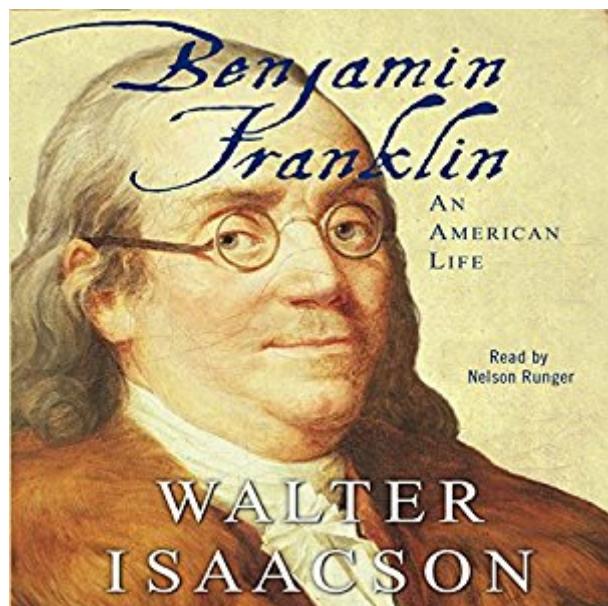


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Benjamin Franklin: An American Life



Synopsis

Benjamin Franklin is the founding father who winks at us - an ambitious urban entrepreneur who rose up the social ladder, from leather-aproned shopkeeper to dining with kings. In best-selling author Walter Isaacson's vivid and witty full-scale biography, we discover why Franklin turns to us from history's stage with eyes that twinkle from behind his new-fangled spectacles. In Benjamin Franklin, Isaacson shows how Franklin defines both his own time and ours. The most interesting thing that Franklin invented, and continually reinvented, was himself. America's first great publicist, he was consciously trying to create a new American archetype. In the process, he carefully crafted his own persona, portrayed it in public, and polished it for posterity. His guiding principle was a "dislike of everything that tended to debase the spirit of the common people". Few of his fellow founders felt this comfort with democracy so fully, and none so intuitively. In this colorful and intimate narrative, Isaacson provides the full sweep of Franklin's amazing life, from his days as a runaway printer to his triumphs as a statesman, scientist, and Founding Father. He chronicles Franklin's tumultuous relationship with his illegitimate son and grandson, his practical marriage, and his flirtations with the ladies of Paris. He also shows how Franklin helped to create the American character and why he has a particular resonance in the 21st century.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Excellent book! I'm always in search of mentors, and find that we can learn a lot from people even after they've passed, through biographies and autobiographies. I've always been intrigued by

Benjamin Franklin - he's such an interesting character. Heavily influential, the writer of several major American documents, one of our founding fathers, an inventor, businessman, and writer - but also a cunning, mischievous, and, at times, hedonistic man. Probably the most relatable founding father for us millenials, because of the breadth of what he accomplished while still playing hard (you know he would've popped molly and rocked EDC with the best of them). I tried once to get through Poor Richard's Almanack, and just couldn't do it. However, in "Benjamin Franklin: An American Life", Walter Isaacson does an EXCELLENT job of portraying the various sides of BF's personality, capturing his influence on our current American identity, while still allowing us to learn from BF as if he was teaching us lessons to apply to our own lives. Highly recommend this biography if you're looking for something to read everyday before bed!!

Clearly, Walter Isaacson's goal is to portray Benjamin Franklin with a whole new, sort of revisionistic realism. And he succeeds marvelously with this narrative that captures both the myth and pragmatic side of one of our more eccentric founding fathers. This is historical biography on a grand scale and surely will stand the test of time as the standard work on Franklin and, indeed on the founding of our nation. What can be said of Franklin that hasn't been documented before? That he was at once an extraordinarily disciplined, virtuous man while maintaining an "everyday" humanistic side can not be argued. That he was, gratefully, a visionary who was in large part responsible for forming a type of government unheard of or unseen before in the annals of time is also unquestioned. That he had a unique mind and penchant for scientifically detailed analysis which served him and his time well and put him years ahead of his contemporaries is absolutely without doubt. The goal, then, of any new work on Franklin is to re-introduce these virtues to a new generation of readers and to attempt to separate the man from the myth...this is the task that Isaacson performs amazingly well with this work. To call this an ordinary biography is to call McCullough's "Truman", Caro's "Master of the Senate" or Morris' "Theodore Rex" ordinary...this is the level of literary genius that Isaacson has achieved here in my opinion and it's a work that needs to be seriously considered by all historians or general readers. Covered in narrative form, we see Isaacson build Franklin's story from his early days in Boston to his inspiring entrepreneurship in Philadelphia. His early work at the printing press and as an amateur publisher lead him in becoming a local literary visionary. His "Poor Richard's Almanac" and other published works show Franklin to be the sort of personality that ultimately leads to greater "revolutionary" thinking later on. Isaacson also gives fair coverage to Franklin's ever growing scientific and social works activities as his inventions and improvements on items such as stoves and his organization of various groups ranging from fire departments to local lending libraries.

make him a leader in early American society. Able to retire at 40 years old (due to his famous frugality and industry), we then see the middle aged Franklin become a major character on the world stage, first with his invention/discovery of the lightning rod and then, slowly, as a revolutionary activist. This activity leads of course to political aspirations and Franklin goes from a Pennsylvania delegate at the first Continental Congress to diplomatic roles representing colonial interests in Great Britain. It's there that Franklin loses his passion and confidence in the royal government and where this book really takes off. Franklin hesitantly refutes the Stamp Act, returns to America to become a leading figure in the revolt and then returns to England where he starts his service as a career diplomat...it's in this period that Franklin becomes the world leader and thinker that makes him such a renowned figure and also where he forms his vision of our ultimate form of government. Isaacson deftly weaves all this into incredibly readable detail while never sacrificing comprehensiveness. Franklin's personal life, displayed with the generous use of many personal letters and diaries show a different side that form a personality that's rich, somewhat flawed and always entertaining...he's certainly able to "wink" at us from this lofty Founding Father position and Isaacson melds all this into the narrative. Franklin's work at securing first the French intervention into the Revolutionary War and ultimately the peace treaty with England necessarily make up the greater portion of the book, while his activities in France also add to his legendary mystique. Interaction and correspondence with famous personalities such as John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington are offset with practical letters to his wife and children/grandchildren that give a unique biographical balance and add a richness to the story not seen in many historical accounts. To say that Franklin was just a diplomat or just a scientist or just a founding father is really cliché...he was all these things and more and Walter Isaacson combines all this into a beautiful narrative that does justice to Franklin and to history in general...I would recommend this work to any general reader or historian and I'm sure that most would agree that "Benjamin Franklin" stands out and is not your ordinary history book.

Wow this book is fantastic! I was initially drawn to it b/c of the author. I had read his biography on Steve Jobs and thought it was fantastic. Because I am a history lover, I went for this one next. And it did not disappoint! Many times throughout I realized the difficulty of writing this versus the Jobs bio, in that Jobs was alive and so were others with whom to interview about him. Who is alive to give firsthand info about Franklin? The great part is that Isaacson shows great tact in referencing other previous biographers of Franklin and their perspectives on key incidents that may be ambiguous. Fantastic read, and really cool to learn so much about a person who we revere in this

country and really know so little about commonly.

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