer and more complex version.

Table of Contents

Benjamin Franklin: How Did Franklin's Views on Slavery Change Over Time? Long Version

Teacher Materials: Suggested Lesson Plan, Aligned Standards

Student Materials: Cover Page, Student Guide Page, Background Essay, Document Set (11)

Benjamin Franklin: How Did Franklin's Views on Slavery Change Over Time? Short Version

Teacher Materials: Suggested Lesson Plan, Aligned Standards

Student Materials: Cover Page, Student Guide Page, Background Essay, Document Set (8)

Lesson Plan

Benjamin Franklin: How Did Franklin's Views on Slavery Change Over Time? Long Version

Day 1- Begin with a warm up activity. Suggestions:

- Show students a picture of Benjamin Franklin and write facts about him.
- Play a short video from YouTube (see the Ken Burns series of short videos on YouTube at [#benfranklinpbs](#)).
- Have the students explore the benfranklin300.org website

Have students read the background essay and take care to check that they understand the context of the time period (political, social, and economic norms). Students should highlight important information as they read.

Homework- Students should briefly skim each document and think about categories in which to place documents. *This could also be done at the end of the period time permitting.*

Day 2- Discuss documents

Directions: Analyze the documents provided in the DBQ to answer the question: How did Franklin's views on slavery change over time? Review one of the documents with students and again be mindful to make sure they are thinking about the context of the time period. After reviewing the time period, make notations on the board or screen to help guide students to how the document relates to the prompt and to what level of annotations you are looking for. Students can work on analyzing the rest of the documents individually, in pairs, or in small groups as you see fit.

Homework- Students should finish annotating the documents. *This could also be done at the end of the period time permitting.*

Day 3- Begin by reviewing the categories students placed the documents in and discuss their choices. Students should spend the rest of the period completing a culminating activity to demonstrate knowledge gained from document review. Suggested culminating activities include: essay, debate, or class discussion.

Student Copy LV

Benjamin Franklin: How Did Franklin's Views on Slavery Change Over Time?



Tips For Student Success

1. Read the prompt carefully highlighting any key words
2. Read the background essay to familiarize yourself with the topic being presented
3. Study each primary source carefully
4. Take notes in the space provided after each source
5. Separate documents into three different categories
6. Review all notes to come up with an evidence-based conclusion

Background Essay: Benjamin Franklin and Slavery in America

Benjamin Franklin: Life and Career

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) lived his 84 years during a period of sweeping change in America and in Europe. People began to question the authority of absolute monarchs. Individual achievement and social mobility were beginning to be seen in a positive light. Global trade, travel, and communication opened up nations, communities, and families to new ways of looking at the world and to scientific advancements.

Revolutionary ideas that men by nature were equal and entitled to liberty began to etch away at the justifications for African enslavement. Franklin embraced- and sometimes led- these new ways of thinking. His character and life, full of curiosity with an independent nature, were shaped by the exciting developments of the century of Enlightenment.

The accomplishments and legacy of Benjamin Franklin have inspired politicians and teachers, explorers and inventors, students and scientists. Benjamin Franklin was one of the founders of our nation, a man who stood up for independence, crafted political and diplomatic victories, and was vital in the creation of our early republic. Benjamin Franklin was a scientist and inventor whose discoveries and inventions changed politics, education, civic life, and the private lives of individuals around the world.

Franklin is fundamentally Philadelphian and fundamentally American. A self-made man who rose from humble beginnings and prided himself on his industriousness and frugality, he was an innovator, a political strategist as well as a charming personality. He was wealthy enough to retire at age 42 so that he could pursue his goal of being “useful.” Franklin is a historic figure of national and international significance, a relevant revolutionary who changed the course of history, on scales grand to minute.

Benjamin Franklin and Slavery

Over a period of about fifty years, the Franklin household included free, white servants, and at least several enslaved servants of African descent. Among the enslaved servants were Peter and Jemima, a married couple, purchased by the Franklins sometime before 1750.

After preparing a will in which Peter and Jemima would be freed in the event of Franklin’s death, Franklin and his son William left for London in 1757. They brought Peter and another enslaved manservant named King with them.

Jemima stayed behind with Deborah Franklin, along with a young boy named Othello, who may have been Peter and Jemima’s son.

When Franklin died many years later, he no longer owned any slaves.

Slavery in America

Slavery fueled the nation's economy. Enslaved men, women, and children worked in homes and on farms, and in shops and on docks, and on plantations. Enslaved laborers toiled as blacksmiths, field hands, midwives, coopers, domestic servants and more while enslavers reaped the benefits. America's economic growth rested on the labor of humans held in bondage.

