

Language and Huckleberry Finn

2-3 days

High School Language Arts

DESIRED RESULTS:

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

- Mark Twain’s beliefs changed over time regarding the role of language in unifying society.

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

- How does the language spoken by a person affect how others perceive him or her?
- How might language perpetuate stereotypes and bigotry?
- How does language (word choice, grammar, sentence structure, etc.) shape the overall meaning of *Huckleberry Finn*?

CORE UNDERSTANDINGS:

Students will need to know

- The impact of language on racism, perception and understanding.
- How to create a rhetorical precis.
- How each character’s dialect shape the ways other characters (and the reader) perceive them.

Students will need to be able to:

- Understand how to defend their opinions with outside sources.
- Understand the political implications of language.
- Identify ways in which language shapes the meaning of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

SUGGESTED ASSESSMENTS:

- All students will earn 70% or higher on the reading quiz (short answer).
- All students will remain on task while creating their group project.
- All students will earn 70% or higher on the “Quality of Product” rubric (used to assess the group project).
- Students will participate in the Socratic Seminar by listening, questioning, and providing evidence to prove their beliefs.
- Students will achieve a score of “4” or higher on the essay.

LEARNING EXPERIENCES:

1. For homework students will read David Sewell’s article “Mark Twain’s Languages: Discourse, Dialogue, and Linguistic Variety”. Students will also bring to class outside research articles, essays, etc. for the next day’s Socratic Seminar.
2. Students will complete a Rhetorical Precis for homework.
3. In class, students will demonstrate understanding of Sewell’s article by completing a short-answer quiz.

4. In class, divide students into groups, according to learning styles (written, oral, visual, kinesthetic). Give groups the following tasks, based on learning styles:
 - Written: Adopt Mark Twain's ideas as if you are a politician. Write a campaign speech explaining how language can be used to unify society and what you will do to achieve this if elected into office.
 - Oral: Create a newscast, complete with anchors, reports, and guests that examines David Sewell's thesis and evidence (Suggestions: go out live to Sewell's home and run archive footage of Twain).
 - Visual: Create a brochure promoting the use of language to unify a society.
 - Kinesthetic: Create and perform a skit that explores Twain's beliefs regarding language, according to David Sewell (Suggestion: perform a parody of "Saturday Night Live", with Mark Twain as guest host).
5. Students will participate in a Socratic Seminar on Sewell's article, either agreeing or disagreeing and presenting evidence they found.
6. End-of-unit essay prompt: "Identify and examine Mark Twain's choice of language, including, but not limited to, the different dialects spoken by the characters in the novel. Prove how Twain uses language to develop the overall meaning of the novel".
7. Students may use the Ortiz-Davis English Facebook page to post questions and enter into dialogue with other students regarding the topic.
8. At the end of each class period, students will write on a piece of paper (exit slip) any questions they may still have.
9. Students will compare their Rhetorical Precis in class.
10. Students will determine depth of knowledge and understanding by listening to others during the Socratic Seminar.

"COMMON CORE" CONNECTIONS:

- RL. 11-12.3: Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama.
- RL. 11-12.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative language and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings, or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.
- L. 11-12.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking. Apply the understanding that usage is a matter of convention, can change over time, and is sometimes contested.
- L. 11-12.3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
- L. 11-12.5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. Interpret figures of speech (e.g. hyperbole, paradox) in context and analyze their role in the text.

SUGGESTED LESSON EXTENSION:

Compare the writings and writing style of Mark Twain with those of a significant author from the past fifty years— are there any similarities between the two? If so, what are the differences?

