

Excellence in Literature

Reading and Writing Through the Classics



Introduction to Literature

Janice Campbell

Unit 3

The rain ...falls upon the just and the unjust alike; a thing which would not happen if I were superintending the rain's affairs. No, I would rain softly and sweetly on the just, but if I caught a sample of the unjust outdoors I would drown him.

- Mark Twain, a Biography

Focus Text

A Connecticut Yankee In King Arthur's Court by Mark Twain

Honors Text

The Prince and the Pauper by Mark Twain

Unit Focus

The use of irony and framed narrative in an entertaining story format in order to vividly convey the author's viewpoint on serious issues.

Introduction

American novelist Samuel Clemens is best known by his pseudonym, Mark Twain. His tales combine humor, irony, and a keen sense of observation.

In this unit, we will read *A Connecticut Yankee In King Arthur's Court*, one of the few Twain novels in which the main action takes place outside the United States. The protagonist Hank Morgan, a Connecticut Yankee, receives a blow to the head and is transported back to the time of King Arthur, where he tries to improve medieval systems with Yankee ingenuity. Twain's satire is both funny and thought provoking.

Something to think about...

Twain wrote this novel about twenty-five years after the Civil War. What issues do you see in *Connecticut Yankee* that may be related to Twain's perception of the Civil War? Can you determine Twain's view on the issue of slavery?

Be sure to notice...

This story is told as a framed narrative, which is a story within a story. The narrative of Hank's adventures in the medieval world is framed by the story of his accident and recovery. This literary device appears in other famous classical works such as *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer. In this ancient book, the stories of the individual pilgrims are framed by the story of their journey to Canterbury. As you read, think about how this affects your perception of the central narrative.

Context Resources

The Author's Life

There are so many good books about Mark Twain that it's hard to choose just one! You may want to begin with the website, and then read the short biography of your choice.

The official website for Mark Twain contains a brief biography, photos, quotes about and by the author, as well as desktop wallpapers and screen savers you can download.
<http://www.cmgww.com/historic/twain/>

Mark Twain: America's Humorist, Dreamer, Prophet by Clinton Cox (or other short biography available at your local library)

The Courtship of Olivia Langdon and Mark Twain by Susan K. Harris

The Autobiography of Mark Twain by Mark Twain

Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain: A Biography by Justin Kaplan

Mark Twain: An Illustrated Biography by Geoffrey C. Ward

Poetry

“The Idylls of the King” by Alfred, Lord Tennyson- This epic poem was extremely popular during Mark Twain’s lifetime, and may have influenced his writing of *A Connecticut Yankee*. Read the section, “The Coming of Arthur” and any others that appeal to you. It is included in many poetry anthologies, or you can read it at:
<http://www.worldwideschool.org/library/books/lit/poetry/IdyllsoftheKing/toc.html>

Mark Twain didn’t claim to be a poet, but he did write a few poems. Be sure to read the following poems at <http://www.poemhunter.com/mark-twain/>

- “A Sweltering Day In Australia”
- “Genius”
- “Ode to Stephen Bowling Dots, Dec’d”
- “The Aged Pilot Man”
- “Those Annual Bills”
- “To Jennie”

Audio

There is some evidence to suggest that Thomas Edison recorded Mark Twain’s voice on wax cylinder. That recording is no longer available, but you may listen to interesting re-creations of some of Twain’s lectures at:

http://classiclit.about.com/od/marktwainfaqs/f/faq_mtwain_voic.htm

An audio book of *A Connecticut Yankee In King Arthur’s Court* can be downloaded free from Librivox:

<http://librivox.org/a-connecticut-yankee-in-king-arthurs-court-by-mark-twain/>

Video Resources

The Adventures of Mark Twain (1944 and 1985)

Mark Twain (2001) A television biography, directed by Ken Burns.

A Connecticut Yankee In King Arthur’s Court was filmed for television in 1989, but I’ve not been able to see it. If your library has a copy, it may be worth watching.

Visual Arts

This stock photo site has several high-quality vintage photos of Mark Twain, including one of him playing the piano for his wife, Clara Clemens and a friend, and another of him playing billiards in 1908. It's interesting to look at the backgrounds in the photos to see how he lived.

http://www.imageenvision.com/stock_photo/details/0003-0801-1723-2148/samuel_clemensmark_twain_playing_a_piano_for_his_wife_clara_clemens_and_marie_nichols

Another photo site offers a recent photo and short video clip of Mark Twain's home, plus Huck Finn clip art.

