

Mark Twain: Painting Lake Tahoe with Words

3-4 days
ELL, High School

DESIRED RESULTS

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

- ❖ Using Mark Twain, one of America’s best known writers, is a great way to engage English Language Learners in literature, but also American culture. This lesson helps ELL students to observe, discuss and create descriptive works through the imagery first developed by Twain.

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

- ❖ What are the historical connections between Mark Twain and Lake Tahoe?
- ❖ How does Mark Twain use various literary techniques to paint Lake Tahoe with his words?
- ❖ What do we learn about Twain through the reading of these two chapters in *Roughing It*?
- ❖ Why do you think it was important for Twain to use the vocabulary that he did when writing a travelogue such as *Roughing It*?

CORE UNDERSTANDINGS

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

- ❖ Students will interpret the meaning of some of Twain’s famous quotes.
- ❖ Students will develop a knowledge of the physical and geographic area of Lake Tahoe.
- ❖ Students will define various literary techniques and analyze how Mark Twain used them to describe his experience in Lake Tahoe.
- ❖ Students will expand their vocabulary in regards to new terms that Mark Twain provides in his chapters.

LIST SUGGESTED ASSESSMENT(S)

- ❖ Classroom discussions about various topics throughout the lesson
- ❖ Homework Assignment: creating a chart of words that one did not know or did understand within the context of the reading.
- ❖ At the end of the unit, students are given three choices at the end of the unit project, drawing a Lake Tahoe scene, writing a descriptive paragraph

of their native hometown landscape, or do a research and presentation on another famous American lake.

- ❖ Listen to students' findings of Mark Twain's use of descriptive literary techniques in the two chapters about Lake Tahoe in *Roughing It*.

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

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

1. Period 1 – Post some famous Mark Twain quotations around the room without telling students they are by Mark Twain. Have students circulate and read each one, and copy to their notebook the one that resonates most with them. Then ask them to share what the quote means and why they choose it. Famous Mark Twain Quotes:

“Always obey your parents when they are present.”

“The lack of money is the root of all evil.”

“Man is the only animal that blushes. Or needs to.”

“Always do right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest.”

“Character is the architect of achievements.”

“A full belly is little worth where the mind is starved.”

“The man with a new idea is a crank until the idea succeeds.”

“A man cannot be comfortable without his own approval.”

“Travel is fatal to prejudice.”

“There is no sadder thing than a young pessimist, except an old optimist.”

“If you tell the truth you don't have to remember anything.”

2. Reveal to the students that those quotes belong to Mark Twain, the greatest American writer. Ask students what they already know about Mark Twain and his works.
3. Share with students a brief biography of Mark Twain, focusing on his travel to the West (the year, the reason, and his occupations).
4. When Mark Twain got to Carson City, Nevada, he and some other men under his brother's employment traveled to the famous Lake Tahoe. He devoted two chapters of his experience in Lake Tahoe in his travelogue to the West, *Roughing It*. “Three months of camp life on Lake Tahoe would restore an Egyptian mummy to his pristine vigor and give him an appetite like an alligator.” What about Lake Tahoe that make Mark Twain describe it in such way?

Introduce Lake Tahoe with some pictures. Lake Tahoe is a large freshwater lake in the Sierra Nevada range of the United States. At a surface elevation of 6,225 ft (1,897 m), it is located along the border between California and Nevada west of

Carson City. Lake Tahoe is the largest alpine lake (lakes or reservoirs at high altitudes, usually starting around 5000 feet in elevation above sea level) in North America.





5. Homework: Read *Roughing It* Chapters 22 and 23 (handout), pick twenty vocabulary words that you are not familiar with and make a word list with definition and original sentence from the text.

Word	Part of Speech	Definition	Sentence from the text	Your own sentence

1. Period 2- Have students share in groups of 2 their vocabulary list (last night's homework). What do you know about Lake Tahoe after reading the two chapters of *Roughing It*?
2. Read aloud parts in the two chapters. Some sample sentences:

“As the darkness closed down and the stars came out and spangled the great mirror with jewels.”

“The forest about us was dense and cool, the sky above us was cloudless and brilliant with sunshine, the broad lake before us was glassy and clear, or rippled and breezy, or black and storm-tossed, according to Nature’s mood.”

3. Analyze the two chapters:

In what aspects does Mark Twain describe Lake Tahoe?

The surroundings, the size, the water, the climate, the views.

What are some descriptive and literary techniques you know?

Define them.

What techniques does Mark Twain use to describe Lake Tahoe?

How does the use of these techniques enhance the readers understanding of Lake Tahoe and help them visualize the beauty of it?

Vivid adjectives, action verbs, simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, synesthesia, parallelism, and etc.

4. Have students work in groups and find more sentences in these two chapters that use descriptive techniques in describing Lake Tahoe and then visualize its beauty.
5. Share the sentences they find.
6. Homework: Read the two chapters again. Underline some of your favorite sentences and prepare to share them tomorrow. Write a sentence with each of the words on your vocabulary list.

1. Period 3- Have students share with the class their favorite sentence/s from the text and why they like it/them (last night’s homework).
2. Through the reading of these two chapters in *Roughing It*, what can we say about this writer, his writing characteristics, and his attitude toward nature?

(Note: Mark Twain’s belief and his appreciation of Nature: Caricature of God and church is often seen in Twain’s works, which made people think that Twain is a non-believer of any divine power. However, Mark Twain was not the heretical atheist he was sometimes accused of being. He believed in God, but not the orthodox God of religious tradition. He wrote in his private notebook in 1898, “The Being who to me is the real God is the One who created this majestic universe and rules it. He is the only originator, the only originator of thoughts; thoughts suggested from within, not from without. He is the only creator. He is the perfect artisan, the perfect artist.” Mark Twain

believed that to know God was to know Nature. The ways of God are the ways of Nature and can be observed in the natural world. In the introduction to *Letters from the Earth*, he affirmed his doctrine that divine law is natural law: “Natural Law is the Law of God – interchangeable names for one and the same thing.”)

3. Share with students some pictures of Lake Tahoe. Then ask students to read the text again and picture the different sceneries of the lake in their head.







4. Summary:

Why is the use of literary techniques important in descriptive writing?

How can we use them in our own writing?

What is one natural scenery that amazed you? Can you write a paragraph to describe it? How are you going to do it?

Suggested Common Core Connections:

Language: Grades 9-10

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.4 Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 9–10 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

Language: Grades 11-12

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.6 Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

NYS ESL Standard 2: Students will listen, speak, read, and write in English for literary response, enjoyment, and expression. They will develop and use skills and strategies appropriate to their level of English proficiency to listen to, read, and respond to oral, written, and electronically produced texts and performances,

relate texts and performances to their own lives and other works, and develop an understanding of the diverse social, historical, and cultural dimensions the texts and performances represent.

MATERIALS AND ATTACHMENTS

- ❖ Handouts of *Roughing It* Chapters 22 and 23
- ❖ Photograph handouts
- ❖ Paper, pencil, pen
- ❖ Quotes

SUGGESTED LESSON EXTENSIONS TO ENHANCE STUDENT LEARNING

- ❖ End of unit homework:

Pick a famous landscape of your hometown and write a paragraph to describe it. Use a minimum of five vocabulary words in your paragraph and try to use some descriptive literary techniques in your writing.

- ❖ End of unit project (pick one):

a) Pick a scene from the two chapters and draw an illustration for that scene. Then add a sentence or two of caption on your illustration.

b) Do a research on another famous American lake and make a presentation on it, including information of its geographical features and pictures.