

# Stereotypes, Satire, and Humor

45 Minutes

English, high school

## DESIRED RESULTS

What are the “big ideas” that drive this lesson?

- Mark Twain has gained popularity for his literary humor, which he often achieved through his use of stereotypes and satire. Both of these devices generate humor through ridicule of a person or group, but while satire is intended to expose a moral folly or hypocrisy, stereotypes are most often just offensive generalizations that lack validity due to their oversimplification.
- Critics of Mark Twain have often focused on his stereotypes and the degree to which readers find them to be offensive

What are the “essential questions” that students must answer in order to understand the “big ideas”?

- What are “stereotypes” and why are they often offensive?
- What is “satire” and how is it distinct from stereotyping?

## CORE UNDERSTANDINGS

Identify what students will know and/or be able to do.

- Students will define “stereotype” and “satire” and explain the difference between the two terms, using examples from Twain literature to do so.

- Students will distinguish between stereotypes and satire that are offensive as opposed to inoffensive by using the latter type in an original story.

## LIST SUGGESTED ASSESSMENT(S)

- Students will demonstrate their mastery of the terminology in numerous summative assessments including chapter quizzes, tests, and short written responses.
- Participation in class discussions will demonstrate a student's ability to distinguish between stereotypes and satire that is offensive and inoffensive.
- Students will create their own narrative story using a inoffensive forms of satire and/or stereotypes.

## LEARNING EXPERIENCES

What are the specific activities and sequence of instruction that will be used to engage students in this lesson?

- Discuss what a "stereotype" is and how stereotypes have played a role in social conflict i.e. Jewish persecution during World War II.
- Discuss the definition of satire, asking students to provide an example of modern satire for the class i.e. *The Daily Show*.
- Begin reading aloud a sample of text from Mark Twain that satirizes the way people talk and act i.e. his characterization of Mormons in Chapter 14 in *Roughing It*; ask students to analyze through discussion how Twain utilizes satirical stereotypes to generate humor with the reader.
- Also during discussion, ask students to identify what characteristics determine if the stereotypes are humorous or offensive. Create a list of what students should keep in mind when creating their own humorous satirical piece with stereotypes.
- Allow students sufficient time to plan and write their own short satires. Teachers can either provide another class block or make this a homework assignment for students to complete the task.

## “COMMON CORE” CONNECTIONS

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

## MATERIALS AND ATTACHMENTS

- Ch. 14 in *Roughing It* about Mormon Wives (in public domain online)

## SUGGESTED EXTENSIONS TO ENHANCE STUDENT LEARNING

- Teachers can extend this lesson by collaborating with other educators in the school to develop interdisciplinary units. For instance, in a history course students can analyze the conflict among various ethnic groups or the creation of different civilizations; in the case of “Jim Crow” stereotypes, a valuable resource is the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia: <http://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/>
- Students can read their pieces aloud to one another in small groups to celebrate the writing pieces they created. Teachers may even group students based on similar populations in their stories. If stories are in danger of being offensive, teachers may want to read selections first before providing class time for this activity.