

Using Gilded Age Hartford to Understanding Mark Twain's Literature

2-3 Weeks

High School English, History

DESIRED RESULTS:

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

Great writers reflect their own time, place, and culture in their literature, and this was especially true of Mark Twain. To appreciate his work, students must understand the historical and cultural context in which it was written. By comparing their own town or city during the same time period as that of Twain's Hartford (late 19th Century), students will gain an appreciation for the importance of contextual similarities and differences in framing an author's work and defining his motivation.

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

What were the most prominent characteristics (economic, social, political) of Hartford CT in the late 19th century, and how did they reflect the most prominent characteristics of the Gilded Age?

How are they different?

What were the most prominent characteristics of your town/city in the late 19th century, and how do they reflect the most prominent characteristics of the Gilded Age? How are they different?

How was the Gilded Age an improvement in the lives of Americans? How did it make American life less tolerable?

What is “progress” and how should it be measured?

NOTE- This assignment is preparatory for reading and understanding the degree to which the characteristics of the Gilded Age are reflected in Mark Twain's literature i.e. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (CYCAK)*, or *The Gilded Age (GA)*

CORE UNDERSTANDINGS:

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

Students will understand the meaning of the term: "progress" both in a material and moral sense

Students will appreciate how progressive Hartford was during the late 19th century, and will be able to assess the degree to which their own town/city was progressive during the same period.

SUGGESTED ASSESSMENT(S):

Each student will accurately and fully complete the graphic organizer (see attachments).

Each student will write a compare/contrast essay deemed competent according to the standards of the prescribed rubric (see attachments).

LEARNING EXPERIENCES:

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

The teacher will assign a preparatory reading from sources readily available to students in the library and/or at home that provide an overview of life in late 19th century American cities sufficient to show that the wealth and material "progress" of the

“Gilded Age” was spurred by industrialization, immigration, and technological innovation.

The teacher will begin this lesson with a discussion of the preparatory reading to elicit from the class the key factors for creating Gilded Age progress, and provide prompts for organized note-taking.

The teacher will distribute copies of Twain’s 1868 letter to the Alta California (see attachments) in which he says Hartford is the “handsomest city” he has ever seen, guide their reading of this letter, and elicit from discussion the reasons they see for why Twain found Hartford to be so attractive, i.e. beautiful streets, homes, landscaping, and people with “steady habits” who made their wealth from insurance, publishing, and machine industries.

The teacher will transition to an independent study assignment in which small student groups are tasked with creating a photo essay, perhaps using PowerPoint, that depicts a comparison of various aspects of Gilded Age Hartford and their own town/city as manufacturing, financial, and commercial centers (or perhaps agricultural centers or transportation hubs) or depicting a comparison of the cities’ leading civic, religious, and social institutions. One group will be asked to make a photo essay of Mark Twain’s Hartford home as compared to a prominent home in their own community at that time (see attachments).

Each group will present their photo essay to the whole class, allowing all students time to complete the compare and contrast graphic organizer (see attachments).

Once each student has completed the graphic organizer, they will be assigned to write a compare/contrast essay on the degree to which Hartford and their town/city typified the Gilded Age.

“COMMON CORE” CONNECTIONS:

CCSS. Literacy. SL. 9-12. 4 Present information, findings, and support evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to the purpose, audience, and range of tasks.

MATERIALS AND/OR ATTACHMENTS:

Photographs of Hartford and text from “Hartford, CT as a Manufacturing, Business and Commercial Center...” by The Hartford Board of Trade, 1889; <http://www.quinnipiac.edu/media/abl/etext/hartford/hartford.html>; an online resource sponsored by Quinnipiac University

Local library/historical society resources for period photographs and textual material

Graphic organizer

“Samual Clemens to the *Alta California*

Essay rubric

Procedure:

The teacher will also show photographs of Twain’s home from the book *Mark Twain House*, edited by Henry Darbee (1995), and

Compare and Contrast Chart Graphic Organizer

Item #1 _____	Item #2 _____
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How are they alike?

How are they different?

