

Mark Twain

Welcome to Part 3 of our Unit 4 study. In this lesson, we will be reading and studying two works from the icon of Western Frontier literature, Mark Twain. Please follow the below menu items and their links for all the necessary “stuff” for this lesson. Enjoy! :-)

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Biography of Mark Twain

Mark Twain was the pseudonym of Samuel Langhorne Clemens, b. Florida, Mo., Nov. 30, 1835, d. Apr. 21, 1910, who achieved worldwide fame during his lifetime as an author, lecturer, satirist, and humorist. Since his death his literary stature has further increased, with such writers as Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner declaring his works--particularly Huckleberry Finn--a major influence on 20th-century American fiction.

Twain was raised in Hannibal, Mo., on the Mississippi River. His writing career began shortly after the death of his father in 1847. Apprenticed first to a printer, he soon joined his brother Orion's Hannibal Journal, supplying copy and becoming familiar with much of the frontier humor of the time, such as George W. Harris's Sut Lovingood yarns and other works of the so-called Southwestern Humorists.

From 1853 to 1857, Twain visited and periodically worked as a printer in New York, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Cincinnati, corresponding with his brother's newspapers under various pseudonyms. After a visit to New Orleans in 1857, he learned the difficult art of steamboat piloting, an occupation that he followed until the Civil War closed the river, and that furnished the background for "Old Times on the Mississippi" (1875), later included in the expanded Life on the Mississippi (1883).

In 1861, Twain traveled by stagecoach to Carson City, Nev., with his brother Orion, who had been appointed territorial secretary. After unsuccessful attempts at silver and gold mining, he returned to writing as a correspondent for the Virginia City Territorial Enterprise. At first he signed his humorous and imaginative sketches "Josh," but early in 1863 he adopted the now-famous name Mark Twain, borrowed from the Mississippi leadsmen's call meaning "two fathoms" deep--safe water for a steamboat.

Twain went to San Francisco in 1864. Dubbed the "Wild Humorist of the Pacific Slope," he achieved a measure of national fame with his story "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" (1865). A trip to Hawaii in 1866 furnished articles for the Sacramento Union and materials for the first lecture, on his return, in a long and successful career as a public speaker. The following year he traveled to the Mediterranean and the Holy Land, providing letters to the San Francisco Alta California that, in their revised form as The Innocents Abroad (1869), won immediate international attention.

In 1870, Twain married Olivia Langdon of Elmira, N.Y. After serving briefly as editor and part-owner of the Buffalo Express, he moved to Hartford, Conn., in 1871, abandoning journalism in order to devote his full attention to serious literature. There, and during summers in Elmira, he produced *Roughing It* (1872), an account of his Western years; *The Gilded Age* (1873, with Charles Dudley Warner), a satire of get-rich-quick schemes and political chicanery; the new pieces for *Sketches, New and Old* (1875); and *Tom Sawyer* (1875), his classic tale of boyhood.

A European sojourn in 1878-79 inspired *A Tramp Abroad* (1880), soon followed by *The Prince and the Pauper* (1882), Twain's first historical novel. He later turned to history again in the allegorical satire *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), a powerful fictional indictment of political and social injustice. Meanwhile, he completed *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) and, after establishing his own firm, Charles L. Webster and Co., published his masterpiece, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, in 1884.

Increasingly involved financial problems prompted Twain to move to Europe in 1891, just after finishing *The American Claimant* (1892). In 1894, following the failure of his publishing company and of the Paige typesetting machine in which he had invested heavily, Twain was forced to declare bankruptcy. During this period he turned out a number of works, generally inferior to his best: *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894), *Tom Sawyer Abroad* (1894), *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (1896), and *Tom Sawyer, Detective* (1896). In 1895, to help recoup his losses, he embarked on a world lecture tour, later described in *Following the Equator* (1897).

Although his financial situation rapidly improved, additional stress and sorrow came with the deaths of Twain's daughter Susy in 1896 and of his wife in 1904. His writings of the late 1890s and 1900s became more pessimistic than ever; "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" (1898) and *What Is Man?* (1906) are particularly scathing examinations of human nature. Yet, these works also imply that proper understanding of human motivations can result in progress. Moreover, volumes in the Mark Twain Papers series--*Which Was the Dream?*, and *Other Symbolic Writings of the Later Years* (1967), *Mark Twain's Mysterious Stranger Manuscripts* (1969), and *Mark Twain's Fables of Man* (1972)--suggest that the period was not the wasteland described by some critics.

