



## INTRODUCTION

A BOY ABOUT TEN YEARS OLD was swimming in a pond in early colonial Massachusetts. He was a strong swimmer, and after a while he floated on his back, looking up at the sky. Thick clouds glided by overhead and seabirds soared on the swiftly moving air currents. He swam to the shore's edge and picked up a kite he had left there, and waded back in the water until he stood waist deep. He turned on his back and let out the string, and the kite began to rise. He held on tightly to the stick, and the kite began to pull him along. As he was swept over the pond's surface his startled companions ran along the water's edge, cheering him on.

This was the first, but certainly not the last, time that Benjamin Franklin would amaze his friends with the help of a kite. In fact, Franklin's whole life was amazing. He excelled in many different fields, and pursued the unknown and attempted to understand it.

When we picture Franklin, we don't see the curious, strong-willed boy; we see a bald man with spectacles, already on in years. There is something about Franklin that makes us feel we somehow know him, so unlike the other Founding Fathers peering sternly at us from their solemn portraits. We even affectionately call him Ben.

This perception has a solid foundation. Ben Franklin was not born into the upper classes.

In fact, he rose from the humblest origins to become one of the greatly respected founders of the new nation.

Even so, throughout his legendary life, he often signed his name simply B. Franklin, Printer, displaying the great pride he took in his trade. But he was also one of the most farsighted of the early leaders, possessing a brilliant, questioning mind. And he was driven to achieve success in a remarkable variety of enterprises—as a scientist, writer, inventor, philosopher, publisher, and statesman. He was the perfect representative of the new and expanding nation when he went to the courts of Europe. During his life, he was the most well-known American in the world, a real celebrity of his time.

Franklin believed in moving forward, working hard, and saving to gather wealth. His principle of looking for opportunity and taking it was the same as the new nation's. Only in this fresh and fertile environment could Franklin's ideas come about. His thoughts and actions parallel the growth of America. Here, he believed, anything could be accomplished. He was the proof of that.

Benjamin Franklin was able to envision what his country could become, built on the strength of a thriving middle class. He symbolized in his lifetime, as well as ours, the driving spirit of its people.