Comparison and Contrast Essay



	1 pts	2 pts	3 pts	4 pts
Purpose and Supporting Details	<p>1</p> <p>The paper compares or contrasts, but does not include both. There is no supporting information or support is incomplete.</p>	<p>2</p> <p>The paper compares and contrasts items clearly, but the supporting information is incomplete. The paper may include information that is not relevant to the comparison or contrast.</p>	<p>3</p> <p>The paper compares and contrasts items clearly, but the supporting information is general. The paper only includes the information relevant to the comparison and contrast.</p>	<p>4</p> <p>The paper compares and contrasts items clearly. The paper points to specific examples to illustrate the comparison and contrast. The paper includes only the information relevant to the comparison and contrast.</p>
Organization and Structure	<p>1</p> <p>Many details are not in a logical or expected order. There is little sense that the writing is organized.</p>	<p>2</p> <p>The paper breaks the information into whole-to-whole, similarities-to-differences, or point-by-point structure, but some information is in the wrong section. Some details are not in a logical or expected order, and this distracts the reader.</p>	<p>3</p> <p>The paper breaks the information into whole-to-whole, similarities-to-differences, or point-by-point structure but does not follow a consistent order when discussing the comparison and contrast.</p>	<p>4</p> <p>The paper breaks the information into whole-to-whole, similarities-to-differences, or point-by-point structure. It follows a consistent order when discussing the comparison and contrast.</p>
Transitions	<p>1</p> <p>The transitions between ideas are unclear or nonexistent.</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Some transitions work well, but connections between other ideas are fuzzy.</p>	<p>3</p> <p>The paper moves from one idea to the next, but there is little variety. The paper uses comparison and contrast transition words to show relationships between ideas.</p>	<p>4</p> <p>The paper moves smoothly from one idea to the next. The paper uses comparison and contrast transition words to show relationships between ideas. The paper uses a variety of sentence structures and transitions.</p>
Grammar and Spelling (Conventions)	<p>1</p> <p>Writer makes more than 4 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Writer makes 3-4 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Writer make 1-2 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.</p>	<p>4</p> <p>Writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.</p>
References (Sources)	<p>1</p> <p>Very few references are correctly documented and paper has 4 or more errors with the APA format, either in the paper and/or on the reference page.</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Some references are correctly documented but paper has 3-4 errors with the APA format, either in the paper and/or on the the reference page.</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Most references are correctly documented but paper has 1-2 errors with the APA format, either in the paper and/or on the reference page.</p>	<p>4</p> <p>References are correctly documented in the text of the paper and on the reference page at the end of the paper. Writer follows the APA style.</p>



Image from Norton 3rd edition of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*



MISS CHARLOTTE

Image from Norton 3rd edition of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*



“AND ASKED ME IF I LIKED HER.”

Image from Norton 3rd edition of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

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San Francisco *Alta California*, March 3, 1868

MARK TWAIN ON HIS TRAVELS.

[SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT OF THE ALTA CALIFORNIA]

The New Sensational Play -- A Glimpse of Hartford -- Sundry Connecticut Sights -- Charter Oak -- "Home Again. "

WASHINGTON, February 1st.

"The White Fawn. "

I have been to New York since I wrote last, and on the 21st of January I went with some newspapermen to see the new spectacle at Niblo's, the "White Fawn," the splendid successor of the splendid "Black Crook." Everybody agrees that it is much more magnificent than the Crook. The fairy scenes are more wonderfully dazzling and beautiful, and the legs of the young women reach higher up. Whole armies of actors appear on the stage at once, and ninety carpenters and twenty gas-men are on duty all the time. The dresses of the actors and actresses are perfectly gorgeous, and when the various colored lights fall upon them from secret places behind the scenes, the effect is almost blinding. I think these hundreds of princely costumes are changed every fifteen minutes during half the night; splendid pageants are filing about the stage constantly, yet one seems never to see the same dress twice. The final grand transformation scene is a vision of magnificence such as no man could imagine unless he had eaten a barrel of hashesh. There are such distances, too, such marvellous counterfeits of perspective. It is a luxuriant jungle of colossal flowers, stretching ever so far away -- a mass of riches coloring, burning and flashing and blazing as with the glories of a hundred suns -- and out of every flower crops a beautiful woman (apparently naked, for the most part,) and so ingeniously have these rascally angels been "sized," to perfect the perspective, that the smaller ones seem swimming high in air in the midst of a tinted mist in the distance. It is a vast wilderness, a tropic world of giant flowers and tangled vines and fairy female forms, sleeping in a flood of dazzling fires. The women seem a part and parcel of the flowers they repose among; wherever you look closely you find one, or two, or a group; the curtain falls before you have hunted out a third of them. America has not seen anything before that can equal the "White Fawn."

