



Study Guide on Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*

QUESTIONS ON THE WHOLE WORK

1. Franklin says, "And, lastly (I may as well confess it, since my denial of it will be believed by nobody), perhaps I shall a good deal gratify my own *vanity*. Indeed, I scarce ever heard or saw the introductory words, "*Without vanity I may say,*" etc., but some vain thing immediately followed. Most people dislike vanity in others, whatever share they have of it themselves; but I give it fair quarter wherever I meet with it, being persuaded that it is often productive of good to the possessor, and to others that are within his sphere of action; and therefore, in many cases, it would not be altogether absurd if a man were to thank God for his vanity among the other comforts of life." Is Franklin right? In the Judeo-Christian tradition, vanity is a form of pride. Later in the *Autobiography*, a Maiden Lady of 70 tells Franklin that she confesses her sins everyday and when Franklin asked how she "could possibly find so much Employment for a Confessor?" she responded, "It is impossible to avoid vain Thoughts." Does he learn from her?
2. According to Franklin, what is the value of reading?
3. Franklin has clear virtues that he strives for. What are the vices he struggles with?
4. What motivates Franklin's quest for moral perfection?
5. What role and effects does eloquence have on society, according to Franklin's life, beliefs, and observations?

QUESTIONS ON THE OUTLINED PARTS

1. Ancestry and Early Life in Boston: *Why is Franklin writing his autobiography? How would you characterize Franklin's education? What moved him along? What did he learn?*
2. **Beginning Life as a Printer:** *What books did he especially love? What did he learn from reading about Socrates? What is the purpose of conversation?*
3. Arrival in Philadelphia
4. First Visit to Boston
5. Early Friends in Philadelphia: *What united Franklin and his friends? What were their shared interests and activities?*
6. First Visit to London: *Franklin speaks about the "Errata of his life." What do these comments show about where he came from and where he is morally?*
7. **Beginning Business in Philadelphia:** *What does Franklin believe in and what does he doubt? According to Franklin, what values lead to happiness? What subjects do he and his friends discuss? What guidelines did they have for their discussions? What did the participants of the discussions acquire?*



8. **Business Success and First Public Service:** *What effect do Franklin's library's have on the general public? According to Franklin, why is education concerned with the youth? Why did reading become so fashionable after Franklin established his library? Why doesn't Franklin attend public worship?*
9. **Plan for Attaining Moral Perfection:** *Does Franklin see moral perfection as doing no wrong or only doing right? Was Franklin's good intention to be virtuous enough to make him virtuous? What is Franklin's most important and least important virtue? Are the order or precepts of the virtues surprising in any way?*
10. **Poor Richard's Almanac and Other Activities:** *How does Franklin win the goodwill of the "Gentleman of Fortune and Education" who opposed him as Clerk of the General Assembly?*
11. **Interest in Public Affairs:** *Which of Franklin's public services strikes you most as inspiring? According to Franklin's account, what is the purpose of a leader in a community?*
12. **Defense of the Province:** *How does Franklin unite the many sects of Christianity in the defense of the Province?*
13. **Public Services and Duties:** *What is Franklin's attitude toward patenting inventions? What kind of people come out of Franklin's University of Philadelphia, according to Franklin?*
14. Albany Plan of Union
15. Quarrels with the Proprietary Governors
16. Braddock Expedition
17. Franklin's Defense of the Frontier
18. Scientific Experiments
19. Agent of Pennsylvania in London

Suggested use: This study guide includes a few questions and observations about Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. Among possible uses, one could consider these comments while reading the work; or one could use them as starting points for a classroom discussion.