

Teacher Guide to Student Worksheet 4-Questions on the Biographical Sketch of Priestley

1. Why did he immigrate to Pennsylvania?

Priestley's liberal religious beliefs and his political convictions made him unpopular in England (to say the least). He wrote a book called, *History of the Corruptions of Christianity*, which criticized the Church of England. He also supported the French Revolution and the abolishment of the British monarchy. An angry mob burned his home and church in Birmingham in 1791. He left for London, and in 1794, immigrated with his family to Pennsylvania in order to escape persecution.

2. Who were the influential people along his path?

Benjamin Franklin must have been one of the influential people in Priestley's migration. They met in 1760s when Priestley traveled to Pennsylvania as a provincial agent. Franklin encouraged Priestley's scientific experiments which yielded many discoveries.

3. What obstacles, if any, did he have along his journey?

His radical beliefs—and his expression of them—proved to be an obstacle. Even in America, his liberal religious beliefs were not accepted in Northumberland, and the Secretary of State Timothy Pickering wanted to deport Priestley for his political ideas.

4. Was he “pulled” or “pushed” to our country? Explain.

Priestley was “pushed” to our country. With his home burned and few available options left to him in London, he came to America a political refugee. Perhaps, however, he chose Pennsylvania as his place to settle because of its founding as “a religious experiment”.

5. What were his notable achievements? Why were they remarkable?

His scientific achievements were many:

- (1) He conducted experiments with electricity
- (2) Discovers the conductivity of graphite
- (3) Invents “soda water” (carbon dioxide in water)
- (4) Identifies the gas “oxygen” and “nitrous oxide”
- (5) Discovers the process of photosynthesis

Considering what little scientific knowledge was known during his day, Priestley's experiments show careful observation, recording, deductions, and conclusions about processes that were often not “visible” with the eye.

6. How does his life affect you today, or does it? Explain.

His experiments have added knowledge to the scientific community about life which we take for granted today. We know about oxygen and the process of photosynthesis because of Priestley's careful observation. I drink carbonated water (soda), and use an eraser (also one of his inventions). In addition, his life seems a powerful argument to be grateful for the freedoms we have in America (freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion).

7. Where in the state did he settle? Illustrate on map.

