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The Silence Dogood Letters

Benjamin Franklin (1705 - 1790)

Read by: Darcy Smittenaar and Patti Cunningham Language: English
 Length: 1 hour and 19 minutes Style: Solo
 Genre(s): Humorous Fiction

Product Formats and Options				
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During his teenage years Benjamin Franklin worked as an apprentice printer at his older brother's printing shop in Boston. The New England Courant newspaper was printed in the shop. Franklin submitted numerous pieces for publication, all of which were rejected. At age 16 he created the persona of Silence Dogood, a middle-aged widow, to write and submit letters to the editor. Every two weeks he left a letter under the door of the shop from Mrs. Dogood. The letters were intended as amusements and poked fun at aspects of life in young colonial America. They were published in the Courant and became very popular. A total of 14 letters were published in 1722. Some men even tendered marriage proposals to Mrs. Dogood upon learning of her widowhood. When his brother James discovered that the letters had been written by his younger brother, Benjamin was forced to leave his apprenticeship without permission and promptly absconded to Philadelphia.

Benjamin Franklin (January 6, 1705– April 17, 1790) was a Founding Father of the United States and in many ways was “the First American”. A world-renowned polymath, Franklin was a leading author, printer, political theorist, politician, postmaster, scientist, inventor, civic activist, statesman, and diplomat. As a scientist, he was a major figure in the history of physics for his discoveries and theories regarding electricity. As an inventor, he is known for the lightning rod, bifocals, and the Franklin stove, among other inventions. He facilitated many civic organizations, including Philadelphia's fire department and a university. Franklin's first success was as a partner in the *Pennsylvania Chronicle*, a newspaper known for its revolutionary sentiments and criticisms of British policies. He became wealthy publishing *Poor Richard's Almanack* and *The Pennsylvania Gazette*. He was the British postmaster for the colonies and set up the first national communications network. From 1785 to 1788, he served as governor of Pennsylvania.

Franklin earned the title of “The First American” for his early campaigning for colonial unity and became a national hero when he spearheaded the effort to repeal the unpopular Stamp Act. As colonial spokesman in London and then as Ambassador to France, he exemplified the emerging American nation. An accomplished diplomat, he was admired among the French as American minister to Paris. Always looking ahead, toward the end of his life he freed his own slaves and became one of the most prominent abolitionists. Franklin was foundational in defining the American ethos. In the words of historian Henry Steele Commager, “In a Franklin could be merged the virtues of Puritanism without its defects, the illumination of the Enlightenment without its heat.” To Walter Isaacson, this makes Franklin “the most accomplished American of his age and the most influential in inventing the type of society America would become.” Fittingly, Franklin has been honored on coinage and the \$100 bill. Many streets, towns, counties, educational institutions, and companies have been named after him.