

Mesmerized: How Ben Franklin Solved a Mystery that Baffled all of France

By Mara Rockliff
Illustrated by Iacopo Bruno

Ben Franklin uses practicality to get to the bottom of Mesmer's elusive tricks in this nonfiction book.

Audience

- Grades 1-5

Synopsis:

History, science, biography, mystery, and lots of rich vocabulary—this book has it all! This engaging story describes the genesis of the scientific method, as used by Ben Franklin to solve the riddle of why people in France seeking cures for various ailments were seemingly hypnotized, or “mesmerized,” by a mysterious force controlled by the enigmatic Dr. Mesmer. Rich illustrations and clever use of fonts in various shapes and sizes add to the visual appeal.

Author Website:

- <http://mararockliff.com/>

Illustrator Website:

- <http://www.iacopobruno.blogspot.com/>

Curricular Connections:

- Scientific method
- History of Science
- Biography
- Social Studies
- Vocabulary
 - Science terminology
 - Etymology
 - Foreign language vocabulary building
- Determination & Perseverance
- Problem Solving

Lesson Ideas:

- Use this title to introduce the Scientific Method.
- Research other “firsts” in scientific inquiry.
- Discuss biography and how different biographies can focus on different aspects of a famous person's life -- a reason for using a variety of sources in doing research.
- Why is Ben Franklin an example of a “Renaissance Man”?
- The Franklin Institute Museum in Philadelphia
 - Have students take a virtual field trip to The Franklin Institute Museum in Philadelphia to explore the history of science as a discipline.
<https://www.fi.edu/history-of-science-and-technology>
 - Educator Resources
<https://www.fi.edu/resources-science-learning>
- Vocabulary/rich language -- examine the use of words and phrases that may not be familiar to students-- (scientific terms, French language words, words and phrases used more commonly in the past, old-fashioned fonts and typefaces)

- Flow Chart of the Scientific Method
http://www.sciencebuddies.org/science-fair-projects/project_scientific_method.shtml#overviewofthescientificmethod
- Lesson and Mini-book on the Scientific Method
<http://binkiesandbriefcases.com/scientific-method-mini-book/>

Discussion ideas:

- Have you ever found yourself influenced by the power of suggestion?
- Is what you are feeling sometimes “all in your head”? Is there a way to test that?
- What does it mean to be mesmerized -- how is that word used today?
- What makes you mesmerized? TV watching? Playing video games?
- What other examples can you think of where scientific proof changed what people believed (the earth is round vs. flat for example)

Online Resources:

- Interview with both author and illustrator (scroll down below the review)
<http://www.shelf-awareness.com/max-issue.html?issue=138>
- Additional lesson ideas related to the following topics can be found at
<http://classroombookshelf.blogspot.com/2015/04/mesmerized-how-ben-franklin-solved.html>
 - Art history: Rococo style
 - Hoaxes and Myth-busting
 - Eponyms in Science
 - The Placebo effect
 - Medical treatments and alternatives

Common Core Anchor Standards:

- CCSS.ELA.Literacy.CCRA.R.1
Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- CCSS.ELA.Literacy.CCRA.R.4
Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- CCSS.ELA.Literacy.CCRA.R.9
Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Suggested Companion Titles:

- Books by Mara Rockliff
 - [Gingerbread for Liberty](#) (also on this year’s Black-eyed Susan Picture Book list)
 - [Mouse Math](#) (series)
 - [Get Real: What Kind of World are You Buying?](#)
 - [Me, Momma, and Big John](#)
 - [Chik Chak Shabbat](#)
 - [Anything But Ordinary Addie: The True Story of Adelaide Herrmann, Queen of Magic](#) (also illustrated by Iacopo Bruno)
- Scientific Method
 - [Mistakes that Worked](#) by Charlotte Foltz Jones

- What is Science? By Rebecca Kai Dotlich
- Extensive list of older but tried and true titles grouped by aspect of science
<http://commoncore.dadeschools.net/docs/science/Elementary%20Science/PPSFavoriteBooksK-6.pdf>
- List of 55 more recent titles group by aspect:
<http://www.whatdowedoallday.com/2014/03/science-picture-books-for-kids.html>