

**Reader's Guide:** Open4Definition centers on identifying and implementing *Sapient Definitions*. This is a lexical definition, so Benjamin Franklin's life is used to entertainingly describe and define *sapient* as the sum of its synonyms. This is a quick read about a true visionary. Enjoy. (1,000 words) Other definitions: Gulf Stream, Franklin stove, lightening rod, bifocals, positive, negative, conductor and battery.

## Ben Thinkin'

### A Sapient Journey of Experimentation

Canadian geese fly long distances in a V formation rotating leadership to make migration easier. European starlings take flight in synchronized and startlingly fast movements. A flock of sandpipers darts evasively to avoid capture when winged predators approach.

These are fascinating air shows for even the most casual observer. B. Franklin, printer, was anything but a casual observer of the eighteenth century. He was clearly a visionary. When Benjamin Franklin returned to Philadelphia from his eighth and final stint in Europe, there was an unmistakable call for clear-sighted and wise counsel. America lacked the discipline and knowing foresight of even a protective flock of winged birds.

The thirteen colonies, with French help, had withstood the might of the British Empire. The freed colonies' representatives gathered at the Constitutional Convention in the summer of 1787. At the age of 82, Franklin was twenty years older than any of the other delegates, most of whom were under forty.

Known to be among the greatest philosophers of the time, Franklin's sage and wit were admired on both sides of the Atlantic. He had been a diplomat, inventor, politician, governor, tradesman, prolific writer, abolitionist, scientist, musician, mathematician, soldier, land speculator, avid tourist, North America's first Postmaster, engineer and much more.

Franklin was at his best in working through others. At a young age he organized the Junto - an enlightened small group of tradesmen and artisans. Franklin and his colleagues were far-sighted. They helped establish a hospital, a university, America's first lending library and first Fire Company, state militia and an insurance company. He also successfully promoted the lighting, paving and policing of Philadelphia's streets.

Franklin devoted much of his life to creating a better world. He rarely coasted on auto-pilot. His scientific experiments were famous on both sides of the Atlantic. Franklin was perceptive, yet always sensible. He was most concerned with the practical, educated applications of his work. Franklin was the inventor of the lightening rod, Franklin stove, bifocals and swim fins. He designed a unique musical instrument for entertainment, which also had therapeutic benefits. He identified the concepts of electricity and coined the terms *positive*, *negative*, *conductor* and *battery* into the scientific vocabulary. He was a master of definition of all things large and small.

While **judicious** with his time, he was a **keen** judge of character, grand story teller and prankster. Franklin used his frequent sea journeys to examine the smallest of organisms, speculate on sail design and dampening storm waves, and to identify and then chart the Gulf Stream to shorten the trip across the Atlantic Ocean. To be on a journey at sea with Franklin was equally **scholarly** and entertaining. He was an always **knowledgeable** master conversationalist who delighted in a game of chess or an invigorating swim alongside a slow moving ship.

In a closing speech to the Constitutional Convention Franklin brought the **acute** wisdom of a lifetime to bear on the great question, that is, the same question posed by Alexander Hamilton in the first *Federalist* paper, "whether societies of men are really capable or not, of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend, for their political constitutions, on accident and force." Franklin believed in **reflective** choice and was both **astute** and **shrewd** in its application. His address began,

"I confess that I do not entirely approve of this Constitution at present, but Sir, I am not sure I shall ever approve it: For having lived so long, I have experienced many Instances of being oblig'd, by better Information or fuller Consideration, to change Opinions even on important Subjects, which I once thought right, but found to be otherwise."

Franklin was not much of a public speaker so he read on including the closing, "On the whole Sir, I cannot help expressing a Wish, that every member of the Convention, who may still have objections to it, would with me on this Occasion doubt a little of his own Infallibility, and make manifest our Unanimity, put his Name on this Instrument."

His **thoughtful** admonitions worked and ultimately for the general betterment of all of mankind. His was a **discerning, intelligent** formula worth noting. Admit fallibility, forgo perfection and take small steps forward whenever possible.

Edmund S. Morgan in his 2002 biography of Benjamin Franklin says, "But what won him peoples' trust and the power that accompanied it was his care to act the part of the foot soldier in campaigns in which he was in fact the commanding officer."

I believe that Benjamin Franklin would have been both **contemplative** and supportive of the concept of leveraging Sapient Definitions. He was highly **informed, experienced** and above all **insightful**. He would have also been **canny** and **clever** in the use of Roget's II Thesaurus. Maybe he would have even approved of this story and the use of **bold green text** to highlight each of the synonyms of the word sapient itself. How better to explain - not define - the usage of a word and why it was selected. Of course, he might have been **cagey** and chosen one of his various false names like Silence Dogood, Poor Richard (Saunders), Martha Careful or Benevolus to shield his identity. He certainly would not have closed this thought with a listing of all but one of the remaining unused synonyms for sapient - **astucious, foxy, philosophic, sharp** and above all just plain **smart**.

Webster's defines sapient as full of knowledge; wise; sagacious; discerning. I am a bit more **discriminating**. I just think WWBFD - What Would Benjamin Franklin Define?

Up in the sky, making the right moves in unison can quickly provide safe passage to a flock of birds. Definitions do that for mankind each and every day. Definitions are practically part of our autonomous system. They simplify to the point of invisibility. We just do not think much about them, but it is certain that Franklin would. Maybe we should too.

What signifies knowing the Names, if you know not the Natures of Things.  
-- *Poor Richard's Almanack, 1750*

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