



# Benjamin Banneker: Critical Thinking & Discussion Questions

In the slide presentation on Benjamin Banneker, most of the images of him seem to look like different people. Why would nearly every image appear so different?

What is a “Quaker”? What do Quakers believe? What is the connection between Quakers and the Abolitionist movement in early America?

What does it mean to be self-taught? Do you know anyone who is a self-taught expert in a particular subject? Have you ever heard of the term “auto-didact”? What does it mean?

Do you think it would be harder or easier today to become a self-taught expert today, compared to during Colonial times? What subjects are you passionate enough about that you learn about them on your own, outside of school?

When Benjamin Banneker was relatively young, he studied the inner workings of a clock in order to build one himself. Have you ever taken apart anything in your house to try to figure out what makes it work? (Ask permission from your parents before you try this!)

Have you ever noticed old colonial markers or stone highway markers when you’ve traveled? Pay attention and you may spot some, someday.

Benjamin Banneker became successful writing a series of almanacs. Do you know of any other people during the same time period who also wrote an almanac? [Ben Franklin wrote “Poor Richard’s Almanac,” which was full of pithy sayings like: A penny saved is a penny earned and Lost time is never found again.] Are there any almanac’s still being published today? [The Farmer’s Almanac and World Almanac.]

Benjamin Banneker wrote to Thomas Jefferson to make the case against slavery. Are you surprised that Thomas Jefferson wrote back to him?

**Here is what Banneker wrote to Jefferson:** “Sir, how pitiable is it to reflect, that altho you were so fully convinced of the benevolence of the Father of mankind, and of his equal and impartial distribution of those rights and privileges which he had conferred upon them, that you should at the same time counteract his mercies, in detaining by fraud and violence so numerous a part of my brethren under groaning captivity and cruel oppression, that you should at the Same time be found guilty of that most criminal act, which you professedly detested in others, with respect to your Selves.” ***Can you restate this in simpler words?***