

## Assignment II

Ben Franklin loved listening to music. He enjoyed singing, especially singing along with fellow Philadelphians. Though he loved songs, he thought that some of the music of his time was too repetitive; therefore, he wrote his own songs. His original songs told about the times and people of his era. This type of song is called a ballad. Franklin even wrote a ballad about Blackbeard, the pirate. He also wrote a tune that praised his wife, Deborah. He called this song, "My Plain Country Joan."

If he lived today, Franklin would probably have a lot of songs downloaded on his MP3 player. He would most likely enjoy rap and country songs that tell stories. The repetition of some present day rock songs may not have "sat well" with Mr. Franklin. He believed that the words of songs should be pronounced precisely, and that the lyrics should tell a story.

Benjamin Franklin frequented concerts in both America and Europe, where he served as a diplomat for 28 years. He even attended Handel's final performance of "The Messiah." At this time, the angelic organ was a popular instrument. It was made of a series of drinking glasses. Franklin improved upon this instrument by creating the glass armonica.

With the students in your group, you will write a song or rap about Ben Franklin. You may "borrow" a tune from a familiar song, or create your own original music. (See example.) You will perform your original song or create a video version for the class. Please provide a copy of your lyrics for the class, so that they may sing along. Singing with friends was one of Franklin's favorite activities!

### **Internet Connection: What is a glass armonica?**

You may play the glass armonica, see a movie of an armonica being played, and find more facts at: <http://www.fi.edu/franklin/musician/musician.html>

## Ben Franklin Song

A music teacher from Texas, Phyllis Montgomery, wrote these words and matched them to the tune of Yankee Doodle.

Verse 1: Our country oh, so young and new  
Ben, smarter than the others.  
For two years he did go to school,  
Then apprenticed for his brother.

Chorus: Benjamin Franklin, he's our man,  
Inventor, printer, statesman,  
Improved the life of everyman  
In our American nation.

Verse 2: Inventing rods to guard our homes  
From lightning's sparks so fiery;  
Ladder chairs to climb upon  
In many - a - home library.

Chorus: Benjamin Franklin, he's our man,  
Inventor, printer, statesman,  
Improved the life of everyman  
In our American nation.

Verse 3: My dad says, "Taxes aren't much fun!"  
They turned the colonists sour.  
The Stamp Act disappeared from view,  
For Ben's words had great power!

Chorus: Benjamin Franklin, he's our man,  
Inventor, printer, statesman,  
Improved the life of everyman  
In our American nation.

Verse 4: King George then placed a tax on tea,  
Not so great a notion!  
Men dressed themselves as Indians.  
The tea went in the ocean.

Chorus: Benjamin Franklin, he's our man,  
Inventor, printer, statesman.  
Improved the life of everyman  
In our American nation.

Verse 5: Tom Jefferson sought Ben Franklin's aide  
while writing our Declaration.  
"these truths to be self-evident,"  
were Franklin's own creation.

Chorus: Benjamin Franklin, he's our man,  
Inventor, printer, statesman.  
Improved the life of everyman  
In our American nation.

Verse 6: Our Constitution protects our rights,  
And guards our people's freedom.  
Thanks to our founding father's work  
and especially Benjamin Franklin!

Chorus: Benjamin Franklin, he's our man,  
Inventor, printer, statesman.  
Improved the life of everyman  
In our American nation.

## Background Dossier Two

### Ben Franklin, Musician

Here are some facts about Mr. Franklin's musical life:

- At age seven, Ben spent all of his money on a penny whistle
- Played the harpsichord, harp, guitar, viola and violin.
- Invented the glass armonica, which was an improvement over the angelic organ (a series of musical glasses)
- Played his armonica in the evening with his daughter, Sally, as she played her harpsichord
- Brought his armonica to dinner parties to play for his associates and friends
- Invented the four-sided music stand which allowed four musicians to play and read their music together while looking at one another
- Composed historical ballads
- Objected to "needless" repetition in songs
- Preferred lyrics to be enunciated
- Studied music as a science, and was knowledgeable in the history, theory and harmony of music
- Had a music room on the third floor of his home, the Blue Room, where he housed his instruments: a harpsichord, a viola, a Welsh harp, and a set of tuned bells for use in tuning his harpsichord
- Loved playing and singing Scottish tunes
- Thought singing was a melodious way of talking



Franklin said, "Of all of my inventions, the glass armonica has given me the greatest personal satisfaction."