

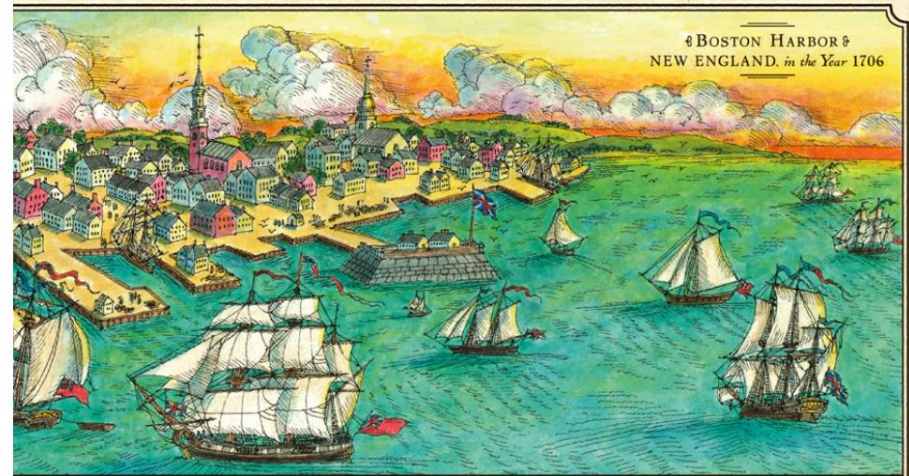
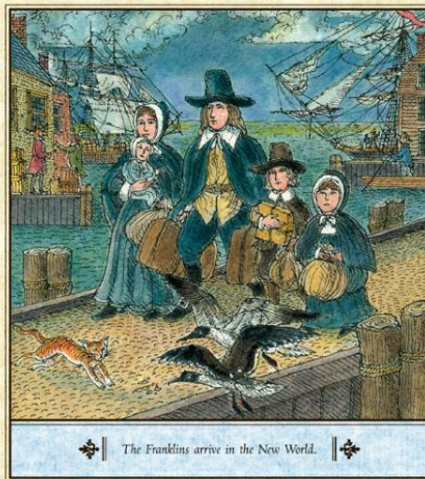
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN was born on a snowy day in the city of Boston, on January 17, 1706. Boston was in what was then called the Massachusetts Bay Colony, one of the thirteen original British ruled colonies. Boston was the largest city, the most important port, and the center of commerce and culture in the colonies.

Ships from all over the world docked in Boston's bustling harbor, loaded with tools, fabric, and goods not available in the New World. Some ships carried slaves. Ships from the colonies sent lumber, farm produce, and animal skins back to England and other foreign lands. Ships went to different ports in the colonies, too, such as Philadelphia and Charleston.

Josiah Franklin, Benjamin's father, was born in Northamptonshire, England. He was a religious man but did not believe in many of the teachings of the established churches in England. In 1683, he left with his family hoping to find a place where he could worship freely in America. The Franklins sailed to Boston and moved into a house on Milk Street.

Benjamin grew up there in a crowded household. The Franklins had fourteen children. Benjamin was the youngest boy.

Large families like the Franklins were common



then and considered necessary for economic reasons. Children supplied free labor, so almost all except the youngest did some kind of work, helping on farms or in family shops with simple chores. Boys helped their tradesmen fathers carry products and unload wagons. Girls helped take care of the home, washing, serving, cleaning, and caring for younger sisters and brothers. Due to disease and poor living conditions, little more than half of these children survived to become adults.



Josiah had been a cloth dyer in England, but there was little need for colorful textiles in Boston. Most people in Boston were Puritans, and they wore clothes of somber colors. So Josiah became a chandler, one who makes candles and soap. He set up shop in the house with Abiah and their fourteen children. Life may have been hectic, but apparently pleasant. Ben's sister Jane, his favorite of all his brothers and sisters, wrote a letter to him many years later recalling their childhood. "All was harmony," she said.



LEFT: Benjamin Franklin's house on Milk Street. Other streets in Boston were named Ber Lane, Frogg Lane, Flounder Lane, Cow Lane, Crabb Lane, Turn Again Alley, Sliding Alley, Crooked Street, and Rope Walk. These quaint spellings reflect the style of written English at the time.

SCHOOL DAYS

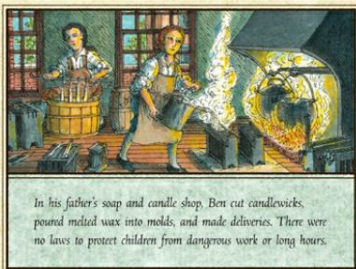
THE PURITANS, who settled Boston, believed that everyone should be able to read the Bible. Most towns in Massachusetts had schools with teachers and books. When Benjamin Franklin was born, most children there were better read than those who lived in London and Paris.