<http://www.fotosearch.com/results.asp?start=0&category=all&keyword=mark+twain&pub=all&rf=rf>

Music

Mark Twain: The Musical (1991) You may listen online to brief samples of songs from the musical:

<http://www.amazon.com/Mark-Twain-Musical-1991-Studio/dp/B00000205K>

The Raging Canal: Listen to this popular canal song of the 1800's, which inspired *The Aged Pilot Man*, a parody by Mark Twain.

http://www.traditionalmusic.co.uk/song-midis/Raging_Canal.htm

Online

Mark Twain's Mississippi offers songs about the Mississippi River from 1830-1890, as well as maps, and other resources that "try to build a larger image of what the Mississippi Valley meant to people in Mark Twain's time; how these meanings influenced his own interpretation of the place, and, finally, how his vision has fed into the many we hold today."

<http://dig.lib.niu.edu/twain/introduction.html>

<http://dig.lib.niu.edu/twain/songs/riversongs.html> (Song recordings.)

At this University of Virginia site, read a brief, interesting article on "King Arthur's Court In Mark Twain's America," and try out Twain's Memory Game.

<http://etext.virginia.edu/railton/yankee/mtcamlot.html>

Twain was ultimately quotable, and you will enjoy browsing through this site that contains some of his most memorable quotes, plus newspaper and magazine articles, as well as quirky items such as a photo of Susy Clemens' headstone, photos of other men that Twain was often mistaken for, etc.

<http://www.twainquotes.com/>

Take an interesting virtual tour of Twain's unique Hartford, Connecticut house, where he lived and worked from 1874-1891.

<http://www.marktwainhouse.org/>

Ken Burns created a film about Mark Twain, which was shown on PBS in 2002. This companion site includes an interesting, interactive scrapbook about the life of Mark Twain.

<http://www.pbs.org/marktwain/>

Unit 3 Assignment Schedule

Week 1

Begin reading focus work. Be sure to consider the questions below as you read.

What are Hank Morgan's beliefs about superstition? Think about how and why he uses superstition in the story, and what he accomplishes by doing so.

How does Hank Morgan view religion? Do you think his beliefs reflect Twain's? Why or why not?

How does Hank use his power? Does he use it for the benefit of the people or for his own glory, or a combination of the two?

There are two distinct views of knighthood in the novel. Consider these two views, and how they may reflect Twain's views of honor, especially in light of the rhetoric of the Civil War.

Morgan le Fay plays an interesting role in the novel. How does she reflect Twain's view of the evils of the age?

Follow the model in the "Formats and Models" chapter to write an Author Profile.

Week 2

Continue reading focus text and context resources.

As you read through each chapter of the novel, stop at the end and write an “In Which” title in the style of Jules Verne. You may refer to the titles in *Around the World In 80 Days* for examples. Do this for each chapter, making each title as interesting as you can, and by the end of the novel, you will have an interesting, condensed version of the story to help you as you write the essay next week.

Week 3

Finish all context resources.

Draft a 500-word essay on the following topic:

Although this book is a humorous time-travel story, Twain addresses a number of serious social issues through the Connecticut Yankee’s experiences. Consider how Hank Morgan’s story expresses Twain’s views on monarchy versus democracy, slavery and/or serfdom, or technology versus tradition. Choose one of these issues and show how Twain used Morgan’s experiences to express his views and how these views reflect the values of America during his time.

Week 4

Edit your draft, making sure that your thesis will be clear to the reader, and that your essay is well-organized, and free of mechanical errors. Use the evaluation rubric in the “Formats and Models” chapter to check your work.

About the Author



Janice Campbell is a lifelong learner, writer, and conference speaker who has enjoyed homeschooling since the late 1980's. She and her husband, Donald, have seen the benefits of home education in the lives of their four sons, each of whom has enjoyed (and benefitted from) getting a jump start on college. Janice takes joy in sharing what she has learned with others. Through her home-based business, Everyday Education, LLC, Janice offers workshops on teaching and evaluating writing, and on homeschooling (and recordkeeping) through high school and beyond.

Janice graduated cum laude from Mary Baldwin College with a B.A. in English. She is author of *Transcripts Made Easy: The Homeschooler's Guide to High School Paperwork*; *Get a Jump Start on College! A Practical Guide for Teens*; *Evaluate Writing the Easy Way!* and the five-year *Excellence in Literature* curriculum (www.high-school-literature.com). She is also Director of the National Association of Independent Writers and Editors (www.NAIWE.com), and creator of the Beat-the-Clock Essay Workshop.™ Janice blogs at www.Janice-Campbell.com, and her website, www.Everyday-Education.com, offers helpful information, resources, inspiration, and a free e-zine. Visit the website today to learn more!