Part of the colonial experience since 1619, slavery contributed to the wealth of the entire nation. Despite some movement to end slavery after the Revolutionary War, the institution became even more entrenched by 1815.

Set 1- Young Entrepreneur (1723-1745)

Document 1- Runaway Slave Advertisement July 1737

Franklin printed advertisements in his newspaper such as this one. These notices showed both slaves for sale and rewards offered for slaves who ran away.

TEN POUNDS Reward.

RUN away from the subscriber's plantation, near New-Castle, some time in December last, a Negroe man slave, named **RAGON**, 30 years of age, about six feet high, a strong hearty fellow, was brought up by Thomas Ogle, deceased; had on when he went away, a coarse dark grey jacket, spotted flannel under waistcoat, buckskin breeches, &c. It is supposed that he keeps near Oglestown, or at William Carson's, about 12 miles below New-Castle, where Bird lately kept tavern. Whoever takes up the said Negroe slave, and secures him in the Goal of this County, or brings him to his said master, so that he may have him again, shall have the above reward; or if any one will inform against the person that harbours or entertains him, shall have Five Pounds, paid by **RICHARD M'WILLIAM.** ¶

THREE POUNDS Reward.

RUN away, on Friday last, from the subscriber, living in Christians Hundred, New-Castle county, a young Negroe man, named **ANDREW**; he is about 5 feet 6 inches high, thin visaged, slim made; had on, when he went away, an old lead coloured cloth coat, worn at the elbows, a new flowered flannel jacket, a fine shirt, ruffled at the breast and guards, striped ticken trousers, home-made white cotton stockings, old calf-skin pumps, lately mended, a good raccoon hat; but it is probable he will change his clothes; he has a scar on the left side of his head, and a cut on his leg; plays on the fiddle very well, and speaks fast and thick when angry. Whoever takes up and secures said Negroe, so that his master may have him again, shall have the above reward, and reasonable charges, paid by **JEREMIAH SMITH.** June 17, 1773. ¶

N. B. All persons following the water, and others, are forbid to entertain said Negroe, at their peril. ¶

Document 1 Notes-

Document 2- Excerpt from article “Franklin's Electrical Years: Enslaved People in Franklin’s Research?”

“In 1735, a local merchant billed Franklin for shoes for a “negro boy.” In 1742, he received a bill for a beaver hat “for your man Joseph.” In 1745, he was billed for a racoon hat “for your Negro.” Those ledger entries may refer to one, two, or three different people. One scholar believes that Joseph may have been an indentured servant named Joseph Rose who worked for Franklin, not an enslaved person. Regardless, the fate of this person (or people) remains unknown.”

Document 2 Notes-

Document 3- Images from a book by Benjamin Lay which Franklin published in 1737. Lay's book was anti-slavery.

*All Slave Keepers
That keep the Innocent in Bondage;
Apostates.*

*Pretending to lay claim to the Pure and
holy christian Religion, of what congregation
soever; but especially to their ministers, by
whose example the filthy leprosy of apostasy
is spread far & near; it is a notorious
Sin, which many of the true Friends of
Christ, & his pure Truth, called Quakers, has
been for many years, & still are concerned
to write & bear Testimony against; as a
heinous & gross & hurtful to Religion, and
destructive to Government, beyond what
words can set forth, or can be declared
of by men or angels, to yet lived in by
Ministers & Magistrates in America —*

The Sins of the People cause them to err.

*Written for a general Service, by him that
truly & sincerely desires the present & eter-
nal welfare & happiness of all Mankind
all the world over, of all colours & Nations,
as his own soul;*

Benjamin Lay.

Philadelphia.

Printed for the Author, 1737.

By Benjamin Franklin



Document 3 Notes-

Set 2- Aspiring Politician (1747-1765)

Document 4- Excerpt from “*Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind*” pamphlet written by Benjamin Franklin in 1751

“As the Increase of People depends on the Encouragement of Marriages, the following Things must diminish a Nation, viz....

the Introduction of Slaves. The Negroes brought into the English Sugar Islands, have greatly diminish’d the Whites there; the Poor are by this Means depriv’d of Employment, while a few Families acquire vast Estates; which they spend on Foreign Luxuries, and educating their Children in the Habit of those Luxuries; the same Income is needed for the Support of one that might have maintain’d 100. The Whites who have Slaves, not labouring, are enfeebled, and therefore not so generally prolific; the Slaves being work’d too hard, and ill fed, their Constitutions are broken, and the Deaths among them are more than the Births; so that a continual Supply is needed from Africa. The Northern Colonies having few Slaves increase in Whites. Slaves also pejorate the Families that use them; the white Children become proud, disgusted with Labour, and being educated in Idleness, are rendered unfit to get a Living by Industry.”

