

Discussion Questions – *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*

1. Franklin is known for his aphorisms and witty sayings, yet they are, for the most part, not mentioned in the book. Why do you think Franklin did not list these in the book?
2. Benjamin Franklin began the publication of *Poor Richard's Almanac*, which continues to be published annually to this day. Except for the title page and a brief mention of the *Almanac*, Franklin does not go into detail about its contents or success. Why do you think he does not write more extensively about the *Almanac*?
3. Franklin spends a great deal of time writing about the virtues which he believes are necessary for man's improvement, and develops a system whereby he can improve himself based upon practicing the virtues over a period of time. Is Franklin's system workable? Is the system necessary? Would you be willing to place this system into effect? Why or why not?
4. Franklin was a printer, publisher, scientist, diplomat and man of letters. Which of his achievements do you consider to be his greatest? He considered himself to be a printer to the end of his life—is this his greatest achievement?
5. An argument could be made that Benjamin Franklin should have been the first President of the United States. Do you think he could have made a good President? Why or why not?
6. Franklin was the architect, along with Jefferson, of the *Declaration of Independence*. He was also instrumental in forming the first Continental Congress and helping to organize the colonies against Great Britain, although he does not go into details of his work in these areas. Why do you think he does not place greater emphasis on these areas in the *Autobiography*?
7. Franklin spends a great deal of time writing about his service as Ambassador to France, where he persuaded the French to assist the U.S. in its War of Independence. He writes that this was the happiest period of his life; is this why he devotes so much of his autobiography to this period?
8. Franklin, like Lincoln, was a self-made man. Like Lincoln, he received little formal education, but was considered a man of letters and learning. Do you think it is possible for a man like Franklin to become so well-informed today, as it was in his time? Why or why not? Is Franklin's career the result of fortuitous timing, inherent ability, and resolve, or did events of the time dictate his ascendance on the world stage?
9. Franklin spends a great deal of time on his civic accomplishments for the city of Philadelphia, such as the establishment of the first library, fire department, and his work as Postmaster General. While these accomplishments are important, how do they compare with his national accomplishments? What does the emphasis on local activities over national activities, say about Franklin's character and emphasis on public service?
10. Franklin, like Jefferson, believed that agriculture was of primary importance to the growth and development of the U.S. He believed that manufacturing was only suited to the poorer elements, and did not see a future for manufacturing in the U.S. He also believed in mercantilism as the basis for the British and U.S. economies. How do you think he would react to the current U.S. economy, and to the emphasis placed on manufacturing and production in the U.S.?