

Lesson Suggestions for: *Ben Franklin's Big Splash: The Mostly True Story of His First Invention* by Barb Rosenstock, illustrated by S.D. Schindler

Submitted by Mary Gardner

Synopsis of book: A young Ben Franklin is portrayed as a curious thinker and questioner as well as a problem solver and inventor. In order to improve his swimming and to swim like a fish he invents swim fins. Rosenstock's narrative is sprinkled with lively verbs enhanced by a variety of word art and also includes quotations from Benjamin Franklin. Schindler's detailed illustrations enhance the text and support the reader's understanding of the time period. Woven in to the possible scenario of Franklin's first invention is information about swimming in the early 1700's that will intrigue readers. Franklin's repeated use of trial and error and not giving up when something didn't work help deliver a message of thinking like a scientist and the scientific method.

Suggestions for use: This book would be an example of complex text for Kindergarten through second graders, and possibly for third graders as well. As such it can be used as a teacher read aloud or shared reading to model close reading. There are multiple layers that provide authentic purposes for rereading as suggested in the possible activities below.

Fourth and fifth graders might use the text in a similar way as they read it independently. It could supplement a study of inventors. It could be an additional source of biographical information of Benjamin Franklin, even though it is fiction.

Possible CCSS: Since the book can be used across grade levels, anchor standards that could be met are included here. Choose appropriate corresponding standards for your grade level.

Reading:

- R.2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their developments, summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- R. 7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

If the book is read aloud – Speaking and Listening

- SL.2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Possible Activities:

Before the first reading: Share the title and discuss what the subtitle (The Mostly True Story of His First Invention) might mean. This could lead to a discussion of the genre of this book. Is it a biography, narrative nonfiction, or fiction? It could also be the basis for a discussion of fact and opinion.

One reading: Read to find out the sequence of events that led to Franklin's first invention, swim fins. Be prepared to have discussion about the fact that Franklin did not wear a swimming suit. It is subtly introduced and some may not catch it at first.

There is also information about Franklin's invention of swim sandals. Students might read an additional time to determine the events that led to that invention and what happened when Franklin tried to use them.

Students could choose how they would like to present the sequence of events if you want an end product. They could make an accordion book of the steps. They could work in small groups to create Power Point (or something similar) presentations that show the steps Franklin used. These could be shared whole class and posted on a class webpage for parents to see. All products could be evaluated using a student-created rubric.

Another reading: Read to explore the use of word art. Why did the author choose to have certain words printed different colors and sizes? Is there a pattern? Does the word art help us understand the story better?

Students might collect all the verbs and/or adjectives. The unknown words could be divided and partners could define them, illustrate them, and then share them whole class.

Another reading: Explore the quotes from Benjamin Franklin that the author has sprinkled throughout the book. Students can form small groups with each group choosing a different quote. They could make posters with the saying and include illustrations to show what they think it means. Posters can be shared whole class.

You might also include in the above activity the author's words from the two-page spread when Ben tried the swim fins for the first time: "Most people squawk about problems; Ben searched for solutions."

Additional information: A key message of the book is that even though his inventions didn't work he wasn't discouraged. You might have students try to determine the message(s) the author is trying to convey. A possible prompt stem: What did you learn about Benjamin Franklin when he _____?

There is a picture chart of Franklin's accomplishments and other inventions as well as a timeline of his life in the end pages. The picture chart could also lead to a discussion of S. D. Schindler's illustrations. How do they help us understand the time period?

The Author's Note in the back also adds historical information that is not in the story itself as well as Rosenstock's commentary on Franklin's accomplishments. Perhaps students can look for evidence in the text to support the author's statement about how she "...imagined him following the basic scientific method: Problem. Research. Hypothesis. Test. Analyze. Conclude. Repeat." (Rosenstock, B., 2014, Author's Note)

Resource Materials

The Author's Note includes an excerpt from a letter Franklin wrote to a fellow scientist in 1773. This could lead to a discussion about primary sources. There are also other sources and source notes listed on the last page of the book.

Poor Richard's Almanac might be worth a look, especially for older students.

An idea for a paired text would be *11 Experiments That Failed* written by Jenny Offill and illustrated by Nancy Carpenter. Several kid-created experiments are described and illustrated with collage. Each experiment is set up in this format: Question, Hypothesis, What You Need, What to Do, and What Happened. The fun and adventurous experiments delightfully illustrate thinking like a scientist!

There is a passage found at www.readworks.org titled *Edison Tried and Tried Again* that reinforces the idea that not all inventions work the first time. It is labeled for Kindergarten with a 250 Lexile level.

The History of Swimming for Kids by Lisa Fritscher retrieved from: <http://www.livestrong.com/article/383078-the-history-of-swimming-for-kids/> on March 27, 2015. (Interesting facts, but teacher needs to preview as some ads might not be appropriate for students.)

The International Swimming Hall of Fame does indeed list Benjamin Franklin as an honoree. You can find the site at: <http://www.ishof.org/index.html>

Modifications

Working with classmates in varied group formations from whole group to small groups will provide opportunities for collaboration. Students with varying educational needs will be supported in learning by their peers and teacher. A scribe could be provided for students with

difficulties writing. A listening center with copies of the book and an audio recording could be provided for additional reading support.