Document 4 Notes-

Document 5- Excerpt of Franklin’s Will dated 1757

“And I will that my Negro Man Peter, and his Wife Jemima, be free after my Decease.”

Document 5 Notes-

Document 6 - Excerpt of Letter from Benjamin Franklin to Deborah Franklin, June 27, 1760

“Peter continues with me, and behaves as well as I can expect, in a Country where there are many Occasions of spoiling Servants, if they are ever so good. He has as few Faults as most of them, and I see with only one Eye, and hear only with one Ear; so we rub on pretty comfortably. King, that you enquire after, is not with us. He ran away from our House, near two Years ago, while we were absent in the Country; But was soon found in Suffolk, where he had been taken in the Service of a Lady that was very fond of the Merit of making him a Christian, and contributing to his Education and Improvement. As he was of little Use, and often in Mischief, Billy consented to her keeping him while we stay in England. So the Lady sent him to School, has him taught to read and write, to play on the Violin and French Horn, with some other Accomplishments more useful in a Servant. Whether she will finally be willing to part with him, or persuade Billy to sell him to her, I know not. In the meantime he is no Expence to us.”

Document 6 Notes-**Document 7- Letter written by Benjamin Franklin to Reverend Waring dated January 3, 1758**

Revd. Sir,

I send you herewith the Extract of Mr. Sturgeon’s Letter,⁷ which I mentioned to you. He is, among us, esteemed a good Man, one that makes a Conscience of the Duties of his Office, in which he is very diligent; and has behaved with so much Discretion, as to gain the general Respect and Good-will of the People. If the Associates of Dr. Bray should think fit to make Tryal of a School for Negro Children in Philadelphia, I know no Person under whose Care it would be more likely to succeed. At present few or none give their Negro Children any Schooling, partly from a Prejudice that Reading and Knowledge in a Slave are both useless and dangerous; and partly from an Unwillingness in the Masters and Mistresses of common Schools to take black Scholars, lest the Parents of the white Children should be disgusted and take them away, not chusing to have their Children mix’d with Slaves in Education, Play, &c. But a separate School for Blacks, under the Care of One, of whom People should have an Opinion that he would be careful to imbue the Minds of their young Slaves with good Principles, might probably have a Number of Blacks sent to it; and if on Experience it should be found useful, and not attended with the ill Consequences commonly apprehended, the Example might be followed in the other Colonies, and encouraged by the Inhabitants in general.⁸ I am, Sir, Your most humble Servant

B Franklin

Document 7 Notes-

Set 3- Statesman (1766-1790)

Document 8- Anonymous article printed in a London newspaper titled: “A conversation between an Englishman, a Scotsman, and an American, on the Subject of Slavery.” *Franklin is credited as “Amer.” short for American.*

Amer. They ought not to be general, because the Foundation for them is not general. New England, the most populous of all the English Possessions in America, has very few Slaves; and those are chiefly in the capital Towns, not employed in the hardest Labour, but as Footmen or House-maids. The same may be said of the next populous Provinces, New-York, New Jersey, and Pensylvania. Even in Virginia, Maryland, and the Carolinas, where they are employed in Field-work, what Slaves there are belong chiefly to the old rich Inhabitants, near the navigable Waters, who are few compared with the numerous Families of Back-settlers, that have scarce any Slaves among them. In Truth, there is not, take North-America through, perhaps, one Family in a Hundred that has a Slave in it. Many Thousands there abhor the Slave Trade as much as Mr. Sharpe can do, conscientiously avoid being concerned with it, and do every Thing in their Power to abolish it. Supposing it then with that Gentleman, a Crime to keep a Slave, can it be right to stigmatize us all with that Crime? If one Man of a Hundred in England were dishonest, would it be right from thence to characterize the Nation, and say the English are Rogues and Thieves? But farther, of those who do keep Slaves, all are not Tyrants and Oppressors. Many treat their Slaves with great Humanity, and provide full as well for them in Sickness and in Health, as your poor labouring People in England are provided for. Your working Poor are not indeed absolutely Slaves; but there seems something a little like Slavery, where the Laws oblige them to work for their Masters so many Hours at such a Rate, and leave them no Liberty to demand or bargain for more, but imprison them in a Workhouse if they refuse to work on such Terms, and even imprison a humane Master if he thinks fit to pay them better; at the same Time confining the poor ingenious Artificer to this Island, and forbidding him to go abroad, though offered better Wages in foreign Countries.² As to the Share England has in these Enormities of America, remember, Sir, that she began the Slave Trade; that her Merchants of London, Bristol, Liverpool and Glasgow, send their Ships to Africa for the Purpose of purchasing Slaves. If any unjust Methods are used to procure them; if Wars are fomented to obtain Prisoners; if free People are enticed on board, and then confined and brought away; if petty Princes are bribed to sell their Subjects, who indeed are already a Kind of Slaves, is America to have all the Blame of this Wickedness? You bring the Slaves to us, and tempt us to purchase them. I do not justify our falling into the Temptation. To be sure, if you have stolen Men to sell to us, and we buy them, you may urge against us the old and true saying, that the Receiver is as bad as the Thief.³ This Maxim was probably made for those who needed the Information, as being perhaps ignorant that receiving was in it's Nature as bad as stealing: But the Reverse of the Position was never thought necessary to be formed into a Maxim, nobody ever doubted that the Thief is as bad as the Receiver. This you have not only done and continue to do, but several Laws heretofore made in our Colonies, to discourage the Importation of Slaves, by laying a heavy Duty, payable by the Importer, have been disapproved and repealed by your Government here, as being prejudicial, forsooth, to the Interest of the African Company.