**Editorial Comment on
Twain's Final Years**



It's Time For



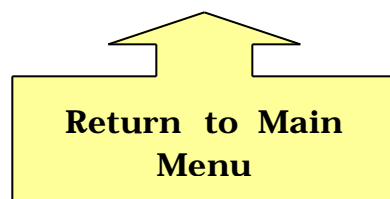
Thoughts from the Cheap Seats

It is important to notice the next to the last sentence of Twain's introduction found on page 518 in the textbook. We are told that, toward the end of Twain's life, his work "depicted an increasingly pessimistic view of society and human nature." Why is this so? We are told the answer to that question in the preceding sentence: his wife and 3 of 4 children died. I highlight this point to shed light and explanation to his later writings and quoted opinions. Twain's pessimistic view often took aim at the Christian church, and while there may be an element of truth in what he expresses, Twain was notably hostile toward Christianity and its missionaries. I say that there may be elements of truth to his opinions because Christians are indeed fallible and imperfect, and if you look closely enough, you will find fault with just about anything you wish to find fault with! Have a look at the below quotes to get an idea of what I am referring to in this regard:

My idea of our civilization is that it is a shoddy, poor thing and full of cruelties, vanities, arrogances, meannesses and hypocrisies. - Mark Twain, a Biography	Christianity will doubtless still survive in the earth ten centuries hence- stuffed and in a museum. - Notebook, 1898
If Christ were here there is one thing he would not be- a Christian. - Mark Twain's Notebook	O kind missionary, O compassionate missionary, leave China! Come home and convert these Christians. - The United States of Lyncherdom essay, 1923

It appears to me that Twain allowed the pain of losing his wife and 3 of 4 children to drive him away from the source of all healing and love, our Heavenly Father. In Twain, we see how the world responds to pain and suffering as compared to how a man of God responds to suffering. Remember Job from the Old Testament? In one day, he lost all of his sons and daughters, but he glorified God and did not sin:

The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord! In all this, Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong. Job 1: 21,22



River Boats of the Era

Frances Gies, GME

<http://www.steamboats.org/index.html>

The term steamboat usually refers to a small, shallow-draft vessel operating on inland waters and propelled by paddle wheels--as distinct from the larger, oceangoing steamship, which was also early in its history propelled by paddle wheels (see ship). The first was a vessel demonstrated in 1787 by John Fitch. In 1790, Fitch established a passenger service, between Philadelphia and Trenton; it was a technical success but a commercial failure.



For many years the steamboat maintained its supremacy on the Mississippi and on inland waters everywhere. It maneuvered easily in shallow waters, and its paddle wheels could operate equally efficiently going ahead or astern.

As steam engines became more powerful, steamboat speeds increased. In the famous race (1870) between the Robert E. Lee and the Natchez, the boats sailed from New Orleans to St. Louis in an unprecedented 3 days, 18 hours. (The steam pressures that had to be built up in order to achieve such speeds, however, often caused engine boilers to explode, and steamboat disasters were commonplace.) Most large passenger boats were side-wheelers, with two huge (12-m/40-ft) paddle wheels. Sternwheelers, with a single paddle wheel at the the vessel's stern, were often used on smaller boats or where rapids and shoals were numerous.

For almost 50 years the river steamboat was the prime mover of goods--primarily, cotton and sugar--and people in the central United States, and small river towns often grew into thriving cities when steamboats began to make regular visits to their docks. By the 1870s, however, railroads had supplanted the steamboat on most of the major routes, and the paddle wheeler eventually disappeared from U. S. waters. Ancient steamboats are still in use as ferries in some countries, and tourists on the Mississippi River can book passage on a splendidly rebuilt side-wheeler. Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), a memoir of his years as a steamboat pilot, provides a classic description of the great steamboat era.

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One-Minute



INSIGHT

With charm and wit, Mark Twain gives an insightful look into the hopes and ambitions of a boy growing up in a town along the Mississippi River. The boy dreams of becoming a steamboatman working on one of the great riverboats on the majestic river. His

desire for the opportunities and prestige the job affords, his envy of a boy who already has such a job, and the contrast he sees between the dullness of the small town and the adventures of the small town and the adventures promised on the river provide a rich bounty of humorous situations and descriptions.

