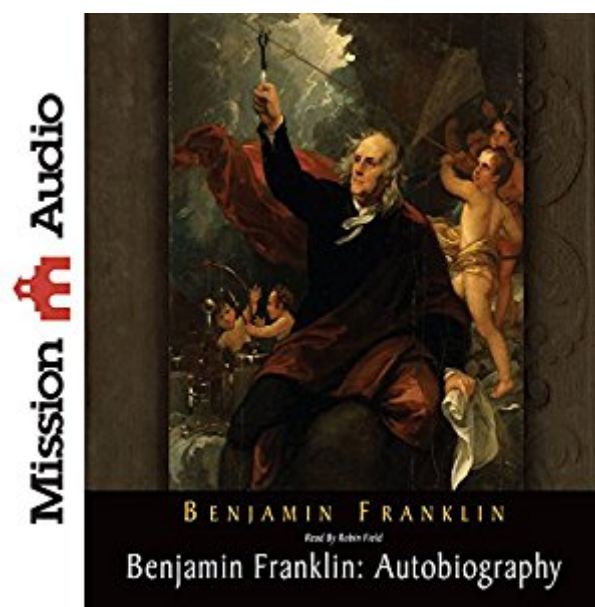


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Benjamin Franklin: Autobiography



Synopsis

"Be in general virtuous, and you will be happy," advises Benjamin Franklin, and he was a man who lived up to his own words. Franklin's Autobiography, one of the most regarded works in early American literature, began as a private collection of anecdotes for his son, but was soon transformed from reflective personal journaling into a work of national history. Filled with the inimitable nuances & wit of the inventor, philosopher, scientist and statesman, this engaging narration of Benjamin Franklin's classic is as certain to delight modern readers as it did with his original audience.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It's a little presumptuous to write a "review" of a book as historically important as this, so I'll just give a few reasons why you should read it. It's well-written and engaging, even 200+ (nearing 300+; Franklin was born in 1706) years later. It stops in 1760, well before his involvement with the Revolution, but it covers in detail his youth, apprenticeships, the formation of his philosophy and ideals, and his path from poor roots to business and social success -- the first telling of the American Dream, the idea that a poor young man could Find His Fortune in the New World through enterprise, wisdom, and work. There is a high degree of self-hagiography here, and it would be amusing to tally up (for example) how many times Franklin praises himself vs. how many times he advises on the virtue of humility. He smooths over controversial topics like his illegitimate son, he doesn't mention his membership in the Freemasons, etc. The construction is also a bit rambling

("Then I did this thing. Next, I did another thing. Then I did a third thing"), but Franklin simply did so many interesting things -- even in this short slice of his life -- that the book is interesting despite that. There's a great deal of discussion on his scientific and inventive accomplishments, and he talks at length about his development of his own personal moral code and how he achieved business success (along with Franklin's Personal Method You Can Use for Self-Improvement -- in some ways, this is the first self-help book!) All in all, this is very much worth reading, and gives a compelling picture of Franklin's life and times.

Franklin wrote this autobiography as a letter of instruction in the ways of the world to his youthful and illegitimate son of 40. It only covers the first half or so of his incredible life, so the things that really made him well-known are not covered, but there is plenty here anyway. Franklin recounts his family's modest life in England and the circumstances that brought them to Boston. He was among the youngest of a very large family, ultimately finding his way to Philadelphia to find work as a printer when an apprenticeship with an older brother turned sour. We always think of Franklin as being a slightly older statesman among the Founding Fathers, when in fact he was a full generation older than Washington or Jefferson. Unlike popular perception, he was an athletic and vibrant youth, who rescued a drowning Dutch companion and taught swimming to children of London's elite. Philadelphia in the 1720's and 1730's was a small town, never sure if it would really take off as a settlement. Franklin quickly befriended key politicians who felt Philadelphia had grown sufficiently to have a world-class print shop. He played a key role in the town's development, leading civic groups in establishing libraries, fire companies, meeting halls, and street cleaning services. Of course, he was also the consummate politician, serving in office, and networking his way to his first fortune by publishing government documents and printing the first paper currency. He also had a knack for working with the several important religious sects of that time and place, especially the pacifist Quakers, even though Franklin was a deist. Franklin was a clever businessman.

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