Document 8 Notes-

Document 9- Excerpt of Franklin's final will dated 1789

“All the lands near the Ohio, and the lots near the centre of Philadelphia, which I lately purchased of the State, I give to my son-in-law, Richard Bache, his heirs and assigns forever; I also give him the bond I have against him, of two thousand and one hundred and seventy-two pounds, five shillings, together with the interest that shall or may accrue thereon, and direct the same to be delivered up to him by my executors, canceled, requesting that, in consideration thereof, he would immediately after my decease manumit and set free his Negro man Bob.”

Document 9 Notes-

Document 10- Example of freedom medal that Franklin promised to distribute to others in a letter from Benjamin Franklin to a friend dated May 15, 1788.



Document 10 Notes-

Document 11- Letter written in Franklin's handwriting known as "Letters to governors," a petition to the First Federal Congress

bound to use all justifiable endeavours to loosen the bands of
 Slavery and promote a general Enjoyment of the blessings of
 Freedom. Under these Impressions they earnestly intreat your
 serious attention to the Subject of Slavery, that you will be
 pleased to countenance the Restoration of liberty to those un-
 happy Men, who alone, in this land of Freedom, are degraded
 into perpetual Bondage, and who, amidst the general Joy of
 surrounding Freemen, are groaning in servile Subjection; that
 you will devise means for removing this Inconsistency from
 the Character of the American People; that you will promote
 mercy and Justice towards this distressed Race; & that you
 will Stop to the very verge of the Powers vested in you for
 discouraging every Species of Traffick in the Persons of our
 fellow Men.

Philadelphia Feb^y 3. 1790

B. Franklin
 Pres^t of the Society

Document 11 Notes-

Student Evidence Sheet- Did Franklin's views on slavery change over time?

Directions: Record overall thoughts here. Did any source convince you more than others?

Teacher Resources

Annotated Bibliography

[Anti-Slavery Medallion, Am I Not A Man and A Brother.](https://www.diplomaticrooms.state.gov/objects/anti-slavery-medallion-am-i-not-a-man-and-a-brother-3/) (n.d.). Diplomatic Reception Rooms, U.S. Department of State. Retrieved July 30, 2023, from <https://www.diplomaticrooms.state.gov/objects/anti-slavery-medallion-am-i-not-a-man-and-a-brother-3/>.

Students will use this source to form an opinion on Franklin's views on slavery. This is an example of an anti-slavery medallion that Franklin promised to distribute. This particular source should lead them to believe that at this point in life Franklin could be considered anti-slavery.

[Benjamin Franklin Petitions Congress.](https://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/franklin) (2018, December 17). National Archives. <https://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/franklin>

Petition in Franklin's handwriting calling for the abolition of slavery. Students will use this source to form an opinion on Franklin's views on slavery. This particular source should lead them to believe that at this point in life Franklin could be considered anti-slavery.

[Franklin's Electrical Years: Enslaved people in Franklin's Research?](https://americanhistory.si.edu/electric-dr-franklin/enslaved-people) (2022, July 26). National Museum of American History. <https://americanhistory.si.edu/electric-dr-franklin/enslaved-people>

This source is Franklin's ledger recording showing he bought shoes for "a negro boy." This shows that at the time that Franklin still owned slaves. Students will use this source to form an opinion on Franklin's views on slavery. This source will show that as a slave owner, Franklin was a supporter of slavery at the time.