Life on the Mississippi was published in 1883. Considered second only to Huckleberry Finn (1885) in literary quality, Life on the Mississippi grew out of a series of articles about Mississippi river piloting that Twain wrote for the “Atlantic Monthly” in 1875. The first half of the book tells how Twain became a pilot and relates his experiences learning about the river. The second half of the book tells about the author’s 1882 trip down the river and his visit to his home in Hannibal, Missouri.

Riverboats were to the people of the Twain’s day as live concerts, CNN, blockbuster movies, and trade shows are to us today. Riverboats brought new people, new products, national and international news, and new business to the towns along the river where they came in to port. Riverboats were “big time” and “prime time” events



Think back to your “younger days” when you had ideas about what you wanted to do and be when you grew up. What did you want to be? I wanted two things: 1) to be a fireman and 2) to be a Dallas Cowboy football player. Why, you ask? It had nothing to do with the jobs themselves, I just thought it would be cool to wear both the fireman and football helmets as part of my job! Oh, I also wanted to pump gas at “The Working Man’s Friend” gas station in Dallas, TX. I thought (as a third grader not allowed yet to pump gas into the family station wagon) that pumping gas would be a “neat thing to do.” I’m not sure when or why I left those thoughts behind me to pursue my teaching career, but I guess since I can still remember those ambitions, that I have not left them behind me completely.



What did you or do you want to be when you grow up? Why? Have you changed your mind since first thinking about these pursuits?

JOURNAL

Did you know?

The Mississippi River, 3,779 km (2,348 mi) long, is the second longest river, after the Missouri, in the United States. Its triangular drainage area, covering about 40% of the country and including all or part of 31 states, is approximately 3,250,000 sq km (1,250,000 sq mi), the third largest in the world. The Mississippi rises in Minnesota and then flows south, following the boundaries between the states of Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Arkansas, and Louisiana on the west, and Wisconsin, Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Mississippi on the east. The river, whose name means "father of waters" in the Algonquian language, has long been an important transportation artery of North America.



Now'z 'bout dat read'un...

Let's take a closer look at some of the items in this selection. Please first read through the selection from page 521-524, and then come back to this part in the lesson. Our "discussion" will make more sense if you do this. Thanks. Remember, if you are viewing this lesson in Word, then you can scroll over the highlighted "discussion" link to view what I would have said if we were all together in a physical classroom.

On page 522 in the upper left-hand corner, Twain includes pigs in his description of the lazy hazy river town. Why do you think he included the account of these pigs amid his other descriptions of the town?discussion

About ten lines down, we read that the arrival of the steamboat is announced by a Negro drayman as, "S-t-e-a-m-boat a-comin'!" How could the alternate wording, "Steamboat is coming", change the effect of the event being described?discussion

On the next page, page 523, in the first column about 10 lines down, we read that the arrival of the steamboat is also "announced" by a "husbanded grandeur" at the implied direction of the riverboat captain. A "husbanded grandeur" refers to a deliberately created effect. Pitch pine is wood from the heart of a pine tree, and it is heavily saturated with pitch making it burn quickly while emitting large amounts of black smoke. Why would the crew want to create a special effect with black smoke?discussion

Toward the bottom of page 523 first column, we read that Twain makes ordinary duties like shaking out a tablecloth and holding a rope seem important and exalted. How do these details add to the humor of this narrative?discussion

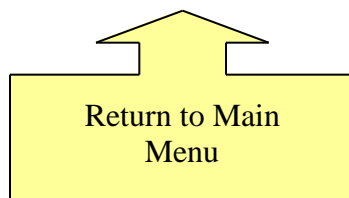
In the top right-hand corner of page 523, we read Twain's comical account of how the "worldly" and obscure boathand worked his way up to the honored and revered position of "apprentice engineer". I thought that Twain's expression, "This thing shook the bottom out of all my Sunday school teachings", was pretty funny, like all of his understanding of how God rewards and punishes people on earth had been rocked and shaken; his entire theology had gotten a kick in the teeth!

There's more humor on page 524 toward the bottom of the first paragraph... "...it seemed to us that the partiality of Providence for an undeserving reptile had reached a point where it was open to criticism." Haven't we all felt like this before about some one else? We see some one else with more and nicer "stuff" than we have, and we instantly wonder why God has "blessed" this other "inferior" person instead of blessing us who are "superior"?



