

20 PLAYS FOR U.S. HISTORY CLASSES

Dean R. Bowman

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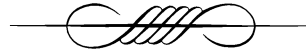
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THE JAMESTOWN ADVENTURES (1607)



Characters (in order of appearance)

English Settlers		Native Americans
AEROGANT	NEWPORT	FOURGAWN
BLUSTER	Captain John SMITH	KONKLUSHUN
KHANARTIST	Rev. Robert HUNT	Chief POWHATAN
DEFAHSIT		POCAHONTAS (chief's daughter)



John Smith

Scene 1:
Chesapeake Bay, the New World,
April 26, 1607

AEROGANT: Land! We've finally made it to the New World!

BLUSTER: I can't wait to get my hands on all that gold!

KHANARTIST: Whoa! Do you think it's just waiting there to be picked, like apples at a Safeway? The task involves getting your fat pinkies a little dirty.

DEFAHSIT: But not yours, of course. You'll sit back and watch us do all the digging and then try to swindle it all out of us. But we're not that stupid.

AEROGANT: Speak only for yourself! Now, regarding manual work—these sensitive and delicate hands have never been sullied or blistered by mundane tasks. But I am willing to employ them to garner gold.

KHANARTIST: Covered, of course, with your white "gentleman" gloves.

AEROGANT: Which can be removed to slap bad-mannered lowlifes like you with their grinning goat-feet faces!

(enter Smith and Newport)



NEWPORT: Gentlemen, gentlemen, it appears we have entered a bay. I suggest we sail up the first large river we encounter so we will be sheltered from the sea.

DEFAHSIT: Captain! We've been over five months at sea! Let's land immediately and go for the gold!

SMITH: Gold, gold, gold. That's all you've been talking about since we left England! Must I remind you of the purpose of this expedition? We are here to establish a permanent English colony. Proceed, Mr. Newport.

**Scene II:
Jamestown, Virginia, summer 1607**

KHANARTIST: This place is the absolute pits!

BLUSTER: For once you're telling the truth. No gold and not a decent FM station in reach.

AEROGANT: Nothing but blood-sucking mosquitoes.

DEFAHSIT: And heat!

BLUSTER: It's a crazy heat, too. It leaves you all wet.

AEROGANT: The proper term is "high humidity," underling.

BLUSTER: Tame your tongue, toad face, or I'll be forced to throw you into the river with your cousins!

AEROGANT: You have the unmitigated gall to compare my aristocratic countenance with an amphibian's? Yours looks like a—

(enter Smith and Hunt)

HUNT: Gentlemen, please communicate in a more sensitive and polite manner.

SMITH: What's going on here? Why aren't you men working? You seem to have all the time in the world to argue and fight, but not a minute for weeding our fields. We need those crops! Our supplies are nearly exhausted!

AEROGANT: Captain Smith! Let me remind you that we are English gentlemen, not peasants! This work is beneath our dignity.

SMITH: I don't care if it's above, below, or in-between! Your dignity won't keep you from starving in this land! Now get to work!

(all but Smith and Hunt exit)

HUNT: Captain Smith, may I suggest making another trading trip up the river? The people certainly gave us a lot for our goods.

SMITH: True, true, true. I know another trip is necessary, but I don't like it. We're rapidly running out of things to trade, and I don't think they'll honor our credit cards. This colony must become self-sufficient!

HUNT: But until then?

SMITH: We'll just have to load up the canoe and see what happens with the locals.

**Scene III:
Chief Powhatan's home, soon after**

FOURGAWN: Great Chief, in light of recent developments, I think you would concur that something must be done about these intruders from abroad, the snowfaces.

KONKLUSHUN: I wholeheartedly agree! We have become victims of their grossly unfair trade practices. We have provided them with good food and sound building materials—

FOURGAWN: In exchange for their cheap English knives and trinkets that even Mega Mall Discounts wouldn't sell!

KONKLUSHUN: Furthermore, they are indiscriminately polluting our pristine environment!

FOURGAWN: There is litter everywhere!

POWHATAN: What is your counsel, then?