[Fearless and Fiery.](https://www.swarthmore.edu/bulletin/archive/winter-2018-issue-ii-volume-cxv/fearless-and-fiery.html#:~:text=Lay%20wrote%20one%20of%20the) (n.d.). Wwww.swarthmore.edu. Retrieved July 30, 2023, from <https://www.swarthmore.edu/bulletin/archive/winter-2018-issue-ii-volume-cxv/fearless-and-fiery.html#:~:text=Lay%20wrote%20one%20of%20the>

This source is a title page of a book Franklin published protesting slavery. In particular this book was written by Benjamin Lay. Students will use this source to determine Franklin's views on slavery. This source may have students be of mixed opinion as Franklin did not put his name on the publication.

[Founders Online: A Conversation on Slavery, 26 January 1770.](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-17-02-0019) (2019). Archives.gov. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-17-02-0019>

This source is the text of the anti-slavery article in a London newspaper, in which he stayed anonymous. Students will use this source to form an opinion on Franklin's views on slavery. This source should lead students to believe that Franklin was anti-slavery. However there may be some dissent as he chose to remain anonymous in the article.

[Founders Online: From Benjamin Franklin to Deborah Franklin, 27 June 1760.](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-09-02-0046) (n.d.). Founders.archives.gov. Retrieved July 30, 2023, from <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-09-02-0046>

This source is a letter in which Franklin details his son's enslaved servant King running away. Students will use this source to form an opinion on Franklin's views on slavery. This particular source could lead to mixed opinions as Franklin's family still owned slaves, but Franklin himself did not try to recapture King.

[Founders Online: From Benjamin Franklin to John Waring, 3 January 1758](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-07-02-0147). (2018). Archives.gov. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-07-02-0147>

This source is a letter in which Franklin discusses efforts to educate African-American children in Philadelphia. Students will use this source to form an opinion on Franklin's views on slavery. This particular source should lead them to believe that at this point in life Franklin could be considered anti-slavery.

[Founders Online: Last Will and Testament, 28 April 1757](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-07-02-0085). (n.d.). Founders.archives.gov. Retrieved July 30, 2023, from <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-07-02-0085>

This source is a section of Franklin's will dated 1757 detailing that his slaves were to be freed upon his death. Students will use this source to form an opinion on Franklin's views on slavery. Students may be of mixed opinion on this source. The case can be made that Franklin was pro slavery as he still owned slaves, he could also be considered anti-slavery because he wanted his slaves released upon his death.

[Founders Online: Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, 1751](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-04-02-0080). (n.d.). Founders.archives.gov. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-04-02-0080>

This source is a pamphlet written by Franklin in 1751. In this pamphlet Franklin argued that slavery corrupted the colonists making them lazy. Students will use this source to form an opinion on Franklin's views on slavery. This source should lead students to believe that Franklin was anti-slavery.

Keyes, C. R. (2023, June 30). **[Slavery Advertisements Published June 30, 1737](https://adverts250project.org/2023/06/30/slavery-advertisements-published-june-30-177/)**. The Adverts 250 Project. <https://adverts250project.org/2023/06/30/slavery-advertisements-published-june-30-177/>

This source is an advertisement printed in the Pennsylvania Gazette in 1737 listing slaves for sale. Franklin likely printed many of these advertisements. Students will use this source to form an opinion on Franklin's views on slavery. This source should lead students to believe that Franklin was pro slavery.

[The Last Will and Testament of Benjamin Franklin](https://www.constitution.org/1-History/primarysources/lastwill.html). (n.d.). Www.constitution.org. Retrieved July 30, 2023, from <https://www.constitution.org/1-History/primarysources/lastwill.html>

This source is an excerpt of Franklin's final will dated 1789 with stipulations that his son-in-law free his enslaved servant upon Franklin's death. Students will use this source to form an opinion on Franklin's views on slavery. This source should lead students to believe that Franklin was anti-slavery.

Student Copy SV

Benjamin Franklin: How Did Franklin's Views on Slavery Change Over Time?



Tips For Student Success

7. Read the prompt carefully highlighting any key words
8. Read the background essay to familiarize yourself with the topic being presented
9. Study each primary source carefully
10. Take notes in the space provided after each source
11. Separate documents into three different categories
12. Review all notes to come up with an evidence-based conclusion

Background Essay: Benjamin Franklin and Slavery in America

Benjamin Franklin: Life and Career

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) lived his 84 years during a period of sweeping change in America and in Europe. People began to question the authority of absolute monarchs. Individual achievement and social mobility were beginning to be seen in a positive light. Global trade, travel, and communication opened up nations, communities, and families to new ways of looking at the world and to scientific advancements.