But the "Black Crook" gave birth to a state of things that may well be regarded as appalling. It debauched many a pure mind itself, and it has bred a species of infamous pictorial literature that will spread the same effect over a far wider field. Papers and pictures that would have been regarded as

obscene, and shunned like a pestilence a few years ago, are displayed on every bookstand, now and sell by tens and hundreds of thousands. Boys and girls can buy them when they please, and they do buy them, and so prepare to go as straight to the devil as they possibly can. I took the role of prophet for one day only, a year ago, and foreshadowed some of these results in a newspaper article. The best thing New York can do, now, and the other cities and towns of America as well, will be to go to building -- not warehouses and dwellings, but houses of ill-fame -- let them build thousands and tens of thousands of them, and the Black Crook, the White Fawn and the infernal literature they have bred will stock them all.

Hartford.

I am in Hartford, Connecticut, now, (January 25th), but I am confident I shall get this letter finished yet, if I keep at it. I think this is the best built and the handsomest town I have ever seen. They call New England the land of steady habits, and I see the evidence about me that it was not named amiss. As I came along the principal street, to-day -- smoking, of course -- I noticed that of the two hundred men in sight at one time, only two were smoking beside myself. I had to walk three blocks to find a cigar store. I saw no drinking saloons at all in the street -- but I was not looking for any. I hear no swearing here, I see no one chewing tobacco, I have found nobody drunk. What a singular country it is. At the hospitable mansion where I am a guest, I have to smoke surreptitiously when all are in bed, to save my reputation, and then draw suspicion upon the cat when the family detect the unfamiliar odor. I never was so absurdly proper in the broad light of day on my life as I have been for the last day or two. So far, I am safe; but I am sorry to say that the cat has lost caste. She has steadily decreased in popularity since I made my advent here. She has achieved a reputation for smoking, and may justly be regarded as degraded, a dishonored, a ruined cat.

They have the broadest, straightest streets in Hartford that ever led a sinner to destruction; and the dwelling houses are the amplest in size, and the shapeliest, and have the most capacious ornamental grounds about them. But I would speak of other things. This is the centre of Connecticut wealth. Hartford dollars have a place in half the great moneyed enterprises in the Union. All those Phoenix and Charter Oak Insurance Companies, whose gorgeous chromo-lithographic show-cards it has been my delight to study in far away cities, are located here. The Sharp's rifle factory is here; the great silk factory of this section is here; the heaviest subscription publication houses in the land are here; and the last, and greatest, the Colt's revolver manufactory is a Hartford institution. Some friends went with me to see the revolver establishment. It comprises a great range of tall brick buildings, and on every floor is a dense wilderness of strange iron machines that stretches away into remote distances and confusing perspectives -- a tangled forest of rods, bars, pulleys, wheels, and all the imaginable and unimaginable forms of mechanism. There are machines to cut all the various parts of a pistol, roughly, from the original steel; machines to trim them down and polish them; machines to brand and number them; machines to bore the barrels out; machines to rifle them; machines that shave them down neatly to a proper size, as deftly as one would shave a candle in a lathe; machines that do everything but shape the wooden stocks and trace the ornamental work upon the barrels. One can stumble over a bar of iron as he goes in at one end of the establishment, and find it transformed into a burnished, symmetrical, deadly "navy" as he passes out at the other. It did not seem to me that in all that world of complex machinery there were two machines alike, or designed to perform the same office. It must have required more brains to invent all those things than would serve to stock fifty Senates like ours. I took a living interest in that birth-place of six-shooters, because I had seen so many graceful specimens of their performances in the deadfalls of Washoe and California.

