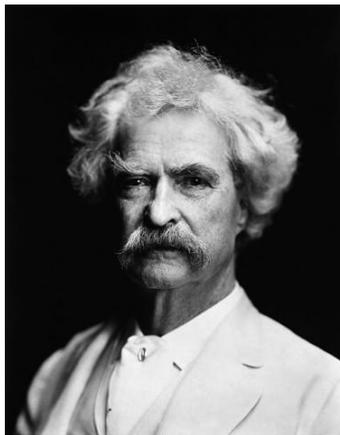


bio. CLASSROOM

BIO: Mark Twain Classroom Guide



Introduction

In 2010, people throughout the world will remember Mark Twain on the 175th anniversary of his birth. Born Samuel Langhorne Clemens on November 30th, 1835, the man who became Mark Twain captured the American spirit through his enormous volume of letters, stories and novels. A gifted and irreverent storyteller, Twain's portrayal of the young and rugged American nation captured the imagination of the world. Through his writings, insights, and engagement with politics, Twain became not only a well-known writer but a statesmen and commentator revered throughout the world.

This one hour BIO follows Twain's life from his early years in Hannibal, Missouri through his death 100 years ago, in 1910. Viewers learn how Twain's ability to create remarkable characters was made possible in many ways by his own journey; throughout his life he worked as a printer, steamboat pilot, clerk, and gold prospector. Through his travels, Twain became keenly attuned to the American idiom, and was able to channel his insights into beloved characters such as Huckleberry Finn. This program also examines the many challenges and hardships Twain faced in his personal life. Rare photographs, expert interviews and excerpts from the stories that made him a legend give students a visual companion to their explorations of Twain's life and work.

Objectives and Curriculum Links

Mark Twain: His Amazing Adventures would be useful for classes on American History, American Culture and Literature. It is appropriate for high school and college students.

Vocabulary

Using a dictionary (www.merriamwebster.com) or an encyclopedia, students may want to define or explain the significance of the following terms from this program:

- Arduous
- Conspicuous
- Incongruous
- Intrinsic
- Intuitive
- Irreverence
- Pinnacle
- Prodigal
- Profusion
- Satire
- Wanderlust

Discussion Questions

1. How do you think Twain's boyhood days in Hannibal, Missouri influenced his adult life, especially his writings?
2. How did Samuel Langhorne Clemens select Mark Twain as his pen name?
3. Unfortunately, several personal and tragic events occurred during Twain's lifetime. What were some of these events, and what impact did they have on his life, professionally and emotionally?
4. Twain lived through the U.S. Civil War. How did the war affect his life and work?
5. Name four of Mark Twain's more well-known writings. Which of his writings do you think was most significant and why?
6. The need to earn money to support his travels and lifestyle often altered Twain's life and travels. What are some examples of this, and how do you think Twain's life might have differed if he had more money?
7. What are some of the "ugly things" that Twain personally experienced or lived through during his lifetime? How did these change the way he wrote and behaved?
8. Twain is described and remembered as a "satirist." What does this phrase mean, and how is Twain an example of this style?
9. In this documentary, the narrator remarked that Mark Twain "had an understanding of life given to few men." What do you think this statement means, and do you agree with it? Discuss.
10. Mark Twain died 100 years ago. Why do you think he is still remembered as an important writer?

Extended Activities

1. **Twain in Quotes.** Mark Twain is well-known for providing pearls of wisdom and insight in his lectures and writings. Ask students to research Twain's writings and choose a quote by Twain that they find meaningful or significant. Have them write a short 1 page essay about this quote and what it reveals about Twain's life and legacy.

2. **A Novel Design.** Working in small groups, ask students to design a book jacket for one of Twain's novels. These can be created in PowerPoint format, on poster-board, or any other format they would like. Schools may want to display these projects in the classroom or hallways in honor of the anniversary of Twain's birth.
3. **Huck Finn 2010.** Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is remembered as one of the most important contributions to American literature. Ask students to create a comic book, an illustrated chapter book, or other creative interpretation of the novel. Students may want to share these projects with younger students.
4. **Twain Timelines.** Twain lived through many significant events in U.S. history, including the Civil War. In small groups, ask students to create illustrated timelines of Twain's life, charting both important events in his life and notable events going on at the same time in the U.S. and throughout the world. Students can include Twain images and quotes to enliven these presentations.

Websites

Read more about Twain on Bio.com:

<http://www.biography.com/articles/Mark-Twain-9512564>

Explore the Mark Twain papers:

<http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/MTP/notes.html>

Learn about Twain's long-awaited autobiography:

http://www.marktwainproject.org/about_absample.shtml

Visit the Mark Twain House and Museum online:

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

Books

Emerson, Everett. *Mark Twain: A Literary Life* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. *A Historical Guide to Mark* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

Powers, Ron. *Mark Twain: A Life* (Free Press, 2006)

Twain, Mark and Harriet E. Smith (ed.). *The Autobiography of Mark Twain* (University of California Press, 2010).