Assignment 1

Your assignment is to answer the 8 questions on page 524 in the "Guide for Responding" section. Use short answers limited to one or two sentences, and when you have completed this portion of the assignment, WAIT. Do not email me your answers yet. You will need to combine your responses to your answers to the questions from our next reading, "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County". Title your document as "<name>EN300.27_Asn".



The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County

One-Minute



INSIGHT

According to one of Mark Twain's biographers, Twain first heard the story that would become this one while in the bar of a rundown tavern in Angel's camp, California. Like the storyteller in that bar, Twain's narrator, Simon Wheeler, spins a funny, improbable yarn about the exploits of a betting man. Wheeler tells his tale of dogfights and frog-jumping contests with no suspicion of humor, but with a heavy dose of colorful regional dialect.

Did you know?

Calaveras county is a real place; it is located in central California southeast of Sacramento and northeast of Modesto. It borders Tuolumne County to the east, the home of Yosemite National Park See the provided pdf file of the town's annual frog-jumping contest





The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County

D' Lesson

Humble

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"MARK TWAIN" is too well known to the public to require a formal introduction at my hands. By his story of the Frog, he scaled the heights of popularity at a single jump, and won for himself the sobriquet of The Wild Humorist of the Pacific Slope. He is also known to fame as The Moralist of the Man; and it is not unlikely that as such he will go down to posterity. It is in his secondary character, as humorist, however, rather than in the primal one of moralist, that I aim to present him in the present volume. And here a ready explanation will be found for the somewhat fragmentary character of many of these sketches; for it was necessary to snatch threads of humor wherever they could be found -- very often detaching them from serious articles and moral essays with which they were woven and entangled. Originally written for newspaper publication, many of the articles referred to events of the day, the interest of which has now passed away, and contained local allusions, which the general reader would fail to understand. Mark Twain never resorts to tricks of spelling nor rhetorical buffoonery for the purpose of provoking a laugh; the vein of his humor runs too rich and deep to make surface-gilding necessary. But there are few who can resist the quaint similes, keen satire, and hard good sense which form the staple of his writings.

written by J. P. from

http://marktwain.miningco.com/library/texts/bl_jf_advertisement.htm?pid=2734&cob=home



Now'z 'bout dat read'un...

Let's start reading the short story. Be sure to give it a good read before going further. When you have read the story, come back to the lesson for a closer look at certain items. Reading the story twice in this manner will help reinforce the story line and other details.

On page 526, in the first column of text, at the start of the second full paragraph, we see the beginning of the narrator take over the story.

On page 526, in the first column of text, about mid-way down the page, we read this:

"...He was always ready and laying for a chance; there couldn't be no solit'ry thing mentioned but that feller'd offer to bet on it, and take any side you please, as I was just telling you."

This section of the story introduces the reader to the colloquial language of the narrator. With your door shut or with no one around you, try saying this portion of the text with the heavy Western accent that this narrator obviously has. Being a native Texan, this seems like right and proper English to me! ;-)

Feel free to do the same with any other portion of the story that has a heavy dose of 'twang and slang. Like I said, you may want to make sure no one else is around.

Skipping a bit over to page 528, we find the narrator involved in recalling incidents concerning a certain frog. Look on page 528, at the first half of the column of text. How do these embellishments heighten the comical effect of this passage?discussion.

Look just below that account to the text which reads, “Why, I’ve seen him set Dan’l Webster down here on this floor-Dan’l Webster was the name of the frog-and sing out...”
What do you find to be funny or a “stretch” in this passage?discussion.

Take a look on page 528, second column of text, fifth full paragraph down. We read that Smiley is willing to bet \$40 on the frog. How much do you think that \$40 would be worth to us today? answer

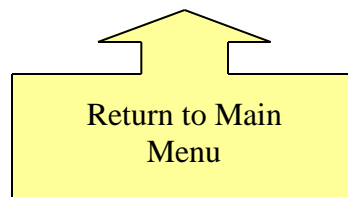
Just below this paragraph, we read the dialogue between Smiley and the stranger. Do you think that the stranger is as naive as he appears to be?discussion

Over on page 429, in the second column of text, in the first full paragraph, interpret these words of the narrator; what is he basically saying here?discussion



Assignment 2

Answer the five questions on page 529 in the “guide for understanding” section.



Websites to Mark Twain web pages

http://www.tarleton.edu/activities/pages/facultypages/schmidt/Mark_Twain.html
<http://marktwain.miningco.com/>

