



The Mark Twain House & Museum

LESSON: *Traveling with Words*

Length: 40 - 50 minutes

Materials: copies of “Painting a Picture” worksheet (enclosed); Drawing/art supplies – crayons, colored pencils or paints & paper

Objectives:

- Recognize Twain’s skill at description writing and his role as a travel writer.
- Read a descriptive passage and discuss the importance of using adjectives, adverbs, metaphors, similes and vivid verbs.
- Demonstrate reading comprehension through artistic expression.



Procedure:

1. Hand out copies of the “Painting a Picture” worksheet. Read the introduction and Twain passage. Discuss the passage. What season of the year is it? How do you know? What kind of day is it? Which of the 5 senses does Twain relate to?
2. Read the follow up question. How does Twain draw a picture with words? Have students circle as many descriptive words as they can find. Review their findings.
3. Hand out the art supplies and blank paper. Ask students to try and draw a picture of the scene Twain describes. When done, have students display their artwork. Discuss how different people can interpret the same description differently. Discuss how writers use words to share their view of something.
4. Explain the process of being a travel writer – observing details, taking notes, comparing something to something else (what it is similar to or reminds you of), using adjectives and adverbs to draw a picture for the reader.
5. Practice: Have students work in groups. Assign each group an object in the room to describe without telling the rest of the class what it is. Have each group write a description of the object and then read their description to the class. Have the class guess which object they are describing.
6. Conclusion: Review the importance of description writing and the use of adjectives, adverbs, etc. Have students be prepared to view the Twain house as travel writers and think about how they would describe a room or object after their visit.

Homework Assignment:



Have students draw a picture of their room and then write a description of the room based on the picture. Or, have students bring their drawings into class, exchange their drawings with another student and then write a description of the other students’ room.



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PAINTING A PICTURE

How would you like to know what a foreign place look like without color magazines, television or the Internet? In Twain's day, these things didn't exist and black and white photographs were very expensive. So, if people wanted to learn about far away places, they had to read about them in the newspaper.

One of Mark Twain's first jobs was being a travel writer for a newspaper. He visited places like Hawaii, Europe, and the Middle East and then sent back essays describing these places in detail. Since photographs were too expensive to publish, Twain's words had to paint a picture for the reader.



See if Twain paints a good picture. In the following paragraph, Twain is traveling past Lake Champlain and he is describing the view he sees from his window on the train.

“For an hour or two we have been skirting Lake Champlain, and the landscape is too divinely beautiful for language to describe. You look miles and miles out over the frozen snow-white floor of the lake, with the dazzling sun upon it, and huge blanket-shadows of the clouds gliding over it, and here and yonder a black speck on a remote level (a sleigh), and away on the far further shore a dim and dreamy range of mountains rises gradually up and disappears in a ragged, low-hanging leaded curtain of clouds.”

Mark Twain

How does Twain draw a picture with words? He uses adjectives, adverbs, vivid verbs and metaphors. Circle all the descriptive words in the paragraph. How many can you find?

DRAW A PICTURE: Reread the paragraph. Then, use the back of this page or a separate piece of paper and try to draw what Twain described.