Benjamin was reading the Bible at the age of five. He also read a book called *Pilgrim's Progress*, which was the story of a man's struggle to overcome problems and achieve success through hard work. It made an early impression on him as to how he might live his life.

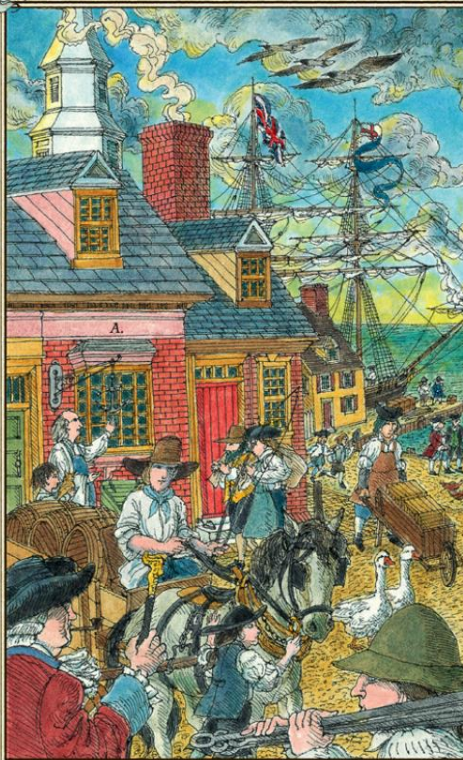
"I don't remember a time I could not read."

His parents recognized his intelligence and zest for learning and sent him to the Boston Latin School when he was eight. They hoped he would go on to Harvard University and become a minister. Ben did well at school, and he was outgoing, popular, and a natural leader. But his independence and dislike for authority ruled out any career in the church. So his father sent him to public school for one more year.

Benjamin began working in his father's soap and candle shop when he was ten. Ben hated the work. The smell of lye and boiling fat sickened



In his father's soap and candle shop, Ben cut candlewicks, poured melted wax into molds, and made deliveries. There were no laws to protect children from dangerous work or long hours.



him, and he found making candle molds boring. He continued to read whenever he could, buying and borrowing books.

"I dislike the Trade," he later wrote, "and had a strong Inclination for the Sea." Ben's father panicked at the thought of him becoming a sailor. One of his older sons had been lost at sea. So he

Some children were taught reading, writing, and arithmetic at home. Children at school used handheld boards called "horn books." They were made of slate and leather and contained lessons and alphabets printed on paper covered with a thin layer of horn.



began taking Ben through the streets of Boston to watch the tradesmen work. Cobblers, blacksmiths, cutters, carpenters, wheelwrights, joiners, coopers, and ship builders—all these craftsmen were called the Leather Apron Men because they wore leather aprons when they worked. Ben would always hold these artisans in high regard. They worked hard and were very skilled.

After a brief try as a cutler, one who makes and sharpens knives, Josiah Franklin decided that Ben should enter the printing profession. Ben always considered himself a Leather Apron Man. "Keep thy shop and thy shop will keep thee," he later wrote.

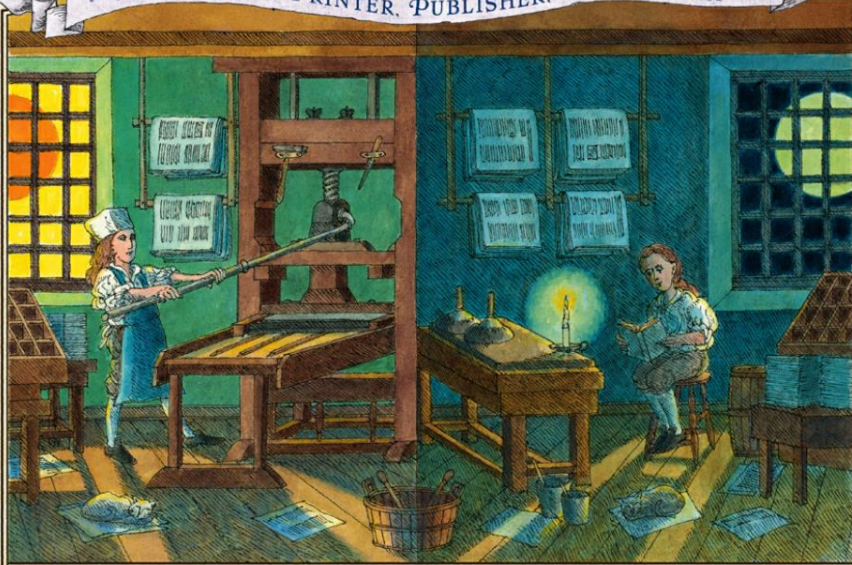
ABOVE: A. Tavern Keeper, B. Potter, C. Wheelwright, D. Blacksmith.