Revolutionary ideas that men by nature were equal and entitled to liberty began to etch away at the justifications for African enslavement. Franklin embraced- and sometimes led- these new ways of thinking. His character and life, full of curiosity with an independent nature, were shaped by the exciting developments of the century of Enlightenment.

The accomplishments and legacy of Benjamin Franklin have inspired politicians and teachers, explorers and inventors, students and scientists. Benjamin Franklin was one of the founders of our nation, a man who stood up for independence, crafted political and diplomatic victories, and was vital in the creation of our early republic. Benjamin Franklin was a scientist and inventor whose discoveries and inventions changed politics, education, civic life, and the private lives of individuals around the world.

Franklin is fundamentally Philadelphian and fundamentally American. A self-made man who rose from humble beginnings and prided himself on his industriousness and frugality, he was an innovator, a political strategist as well as a charming personality. He was wealthy enough to retire at age 42 so that he could pursue his goal of being “useful.” Franklin is a historic figure of national and international significance, a relevant revolutionary who changed the course of history, on scales grand to minute.

Benjamin Franklin and Slavery

Over a period of about fifty years, the Franklin household included free, white servants, and at least several enslaved servants of African descent. Among the enslaved servants were Peter and Jemima, a married couple, purchased by the Franklins sometime before 1750.

After preparing a will in which Peter and Jemima would be freed in the event of Franklin’s death, Franklin and his son William left for London in 1757. They brought Peter and another enslaved manservant named King with them.

Jemima stayed behind with Deborah Franklin, along with a young boy named Othello, who may have been Peter and Jemima’s son.

When Franklin died many years later, he no longer owned any slaves.

Slavery in America

Slavery fueled the nation's economy. Enslaved men, women, and children worked in homes and on farms, and in shops and on docks, and on plantations. Enslaved laborers toiled as blacksmiths, field hands, midwives, coopers, domestic servants and more while enslavers reaped the benefits. America's economic growth rested on the labor of humans held in bondage.

Part of the colonial experience since 1619, slavery contributed to the wealth of the entire nation. Despite some movement to end slavery after the Revolutionary War, the institution became even more entrenched by 1815.

Set 1- Young Entrepreneur (1723-1745)

Document 1- Runaway Slave Advertisement July 1737

Franklin printed advertisements in his newspaper such as this one. These notices showed both slaves for sale and rewards offered for slaves who ran away.

TEN POUNDS Reward.

RUN away from the subscriber's plantation, near New-Castle, some time in December last, a Negroe man slave, named **RAGON**, 30 years of age, about six feet high, a strong hearty fellow, was brought up by Thomas Ogle, deceased; had on when he went away, a coarse dark grey jacket, spotted flannel under waistcoat, buckskin breeches, &c. It is supposed that he keeps near Ogletown, or at William Carion's, about 12 miles below New-Castle, where Bird lately kept tavern. Whoever takes up the said Negroe slave, and secures him in the Goal of this County, or brings him to his said master, so that he may have him again, shall have the above reward; or if any one will inform against the person that harbours or entertains him, shall have Five Pounds, paid by

RICHARD M'WILLIAM. ¶

THREE POUNDS Reward.

RUN away, on Friday last, from the subscriber, living in Christians Hundred, New-Castle county, a young Negroe man, named **ANDREW**; he is about 5 feet 6 inches high, thin visaged, slim made; had on, when he went away, an old lead coloured cloth coat, worn at the elbows, a new flowered flannel jacket, a fine shirt, ruffled at the breast and guards, striped ticken trowsers, home-made white cotton stockings, old calf-skin pumps, lately mended, a good raccoon hat; but it is probable he will change his clothes; he has a scar on the left side of his head, and a cut on his leg; plays on the fiddle very well, and speaks fast and thick when angry. Whoever takes up and secures said Negroe, so that his master may have him again, shall have the above reward, and reasonable charges, paid by

JEREMIAH SMITH.

June 17, 1773.
N. B. All persons following the water, and others, are forbid to entertain said Negroe, at their peril. ¶

Document 1 Notes-

Think about what Franklin would gain by printing these notices?

Document 2- Excerpt from article "Franklin's Electrical Years: Enslaved People in Franklin's Research?"

"In 1735, a local merchant billed Franklin for shoes for a "negro boy." In 1742, he received a bill for a beaver hat "for your man Joseph." In 1745, he was billed for a racoon hat "for your Negro." Those ledger entries may refer to one, two, or three different people. One scholar believes that Joseph may have been an indentured servant named Joseph Rose who worked for Franklin, not an enslaved person. Regardless, the fate of this person (or people) remains unknown."