KONKLUSHUN: Remove their leader, John Smith. Without him the English will certainly leave or perish.

FOURGAWN: They are all a bunch of lazy bums, except Smith.

POWHATAN: OK. Get Smith and bring him back to me. Do you think you need the Antelope Team for this job?

KONKLUSHUN: The A Team? No way—they're too sloppy for the likes of John Smith. We'll use the Bear Team.

POWHATAN: The B Team—a wise choice. That's a very clever group. Good hunting.

**Scene IV:
Jamestown, soon after**

HUNT: Mr. Newport, have you seen our Captain Smith lately?

NEWPORT: No, I haven't. He's been tied up with business for quite some time.

HUNT: What kind of business?

NEWPORT: He's been kidnapped by the locals. Chief Powhatan, it appears, has our fearless leader tied up in knots.

HUNT: What! Surely we must do something immediately!

NEWPORT: There's only one sure way to get him out alive at this point: invite his captors to a pizza potluck.

HUNT: But we've already consumed all our pepperoni, and we used our mozzarella for fish bait! We need another plan.

NEWPORT: How about this, then. We'll sneak a guitar into their camp—

HUNT: And they'll become curious, and Captain Smith will offer to demonstrate if they'll untie him—

NEWPORT: And he'll be free! Won't he?

**Scene V: Chief Powhatan's home,
three days later**

FOURGAWN: Chief Powhatan, look what the English have snuck into our compound.



KONKLUSHUN: I think it's called a guitar.

POWHATAN: Of course it is! I saw one played at a concert up North when I was in college. I wonder if John Smith can play it.

FOURGAWN: I'll go get him.

(exits and returns with Smith)

POWHATAN: John Smith, can you play this instrument?

SMITH: Ah, shucks, yeah.

POWHATAN: Excellent! Call the tribe to gather. We'll have a concert on the green forthwith! Untie Smith.

Scene VI: On the green, soon after

SMITH: Great Chief, what would you like to hear?

POWHATAN: Something natural, possibly with a forest theme; the sounds of beetles or stones rolling . . .

SMITH: Sorry, no can do—too subtle. Hard rock in the trees, yes, or the bees' sting of spring sounds—

POWHATAN: No, no, no, Smith. I'll have nothing of the sort. You are in deep, deep trouble if you cannot play what I request.

POCAHONTAS: Oh, Daddy! I love spring sting music. Please let him play.

POWHATAN: Let me think about it for a minute. Oh, all right. I'm doing this only because you're my dearest daughter. Smith, you may now

play the music like the bees' stings in spring.

POCAHONTAS: Spring sting, Daddy!

SMITH: Boorrnnn in the U.S.A. . . .

POCAHONTAS: Ohhhhh, Daddy! Isn't he the boss!

POWHATAN: The boss? Absolutely and emphatically NOT! I'm the chief around here! Now, what on earth is he singing about? I thought John Smith was an Englishman.

SMITH: Boorrnn in the U.S.A. . . .

POWHATAN: There he goes again! Enough!

POCAHONTAS: Oh, Daddy, he's only singing about us—our people! Isn't he wonderful!

POWHATAN: If you say so, my dear. I just don't understand these things.

POCAHONTAS: What about him, Daddy? Can he go free?

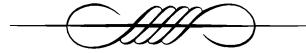
POWHATAN: Not just yet. He has to keep the concert going for awhile since there's such a large crowd. But just remember, Smith, don't try to get rich off my people with any silly T-shirt sales. And keep the encores brief. There is much work to be done tomorrow for the tribe.

SMITH: Thank you so much, Chief. Aren't you going to stay?

POWHATAN: No. I told you what style of music I enjoy. I'm going home to listen to my tapes of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*. Good night.



BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: A MAN FOR THE PEOPLE



Characters (in order of appearance)

SARAH Read, Deborah's mother

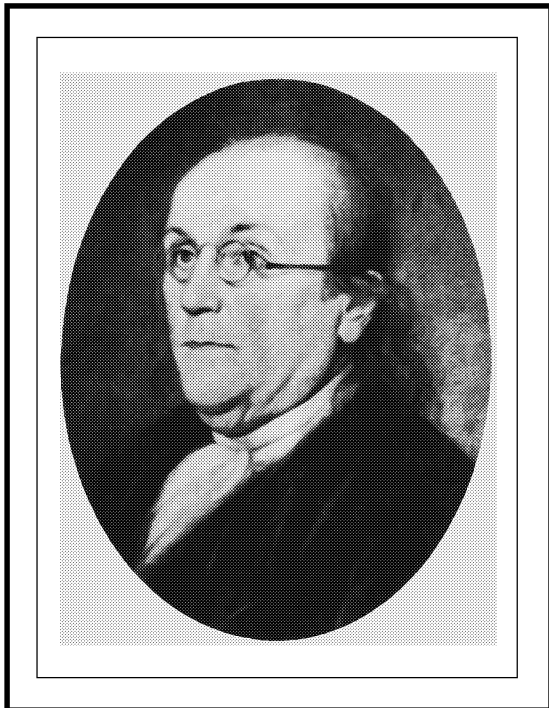
DEBORAH, Ben Franklin's wife

BEN Franklin

WILLIAM Parsons, NICHOLAS Scull, JOSEPH Breintnal, and ROBERT Grace, members of the Junto Club

THOMAS Bond, physician

BILLY Franklin, Ben and Deborah's son



Benjamin Franklin

Scene I: Market Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, autumn 1723

SARAH: Deborah! Come quickly!

DEBORAH: What is it, Mother?

SARAH: The sorriest- and funniest-looking man ever to walk the streets of Philadelphia! And he looks to be about your age. I'll bet he's a runaway servant.

DEBORAH: Maybe he's a bread vendor. He has a huge loaf under each arm.

SARAH: Now, who would buy bread from such a dirty and untidy seven-year-old? Look! His pockets are stuffed with shirts and socks. The poor boy can't even afford a sack for his clothes!

DEBORAH: Mother, I think he's coming this way.

BEN: Excuse me, ladies. Can you please point me to the printing shop of a Mr. Bradford?

DEBORAH: Do you know the streets of Philadelphia?

BEN: No. This is my first visit to your fair city.



SARAH: Where do you come from, young man?

BEN: Boston.

SARAH: By your appearance I would say you left that great city in quite a hurry. Are you a fugitive?

BEN: I am not running away from any law I've broken, only a most unjust and unfair apprenticeship contract. It would have taken four more years to complete, four more years of no wages, four more years as a subject to the tyranny and bad temper of my master.

SARAH: So you have come to Philadelphia to be free.

BEN: Yes, and to create a new life.

SARAH: Well, good luck to you, young man.

BEN: Thank you. But whether I succeed or fail here, luck and good fortune will not be the ladders I will set my feet upon. My aim is to succeed through hard work and wise planning.

DEBORAH: What is your name?

BEN: Benjamin Franklin. And yours?

DEBORAH: Miss Deborah Read. I'll show you where to find Mr. Bradford's shop.

BEN: Thank you. You have been most kind and helpful. I hope we can meet again.

**Scene II:
Franklin home, Philadelphia, 1731**

BEN: Dear wife, I'm off to the Junto Club.

DEBORAH: Can't you miss one meeting? It's so very cold tonight, and you have worked such a long, long day.

BEN: I thank you for your concern for my bodily welfare and comfort. But I do not think it proper to be absent from an organization I myself fathered.

DEBORAH: But all you seem to do with those men is talk, talk, talk.

BEN: We are devoted to a free and unbridled inquiry into truth—philosophy, science, politics—

DEBORAH: Well, to me it's still just a lot of wind blowing nowhere useful. But if you must go, you have my blessing. I know how much pleasure those meetings give you.

**Scene III: The Junto Club,
Philadelphia, soon after**

WILLIAM: Ben, glad you finally arrived.

BEN: Thank you.

NICHOLAS: If any man in Philadelphia has a good reason to be late for a meeting, it's Ben Franklin. Don't you ever stop working? When do you start your day, anyway?

BEN: Five o'clock. Early to bed, early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise!



JOSEPH: That's a catchy phrase, Ben.