BELOW: Ben's father presided over lively dinner conversations that often included well-informed guests especially invited to broaden his children's minds. Ben professed that he became so engrossed in these talks he lost all interest in food, declaring he could scarcely recall what he had eaten an hour after dinner, and that this "perfect inattention" to food served him well in life.

Despite claims of "taking little or no notice" of food, he curiously recorded many classic French and American recipes in his memoirs.



APPRENTICE, PRINTER, PUBLISHER, AND RUNAWAY



Ben worked ten to fourteen hours a day, sweeping, running errands, setting type by hand, inking and operating the press. He borrowed books and often read most of the night. He became a vegetarian, saving money to buy his own books. He practiced writing. He tried to imitate the style of writing he liked. He turned prose into poems and back again. And he never stopped reading. The work was hard and the hours were long. But Ben was strong and sturdy, and he had found a craft he loved.

AT AGE TWELVE, Ben became an apprentice to his brother James, a printer. Ben wasn't thrilled about the apprenticeship that would last nine long years. But the trade offered him something quite appealing. He would be able to read, write, and edit the printed word.

The apprenticeship did not go well. The two brothers did not like each other and quarreled constantly. Ben learned the trade quickly but James treated him poorly, even beating him when they argued. James was jealous of his brother's intellect, and he considered Ben arrogant.

James was an important printer in Boston. He

published his own paper, the *New England Courant*. The *Courant* was unlike any other newspaper. It was biting, fresh, and controversial. It published articles making fun of politicians, and sarcastic poems, some even written by Ben.

"... all the little money that came into my hands was laid out in books."

Many of the letters from readers published in the *Courant* were actually written by James's young friends, and they lampooned upper-class Bostonians. The letters were extremely popular with the public, and were signed with such made-up names as Ichabod Henroost, Abigail Afterwit, Tabitha Talkative, and Fanny Mournful.

Ben was anxious to be included in this group

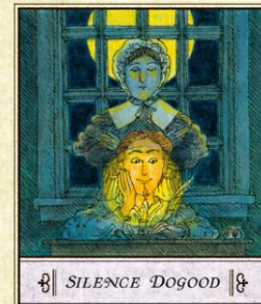
and worked to develop a style of writing like theirs. He secretly began to write made-up letters to the *Courant* signed by a simple country widow he called Silence Dogood, which he slipped under the door of the shop. They became the most popular and anticipated item the paper printed.

Dogood mocked Boston society and its puritanical ways. But the thoughts expressed were Ben's. She championed women's right to education and criticized everything from bad poetry and fashion to Harvard students:

I am . . . a mortal Enemy to arbitrary Government and unlimited Power. I am naturally very jealous for the Rights and Liberties of my Country: and the least appearance of Incroachment of those invaluable Priviledges is apt to make my Blood boil exceedingly . . .

*Sir, Your Friend and Humble Servant,
Silence Dogood*

James was furious and embarrassed when the true author of the letters was revealed. His sixteen-year-old brother had established himself as a real voice, a forerunner of a new American form of writing.



In 1723, James Franklin got thrown in jail for publishing opinions that had gone too far. So Ben took charge and published the paper under his own name. He promised he would tone down the writing that made people so angry. At age seventeen Benjamin Franklin found himself the youngest printer, publisher, and editor in all of Colonial America. This

lasted for three weeks. When James was freed, he forced Ben to become an apprentice again. He refused to accept Ben as a writer and an equal.

Ben worked hard and knew the newspaper business well. But the troubles between the two brothers grew. James ensured that no other printer in Boston would hire his brother. Ben wrote that his brother's harsh treatment "de-meaned me too much." But he also noted that "I had already made myself a little obnoxious to the governing party."

It was time to move on. Ben sold his books to pay for passage and, fearing James might try to stop him, he secretly sailed first to New York, then to Philadelphia. On September 30, 1723, Benjamin Franklin arrived in Philadelphia, ready to start his new life.

BELOW: Ben sailed from Boston to New York, a city smaller than Boston, without a bookstore or newspaper. It only had one printer, who advised Ben to go to Philadelphia to find work. The entire journey from Boston to Philadelphia took Ben eight days, traveling first by boat, then by coach, and on foot.