Document 2 Notes-

Set 2- Aspiring Politician (1747-1765)

Document 3- Excerpt of “*from Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind*” pamphlet written by Benjamin Franklin in 1751

“As the Increase of People depends on the Encouragement of Marriages, the following Things must diminish a Nation, viz....

the Introduction of Slaves. The Negroes brought into the English Sugar Islands, have greatly diminish’d the Whites there; the Poor are by this Means depriv’d of Employment, while a few Families acquire vast Estates; which they spend on Foreign Luxuries, and educating their Children in the Habit of those Luxuries; the same Income is needed for the Support of one that might have maintain’d 100. The Whites who have Slaves, not labouring, are enfeebled, and therefore not so generally prolific; the Slaves being work’d too hard, and ill fed, their Constitutions are broken, and the Deaths among them are more than the Births; so that a continual Supply is needed from Africa. The Northern Colonies having few Slaves increase in Whites. Slaves also pejorate the Families that use them; the white Children become proud, disgusted with Labour, and being educated in Idleness, are rendered unfit to get a Living by Industry.”

Document 3 Notes-

What is Franklin really saying here? Does he think the institution of slavery should continue?

Document 4- Excerpt of Franklin’s Will dated 1757

“And I will that my Negro Man Peter, and his Wife Jemima, be free after my Decease.”

Document 4 Notes-

Why would Franklin wait until after his death to free his slaves?

Document 5 - Excerpt of Letter from Benjamin Franklin to Deborah Franklin, June 27, 1760

“Peter continues with me, and behaves as well as I can expect, in a Country where there are many Occasions of spoiling Servants, if they are ever so good. He has as few Faults as most of them, and I see with only one Eye, and hear only with one Ear; so we rub on pretty comfortably. King, that you enquire after, is not with us. He ran away from our House, near two Years ago, while we were absent in the Country; But was soon found in Suffolk, where he had been taken in the Service of a Lady that was very fond of the Merit of making him a Christian, and contributing to his Education and Improvement. As he was of little Use, and often in Mischief, Billy consented to her keeping him while we stay in England. So the Lady sent him to School, has him taught to read and write, to play on the Violin and French Horn, with some other Accomplishments more useful in a Servant. Whether she will finally be willing to part with him, or persuade Billy to sell him to her, I know not. In the meantime he is no Expence to us.”

Document 5 Notes-

What do we learn from the fact that Franklin left Peter behind and did not try to get him back?

Document 6- Letter written by Franklin to Reverend Waring dated January 3, 1758

Revd. Sir,

I send you herewith the Extract of Mr. Sturgeon’s Letter,⁷ which I mentioned to you. He is, among us, esteemed a good Man, one that makes a Conscience of the Duties of his Office, in which he is very diligent; and has behaved with so much Discretion, as to gain the general Respect and Good-will of the People. If the Associates of Dr. Bray should think fit to make Tryal of a School for Negro Children in Philadelphia, I know no Person under whose Care it would be more likely to succeed. At present few or none give their Negro Children any Schooling, partly from a Prejudice that Reading and Knowledge in a Slave are both useless and dangerous; and partly from an Unwillingness in the Masters and Mistresses of common Schools to take black Scholars, lest the Parents of the white Children should be disgusted and take them away, not chusing to have their Children mix’d with Slaves in Education, Play, &c. But a separate School for Blacks, under the Care of One, of whom People should have an Opinion that he would be careful to imbue the Minds of their young Slaves with good Principles, might probably have a Number of Blacks sent to it; and if on Experience it should be found useful, and not attended with the ill Consequences commonly apprehended, the Example might be followed in the other Colonies, and encouraged by the Inhabitants in general. I am, Sir, Your most humble Servant

B Franklin

Document 6 Notes-

Why did Franklin want a school for free black children and slaves?

Set 3- Statesman (1766-1790)

Document 7- Excerpt of Franklin's final will dated 1789

“All the lands near the Ohio, and the lots near the centre of Philadelphia, which I lately purchased of the State, I give to my son-in-law, Richard Bache, his heirs and assigns forever; I also give him the bond I have against him, of two thousand and one hundred and seventy-two pounds, five shillings, together with the interest that shall or may accrue thereon, and direct the same to be delivered up to him by my executors, canceled, requesting that, in consideration thereof, he would immediately after my decease manumit and set free his Negro man Bob.”

Document 7 Notes-

Why do you think Franklin left this direction in his will?

Document 8- Example of freedom medal that Franklin promised to distribute to others in a letter from Benjamin Franklin to a friend dated May 15, 1788.