They showed us the new battery gun on wheels -- the Gatling gun, or rather, it is a cluster of six to ten savage tubes that carry great conical pellets of lead, with unerring accuracy, a distance of two and a

half miles. It feeds itself with cartridges, and you work it with a crank like a hand organ; you can fire it faster than four men can count. When fired rapidly, the reports blend together like the clattering of a watchman's rattle. It can be discharged four hundred times in a minute! I liked it very much, and went on grinding it as long as they could afford cartridges for the amusement -- which was not very long.

The Charter Oak.

You may have heard of the Charter Oak. It used to stand in Hartford. The Charter of the State of Connecticut was once hidden in it, at a time of great political tribulation, and this happy accident made it famous. Its memory is dearly cherished in this ancient town. Anything that is made of its wood is deeply venerated by the inhabitants, and is regarded as very precious. I went all about the town with a citizen whose ancestors came over with the Pilgrims in the Quaker City -- in the Mayflower, I should say -- and he showed me all the historic relics of Hartford. He showed me a beautiful carved chair in the Senate Chamber, where the bewigged and awfully homely old-time Governors of the Commonwealth frown from their canvasses overhead. "Made from Charter Oak," he said. I gazed upon it with inexpressible solicitude. He showed me another carved chair in the House, "Charter Oak," he said. I gazed again with interest. Then we looked at the rusty, stained and famous old Charter, and presently I turned to move away. But he solemnly drew me back and pointed to the frame. "Charter Oak," said he. I worshipped. We went down to Wadsworth's Athenaeum, and I wanted to look at the pictures, buy he conveyed me silently to a corner and pointed to a log, rudely shaped somewhat like a chair, and whispered, "Charter Oak." I exhibited the accustomed reverence. He showed me a walking stick, a needlecase, a dog-collar, a three-legged stool, a boot-jack, a diner-table, a ten-pen alley, a tooth-pick, a ----

I interrupted him and said, "Never mind -- we'll bunch the whole lumber year, and call it ----"

"Charter Oak," he said.

"Well," I said, "now let us go and see some Charter Oak, for a change."

I meant that for a joke. But how was he to know that, being a stranger? He took me around and showed me Charter Oak enough to build a plank road from here to Great Salt Lake City. It is a shame to confess it, but I did begin to get a little weary of Charter Oak, finally, and when he invited me to go home with him to tea, it filled me with a blessed sense of relief. He introduced me to his wife, and they left me alone a moment to amuse myself with their little boy. I said, in a grave, paternal way, "My son, what is your name?" And he said, "Charter Oak Johnson." This was sufficient for a sensitive nature like mine. I departed out of that mansion without another word. I said to myself, "I et whatsoever shall come of this be laid to other souls than mine. I go hence a vengeful and a desperate man. My mind is made up. I will return to N ___ Farn' again, and damn the reputation of that cat forever."

Hartford has a population of 40,000 souls, and the most of them ride in sleighs. That is a sign of prosperity, and a knowledge of how to live -- isn't it?

Home Again.

I got back to Washington this morning (January 30th,) after tarrying two or three days in New York. If find nothing going on here of particular import, except that J. Ross Browne's nomination to the Chinese Mission has been sent to the Senate by the President, and there is very little doubt that it will be confirmed. I cordially hope so, partly because he is a good man and a talented one; a literary man

and consequently entitled to high honors; and also because he has kindly invited me to take a lucrative position on his staff in case he goes to China, and I have accepted, with that promptness which so distinguishes me when I see a chance to serve my country without damaging my health by working too hard. Present engagements will keep me in the East for five or six months yet; but no matter, I shall follow him out there as soon as I am free, anyhow, if he is sent, and so none of you newspaper men need to go fighting for my secretaryship. I am the only man that can fill the bill. I am able to write a hand that will pass for Chinese in Peking or anywhere else in the world.

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