BEN: Thank you. I've sort of made a hobby of collecting little pearls of wisdom, the kind anyone can understand and find worth emulating.

WILLIAM: Give us a couple more.

BEN: If you insist. The rotten apple spoils its companions. God helps them that help themselves. Never leave till tomorrow what you can do today. An empty bag cannot stand upright. A penny saved is a penny earned. Little strokes fell great oaks.

NICHOLAS: Well done, Ben. Any proverbs about the value of swimming and being a vegetarian?

BEN: Not yet. I'd rather not draw too much attention to my individual interests and habits.

NICHOLAS: Why not? You are one of the city's most successful young men. People could benefit greatly by your example. I suggest that you share your wise sayings in that newspaper of yours.

BEN: Thank you for that affirmation. Actually, I have planned on compiling these proverbs into something more permanent than a newspaper.

JOSEPH: And what might that be?

BEN: An almanac—an almanac of useful information for all our citizens, an almanac written in clear and plain English, an almanac with a good deal of humor to amuse the readers.

JOSEPH: What will you call your almanac?

BEN: *Poor Richard's Almanac.*

WILLIAM: Well, I think it's an excellent idea. There are so few good and useful books to be read in this city.

NICHOLAS: And nearly all of them have come from England at a very stiff price.

JOSEPH: Is it any wonder why the level of learning rises so slowly amongst the general population?

BEN: Gentlemen, gentlemen! There is a solution to this dilemma that will benefit all.

WILLIAM: Speak your mind, Ben.

BEN: Each of us possesses a small library. Why don't we pool all our books into one large library? We can then conveniently have an opportunity to read many more books than we can now.

NICHOLAS: Ben, you are onto something worthwhile here. All we would need to do is to set up some rules and regulations for borrowing the books. It's all so very simple.

BEN: Yes! And look how easily it could be expanded into a free public library for all the citizens of Philadelphia!

JOSEPH: Imagine what a library could do for this city! The quality of life would improve immeasurably!

BEN: Precisely! My dear wife thinks all we do here is talk, talk, talk. She has a point. I propose we use the



Junto Club to launch new ideas for improving Philadelphia.

NICHOLAS: A free public library is certainly a noble idea! But let us not forget that good ideas can be like flames—easily quenched by the waters of practical concerns. Building a library will take much more than talk amongst members of the Junto Club.

BEN: Nicholas is correct. But let's not be defeated by the challenge before us. Remember my maxim, "Little strokes fell great oaks." If we plan carefully and wisely and above all, follow through with our energies, we can bring this idea to life.

WILLIAM: What should be our first "little stroke"?

BEN: Bringing our idea to the whole community. I'll write an article about it in my next paper.

JOSEPH: That should certainly stir up some interest.

NICHOLAS: And if we can show that our Junto Library works, people will start believing a library servicing all Philadelphia can work, too.

BEN: Yes! Next meeting bring all your books here.

***Scene IV: The Junto Club,
Philadelphia, five years later (1736)***

ROBERT: It's so good to have you back with us, Ben.

NICHOLAS: Your little boy's untimely death touched us all.

JOSEPH: If only there was a safer way to prevent smallpox.

WILLIAM: Some day science will give us such a wonderful gift.

BEN: Thank you, one and all for your many acts of kindness to the Franklin family during this time of great sadness.

ROBERT: Ben, your presence here tonight is an inspiration to us all.

BEN: Again, thank you. Though I have lost a dear child, I am more resolved than ever to help improve the lives of all the children of Philadelphia.

NICHOLAS: You've done so much already. So much useful and inspiring knowledge has been spread by your newspaper and almanac.

ROBERT: And the public library has been a huge success!

BEN: Which all of you helped to bring about. Lately I have been thinking along the lines of what Joseph just said—"If only there was a safer way."

JOSEPH: Surely you don't think this club can take on the challenge of preventing smallpox. We're a collection of craftsmen and mechanics, not scientists and doctors.

BEN: Of course. I was considering something quite different: a safer way to run our city. Men, stop for a moment and think what happens when a fire breaks out in Philadelphia. Is it fought with any plan or organization?