Document 8 Notes-

What stands out to you from the medal?

Student Evidence Sheet- Did Franklin's views on slavery change over time?

Directions: Record overall thoughts here. Did any source convince you more than others?

Teacher Resources

Annotated Bibliography

[Anti-Slavery Medallion, Am I Not A Man and A Brother](https://www.diplomaticrooms.state.gov/objects/anti-slavery-medallion-am-i-not-a-man-and-a-brother-3/). (n.d.). Diplomatic Reception Rooms, U.S. Department of State. Retrieved July 30, 2023, from <https://www.diplomaticrooms.state.gov/objects/anti-slavery-medallion-am-i-not-a-man-and-a-brother-3/>

Students will use this source to form an opinion on Franklin's views on slavery. This is an example of an anti-slavery medallion that Franklin promised to distribute. This particular source should lead them to believe that at this point in life Franklin could be considered antislavery.

[Franklin's Electrical Years: Enslaved people in Franklin's Research?](https://americanhistory.si.edu/electric-dr-franklin/enslaved-people) (2022, July 26). National Museum of American History. <https://americanhistory.si.edu/electric-dr-franklin/enslaved-people>

This source is Franklin's ledger recording showing he bought shoes for "a negro boy." This shows that at the time that Franklin still owned slaves. Students will use this source to form an opinion on Franklin's views on slavery. This source will show that as a slave owner, Franklin was a supporter of slavery at the time.

[Fearless and Fiery](https://www.swarthmore.edu/bulletin/archive/winter-2018-issue-ii-volume-cxv/fearless-and-fiery.html#:~:text=Lay%20wrote%20one%20of%20the). (n.d.). www.swarthmore.edu. Retrieved July 30, 2023, from <https://www.swarthmore.edu/bulletin/archive/winter-2018-issue-ii-volume-cxv/fearless-and-fiery.html#:~:text=Lay%20wrote%20one%20of%20the>

This source is a title page of a book Franklin published protesting slavery. In particular this book was written by Benjamin Lay. Students will use this source to determine Franklin's views on slavery. This source may have students be of mixed opinion as Franklin did not put his name on the publication.

[Founders Online: From Benjamin Franklin to Deborah Franklin, 27 June 1760](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-09-02-0046). (n.d.). Founders.archives.gov. Retrieved July 30, 2023, from <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-09-02-0046>

This source is a letter in which Franklin details his son's enslaved servant King running away. Students will use this source to form an opinion on Franklin's views on slavery. This particular source could lead to mixed opinions as Franklin's family still owned slaves, but Franklin himself did not try to recapture King.

[Founders Online: From Benjamin Franklin to John Waring, 3 January 1758](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-07-02-0147). (2018). Archives.gov. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-07-02-0147>

This source is a letter in which Franklin discusses efforts to educate African-American children in Philadelphia. Students will use this source to form an opinion on Franklin's views on slavery. This particular source should lead them to believe that at this point in life Franklin could be considered anti-slavery.

[Founders Online: Last Will and Testament, 28 April 1757](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-07-02-0085). (n.d.). Founders.archives.gov. Retrieved July 30, 2023, from <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-07-02-0085>

This source is a section of Franklin's will dated 1757 detailing that his enslaved servants were to be freed upon his death. Students will use this source to form an opinion on Franklin's views on slavery. Students may be of mixed opinion on this source. The case can be made that Franklin was pro slavery as he still owned slaves, he could also be considered anti-slavery because he wanted his enslaved servants released upon his death.

Keyes, C. R. (2023, June 30). **[Slavery Advertisements Published June 30, 1737](https://adverts250project.org/2023/06/30/slavery-advertisements-published-june-30-177/)**. The Adverts 250 Project. <https://adverts250project.org/2023/06/30/slavery-advertisements-published-june-30-177/>

This source is an advertisement printed in the Pennsylvania Gazette in 1737 listing slaves for sale. Franklin likely printed many of these advertisements. Students will use this source to form an opinion on Franklin's views on slavery. This source should lead students to believe that Franklin was pro slavery.

[The Last Will and Testament of Benjamin Franklin](https://www.constitution.org/1-History/primarysources/lastwill.html). (n.d.). Wwww.constitution.org. Retrieved July 30, 2023, from <https://www.constitution.org/1-History/primarysources/lastwill.html>

This source is an excerpt of Franklin's final will dated 1789 with stipulations that his son-in-law free his enslaved servant upon Franklin's death. Students will use this source to form an opinion on Franklin's views on slavery. This source should lead students to believe that Franklin was anti-slavery.

