



## History Makers

### Ben Franklin 1706–1790

As an Enlightenment thinker, Benjamin Franklin used reason and scientific methods to improve society. At 42, he retired from business to devote his life to science and public service. He proved that lightning was a form of electricity. Then he invented the lightning rod to protect buildings. The Franklin stove and bifocal eyeglasses were also his inventions. He organized a fire department, a lending library, and a society to discuss philosophy. Later he helped draft the Declaration of Independence.

### CRITICAL THINKING

**Connect to Today** Consider how Franklin's abilities could be useful today. For example, how might Franklin solve environmental problems?



For more on Ben Franklin, go to the Research & Writing Center @ [ClassZone.com](http://ClassZone.com)

The Great Awakening inspired colonists to help others. **George Whitefield** (HWIT•feeld) drew thousands of people with his sermons and raised funds to start a home for orphans. Other ministers taught Christianity and reading to Native Americans and African Americans.

The Great Awakening helped develop American identity by encouraging a belief in spiritual equality. It also inspired religious debate, which increased religious diversity.

The movement encouraged colonists to challenge authority and question traditional religious practices. Once this had happened, it was easier to challenge other social and political traditions. In this way, the movement laid the groundwork for revolt against British authority.

**EVALUATE** Describe how religion changed society.

## The Enlightenment

**KEY QUESTION** How did the Enlightenment influence the colonists?

Unlike the Great Awakening, which explored religious emotion, the Enlightenment emphasized human reason and science as the paths to knowledge. It encouraged the belief that human beings could use rational thought to improve themselves and their society. Benjamin Franklin was a famous American Enlightenment figure. He conducted scientific experiments to discover the laws of nature.

**Belief in Progress** Writers of the Enlightenment condemned tyranny and superstition and challenged traditional social practices. They valued justice and equality and called for social and political change. Like the Great Awakening, the Enlightenment had far-reaching effects on the colonies.

The Enlightenment began in Europe, as scientists discovered natural laws governing the universe. In the colonies, at first only educated, wealthy people who could afford new books were familiar with Enlightenment ideas. But soon the values of the Enlightenment influenced the wider population.

Other Enlightenment thinkers applied the idea of natural law to human societies. The English philosopher **John Locke** challenged the belief that kings had a God-given right to rule. For many centuries, European kings had claimed that they were divinely appointed by God to rule their kingdoms. Locke challenged this idea. He also claimed that because govern-