Close Read: Join or Die

**Objective**

After reading Benjamin Franklin’s Join or Die, what claims can you make about the unity or fragmentation of the 13 colonies prior to the French and Indian War?

**Introduction**

Prior to the French and Indian War, the 13 colonies operated much like 13 independent nations. When tension between the American / British Colonists, the French colonists, and the Native Americans began to rise in response to ownership and settlement of the Ohio River Valley, many colonial leaders advocated for unity among the 13 colonies to defend their lands. Among those colonial leaders were Benjamin Franklin - who published an editorial titled “Join or Die” in his newspaper, as well as an iconic political cartoon below it.

### Part 1 - Join or Die

1. Friday last an Express arrived here from Major Washington, that Mr. Ward of Capt. Trent’s Company (British-American Colonists), was compelled to surrender his small fort in the Ohio River Valley to the French, on the 17th….fell down from a French attack with a Fleet of 360 Battleships and Canoes, upwards of 1000 Men, and 18 Pieces of Artillery, which they planted against the Fort; and Mr. Ward having but 44 Men, and no Cannon to make a proper Defense, was obliged to surrender on Summons….

Benjamin Franklin -Join or Die May 9, 1754 Pennsylvania Gazette

1) According to the reports Benjamin Franklin has read, what advantages do the French settlers looking for land in the Ohio River Valley have over the British-American settlers?

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2) How could the information in this section of the editorial be used to motivate colonists to unite?

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### Part 2 - Join or Die

1. We hear farther, that some few of the English Traders on the Ohio escaped, but ’tis supposed the greatest Part are taken…all their Goods, and Skins, to the Amount of near 20,000 pounds….’Tis farther said, that besides the French that came down from Venango, another Body of French armymen near 400, is coming up the Ohio; and that 600 French Indians…to join them; and many more French are expected from Canada; the Design being to establish themselves, settle their Indians…..the French Indians may send out their Parties to kill and scalp the Inhabitants, and ruin the Frontier Counties.

Benjamin Franklin -Join or Die May 9, 1754 Pennsylvania Gazette
1) According to lines 1 - 2, what has happened to the English-American settlers who were able to escape the advancing French army?

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2) Benjamin Franklin suggests in lines 6 - 10 that further French military reinforcements will be arriving in the Ohio River Valley soon. How could this information motivate the colonies to unite?

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Part 3 - Join or Die

Accordingly we hear, that the Back Settlers in Virginia, are so terrify’d by the Murdering and Scalping of the Family last Winter, and the Taking of this Fort, that they begin already to abandon their Plantations, and remove to Places of more Safety. — The Confidence of the French in this Undertaking seems well-grounded on the present disunited State of the British Colonies, and the extreme Difficulty of bringing so many different Governments and Assemblies to agree in any speedy and effectual Measures for our common Defence and Security; while our Enemies have the very great Advantage of being under one Direction, with one Council, and one Purse. Hence, and from the great Distance of Britain, they presume that they may with Impunity violate the most solemn Treaties subsisting between the two Crowns, kill, seize and imprison our Traders, and confiscate their Effects at Pleasure (as they have done for several Years past) murder and scalp our Farmers, with their Wives and Children, and take an easy Possession of such Parts of the British Territory as they find most convenient for them; which if they are permitted to do, must end in the Destruction of the British Interest, Trade and Plantations in America.

Benjamin Franklin - Join or Die May 9, 1754 Pennsylvania Gazette

1) According to lines 3 - 7, what advantage do the French-American colonists have over the British-American Colonists?

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2) How does this advantage relate to the French military advantage Franklin suggested in part 1 of this editorial?

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3) Does Benjamin Franklin appeal to the emotional side of colonists? How? Cite textual evidence from parts 1, 2 and 3 to support your answer.

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Part 4 - Political Cartoon

Appearing at the end of the editorial that appears above in excerpts, Ben Franklin illustrated the following original image.

![Political cartoon - Join or Die May 9, 1754 Pennsylvania Gazette](image)

1) What do the abbreviations around the snake represent?
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2) During the 1700’s, there was a popular myth that suggested that if you put together the pieces of a dead snake that had been cut up before sundown, the pieces of the snake would magically rejoin, bringing the snake to life again. Taking this into account, why do you think Benjamin Franklin used the snake in this image?
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3) Why do you think Benjamin Franklin titled both his editorial article and this cartoon “Join or Die”? 
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**CR Analysis Task**

**Join or Die: Poster**

**Directions:** Using information from the document, you will now complete the task below.

**Task:** Using the information from the document above, and your knowledge of US History complete the following assignment:

- Create a poster advertising unity and cooperation between the colonial governments of individual colonies prior to the start of the French and Indian War.
  - Show the advantages of unity and cooperation
  - Show disadvantages of colonial governments not cooperating
  - Argue for unity and cooperation amongst the colonies

In developing your answer be sure to keep these general definitions in mind:

- **Show** means “to point out; to set forth clearly a position or idea by stating it and giving data which support it”
- **Argue** means to “give reasons or cite evidence in support of an idea, action, or theory, typically with the aim of persuading others to share one’s view”