

Franklin and kite - A00120

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This material was adapted by Peter Schmitt from the book “Four Great Americans: Washington, Franklin, Webster, and Lincoln. A book for young Americans.” by James Baldwin. The book is now in the public domain.

The full text of the book is available through the Gutenberg Project.

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Line drawing of kite is from Microsoft clip art library as part of the Office suite.

The colored drawing of Franklin and the kite is from <http://www.fi.edu/htlc/teachers/lettieri/classroomexperimentsandactivities.html> (a page on the Franklin Institute website with resources for teachers)



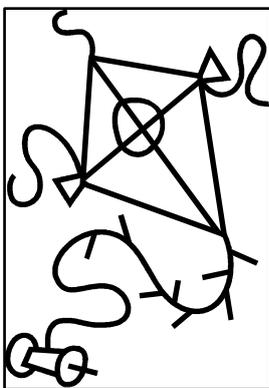
FRANKLIN'S WONDERFUL KITE

Adapted from: *Four Great Americans* by James Baldwin

Benjamin Franklin was not only a printer, politician, and statesman; he was the first scientist of America. It was his delight to study the laws of nature and try to understand some of the mysteries.

In his time the steam engine was unknown. The telegraph was unknown. Comforts which we now enjoy were deemed to be impossible.

Franklin began to make experiments in electricity when he was about forty years old. He was the first person to discover that lightning is caused by electricity. He thought that this was true, but he had no means of proving it.



At last he thought of making a kite and sending it up to the clouds. At the top of the kite he placed a pointed iron rod. The string was of hemp, except a short piece at the lower end, which was of silk. At the end of the hemp string an iron key was tied.

He told no one else about it, for if the experiment should fail, he did not care to have everybody laugh at him.

At last, one day, a thunder-storm came up, and Franklin, went out into a field to fly his kite. There was a steady breeze, and it was easy to send the kite far up towards the clouds.

The lightning flashed, the thunder rolled. The experiment was a very dangerous one.

He put his knuckles close to the key, and sparks of fire came flying to his hand. He was wild with delight. The sparks of fire were electricity; he had drawn them from the clouds.



When Franklin's discovery was made known it caused great excitement among the learned men of Europe. They could not believe it was true until some of them had proved it by similar experiments.

Franklin soon became famous in foreign countries as a philosopher and man of science. But people in America still thought of him as a great printer, and as the editor of *Poor Richard's Almanac*.

He invented the lightning-rod. And, by trying many experiments, he learned more about electricity than the world had ever known before.

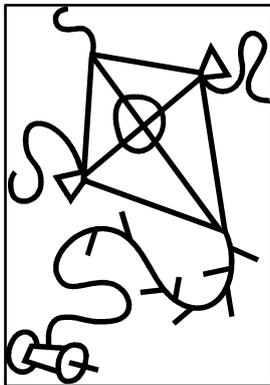
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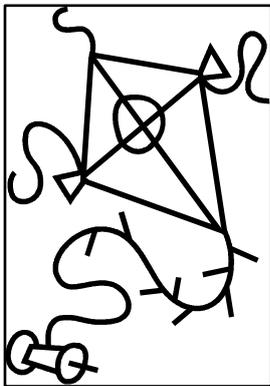
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