

# *How Ben Franklin Stole the Lightning*

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Meanwhile, over in Europe, people called Electrician had started doing some tricks of their own. One trick was to raise a boy up near the ceiling with a bunch of silk cords, rub his feet with a glass "electric tube," and make sparks shoot out of his hands and face.

But although people were doing lots of tricks with electricity, nobody had a clue about why or how it worked. So Benjamin Franklin decided to find out. He asked a British friend to send him an electric tube so that he could do some experiments. In one experiment, he made a cork "electric spider" with threads for legs. It kept leaping back and forth between a wire and an electric bulb just like it was alive.

Ben even figured out how to light up a picture of a king in a golden frame. Anyone trying to remove the king's gold paper crown was in for a shock!

Doing all these tricks gave Ben his idea for stealing lightning out of the sky. You see, Ben did not agree that being struck by lightning was a punishment for evil deeds. He believed that lightning was nothing more or less than pure electricity. Now he set out to prove it.

First he made a silk kite with a wire on top to attract some lightning. Next he added a kite string, tied a key to the bottom, and knotted a silk ribbon below the key. Ben and his son William stood out of the rain inside the doorway of a shed on the side of a field. To keep from getting shocked, Ben held on to the dry silk ribbon. Then he flew his kite straight up toward a big rain cloud. For the longest time, nothing happened.

Just as Ben and William were about to give up, the hair on that wet kite string began to rise up and stand at attention. Ben put his knuckle near the key, and YIKES!!! Out jumped a bright spark of genuine electricity!

Real lightning had traveled all the way down that kite string! Ben had stole electric fire out of the heavens and proven that he was right. Way back then lightning was always setting fire to ships, houses, and churches. So Ben decided to make his most famous invention of all – the lightning rod!

The whole idea was to pull lightning safely out of the sky before it could do any mischief. Ben showed people how to put a pointed iron rod on the tip-top of a roof or ship's mast and connect it to a wire leading all the way down under the ground into water. Now the lightning could follow a safe path without burning up a thing.

This simple but brilliant invention worked beautifully. It saved more lives than anyone can count and made Ben Franklin a great hero.

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What are the two experiments besides the kite experiment that Ben Franklin used with electricity?
2. It says "It kept leaping back and forth" (paragraph 2), why did the author use the word "leaping"?
3. Use the text to create a **diagram** of the object Ben Franklin used to attract lightning.
4. Who is William? Why did the author put him in the story?

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Based on what we know from the TEXT what do we know about Ben Franklin?