

Technology in Mark Twain's "*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*"

3-6 Days

History: High School

DESIRED RESULTS

What are the "big ideas" that drive this lesson?

Often, the course of history can change as a result of invention and technological innovation. For the cultures that produce these technological changes, they are often initially perceived as "fads" or even as "magic" without a widespread appreciation for the long term impact of them. These innovations are also sometimes resisted and condemned, but the changes occur nonetheless.

The purpose of this lesson is to demonstrate how technological changes are able to affect everyday life in many, and sometimes in unforeseen ways. Mark Twain's novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* tells the tale of how technology can impact a society, as well as how that technology can be redirected or misdirected toward motives and applications never intended by the inventor.

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

- ❖ Just because a technology or method of operation exists, is it necessary that people use it on a widespread scale? Why or why not?
- ❖ How can using a new technology or technique be used for purposes other than its original intention?
- ❖ What are some examples of innovations that have been used for different purposes than intended, and that had unforeseen results? Are there examples of this happening in American history? What are these examples?
- ❖ What safeguards have been historically used to monitor and control how innovations have been used? What safeguards and protocols can we put into place to govern and regulate how modern innovations are used?
- ❖ How do you think these innovations have already changed or have the potential to change our culture?

CORE UNDERSTANDINGS

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

Students will understand how technological items/changes in procedure may change the course of history and altered human culture.

Students will be able to discern and explain how certain inventions caused (directly or indirectly) an advance in American industry, agriculture, education, etc.

Using the modern age as context, students will be able to identify and explain how innovations in technology, medicine, education or another chosen field has changed our culture for the better or worse.

Students will be able to identify how Hank Morgan's "contributions" to Arthurian England did or did not help to improve the society according to its own standards and to his own, and substantiate their thesis in a well-developed essay.

Students will be research a technological innovation from the recent past (20-25 years) and compose a persuasive essay that evaluates how the technological change impacted the world.

SUGGESTED ASSESSMENT(S)

- ❖ Participation in classroom activities and discussions.
- ❖ Create a graphic timeline of the events that happen to Hank Morgan in the book.
- ❖ Persuasive essay that explains how Hank Morgan's "contributions" to Arthurian England did or did not help to improve the society according to its own standards and to his own.
- ❖ Creative essay that identifies one of Hank Morgan's innovations (industry, training schools, libraries, military academies, etc.) and applies it to the 21st century, explaining how it will be implemented, how it will be financed, and how it will impact the target audience.
- ❖ Persuasive essay that evaluates how the technological change impacted the world.

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

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

1. Students should first complete their reading of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. While the students are reading, have them note the many period and anachronistic technologies brought up throughout the story.

2. Once completed, tell students to imagine that they have found themselves in same situation as Hank Morgan, transported back in time. Ask them what technologies they use to gain power in the 6th century? How would they go about creating these technologies and using them to their advantage? Using either drawings or 3-D models, ask them to present one example of their works of “magic” to the class.
3. Then have groups of students create two timelines showing the technologies used by Hank Morgan in the story.

The first timeline should graphically illustrate in what order he used the items at his disposal, and the second timeline should show the historical invention date (approximate if need be) and where/by whom these things came into existence.

Make them large and full of visuals and text for display in the classroom. Once completed each group will present their timeline to the other group.

4. Have the students take one of Hank’s innovations (training schools, industrialization, etc.) and modernize it for the 21st Century. Establish a basic idea, how you would go about implementing it, how you would finance it and your target audience. Create a desktop publishing document, PowerPoint or some other presentation using words and visuals to present your idea to the class.

For the instructor: Look at the Internet suggestions (see “materials” section that follows: the teacher should post these sites for students to use). In a well-developed form of your choosing (graphic, essay, PowerPoint, etc.), show how these inventions are or are not reflected in *Connecticut Yankee* and why you think Twain chose to use these inventions in his work. Present your findings to the class.

“COMMON CORE” CONNECTIONS:

- ❖ [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2](#) Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
- ❖ [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9](#) Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

- ❖ [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3](#) Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

MATERIALS AND ATTACHMENTS

- ❖ Copies of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* by Mark Twain
- ❖ Internet starter website suggestions
- ❖ Introductory Internet Resources
 - <http://www.enchantedlearning.com/inventors/1800b.shtml> (Inventors and Inventions from 1851-1900). Accessed 7/21/2011.
 - <http://www.zyzyo.com/2011/04/19th-century-inventions-that-changed-our-world/> (Top Lists). Accessed 7/21/2011.
 - <http://www.magicdragon.com/UltimateSF/timeline1910.html#inventions> (Some Inventions and Innovations from 1890-1910). Accessed 7/24/2011.
 - <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/TwaYank.html> (The e-text version of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*). Accessed 7/24/2011.
 - http://www.marktwainhouse.org/house/floor_plans.php (Mark Twain House and Museum website, virtual tour). Accessed 7/24/2011.
- ❖ Bloom's Taxonomy
- ❖ Internet accessible computers (with printer access)

SUGGESTED LESSON EXTENSIONS TO ENHANCE STUDENT LEARNING

- ❖ In an essay have the students explain how Hank Morgan comes to power in medieval England using 19th Century innovations. Is it a peaceful change or a disruptive one? Use textual support to justify your answer.