

Differentiating Reality from a Hoax

Six Days
English- Middle School/High School

DESIRED RESULTS

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

- *The purpose of this unit is to sprinkle students’ with a silver dust glimpse of Mark Twain’s writing. Twains’ use of dialect, exaggeration, sarcasm, satire, irony and understatement underpin his speech and tone and will be uncovered and stressed in numerous sources throughout this lesson. Students will come to a deeper appreciation of Twain’s processes and final products through the reading of numerous sources.*

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

- *What makes Mark Twain’s stories unique and what are the characteristic and stylistic qualities of his writing?*
- *How are the stories of Mark Twain different from a typical newspaper article?*
- *How do we turn a newspaper article into a hoax? Why or to what effect would an author recreate a story into hoax?*

CORE UNDERSTANDINGS

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

- Read effectively, through repetitive readings, to determine the meaning of words and phrases, both figurative and connotative, as they are used in the text. Analyze the impact of word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings.
- Recognize the characteristics or footprints of Twain’s writing: exaggeration, irony, regional dialect, sarcasm, satire, sense of humor, slang, regional dialect, and understatement through the use of hoax.
- Identify important facts in a newspaper article which is presented in multiple entries.
- Write a hoax in the style of the author using Twain’s footprints and the newspaper article as the basis for this hoax.

LIST SUGGESTED ASSESSMENT(S)

- Informal assessment of small group-based activity.
- Student assessment of individual oral reading.
- Completion of worksheets on the hoax.
- Identification of journalistic qualities of news stories.
- Independent writing of a hoax.

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

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

- Day one: In four small groups, students will define key literary characteristics (see attachments) using any background knowledge they have and also provide an example of how it might appear in a text.
- Day two: Staying in their original four groups, students will first silently read assigned passages as follows: groups 1 and 2 read “Petrified Man” and groups 3 and 4 read “Whitewashing the Fence.” Each person in the group will then take turns reading the assigned passage aloud, experimenting with emphasis and/or timing to denote perceived nuances in the degree of literal truth in the text. Finally, the group will discuss and complete the worksheet (see attachments).
- Days three-five: Students will choose an on-going story in the news and record the facts of the story as they unfold- Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?
- Day six: Using the facts of the news story as a starting point, students will write the story as a hoax, using exaggeration, irony, satire, etc. to demonstrate the ability to differentiate a hoax from reality.

“COMMON CORE” CONNECTIONS

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.3a Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and point of view and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.3b Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.3d Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

MATERIALS AND ATTACHMENTS

- Brief explanation of “Petrified Man” piece for teachers.
- “Mark Twain’s Petrified Man” for each student.
- “Illustration of the Petrified Man from 1882 edition of Twain’s Sketches, New and Old” for each student.
- “Mark Twain’s Whitewashing the Fence Scene from *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Chapter 2” for each student.

- “Pre-Test Understanding Organizer” for each student.
- “What Makes Mark Twain’s Writing Unique?” identification sheet for each student.
- “Non-Fiction Journalistic Documentation -5W’s and How” for each student.
- “Turning Reality in a Hoax - Post-Assessment-Day Six” for each student.

SUGGESTED EXTENSIONS TO ENHANCE STUDENT LEARNING

- After the unit is complete, students can share their writing pieces with the class. They can celebrate their achievements by hearing the work of their peers as a whole class or in small groups.
- Students can also extend this unit by reading more works by Mark Twain. Can they copy any of the author’s other techniques?

Key Vocabulary:

Structural

exaggeration
hoax
fiction
irony
non-fiction
regional dialect

sarcasm
satire
sense of humor
slang
understatement
colloquial tradition

vernacular

Textual

Petrified Man

savant

inquest
crag
eminently

defunct

protracted
adamant

pensive
exposure
sacrilege

Tom Sawyer

delectable
melancholy
expeditions
melodious
laborious

reposeful
skylarking
inspiration
personally
daintily

surveyed
vigor
tranquilly
ponderously

Petrified Man



Illustration of the Petrified Man from 1882 edition of Twain's Sketches, New and Old.

The following news report appeared in the *Territorial Enterprise*, Virginia City, Nevada's leading newspaper, on October 4, 1862:

A petrified man was found some time ago in the mountains south of Gravelly Ford. Every limb and feature of the stony mummy was perfect, not even excepting the left leg, which has evidently been a wooden one during the lifetime of the owner - which lifetime, by the way, came to a close about a century ago, in the opinion of a savan who has examined the defunct. The body was in a sitting posture, and leaning against a huge mass of croppings; the attitude was pensive, the right thumb resting against the side of the nose; the left thumb partially supported the chin, the fore-finger pressing the inner corner of the left eye and drawing it partly open; the right eye was closed, and the fingers of the right hand spread apart. This strange freak of nature created a profound sensation in the vicinity, and our informant states that by request, Justice Sewell or Sowell, of Humboldt City, at once proceeded to the spot and held an inquest on the body. The verdict of the jury was that "deceased came to his death from protracted exposure," etc. The people of the neighborhood volunteered to bury the poor unfortunate, and were even anxious to do so; but it was discovered, when they attempted to remove him, that the water which had dripped upon him for ages from the crag above, had coursed down his back and deposited a limestone sediment under him which had glued him to the bed rock upon which he sat, as with a cement of adamant, and Judge S. refused to allow the charitable citizens to blast him from his position. The opinion expressed by his Honor that such a course would be little less than sacrilege, was eminently just and proper. Everybody goes to see the stone man, as many as three hundred having visited the hardened creature during the past five or six weeks.

Whitewashing the Fence- Tom Sawyer
Mark Twain - Chapter Two



*Illustration from Tom Sawyer Courtesy
The Mark Twain House, Hartford*

Saturday morning was come, and all the summer world was bright and fresh, and brimming with life. There was a song in every heart; and if the heart was young the music issued at the lips. There was cheer in every face and a spring in every step. The locust-trees were in bloom and the fragrance of the blossoms filled the air. Cardiff Hill, beyond the village and above it, was green with vegetation and it lay just far enough away to seem a Delectable Land, dreamy, reposeful, and inviting.

Tom appeared on the sidewalk with a bucket of whitewash and a long-handled brush. He surveyed the fence, and all gladness left him and a deep melancholy settled down upon his spirit. Thirty yards of board fence nine feet high. Life to him seemed hollow, and existence but a burden. Sighing, he dipped his brush and passed it along the topmost plank; repeated the operation; did it again; compared the insignificant whitewashed streak with the far-reaching continent of unwhitewashed fence, and sat down on a tree-box discouraged. Jim came skipping out at the gate with a tin pail, and singing Buffalo Gals. Bringing water from the town pump had always been hateful work in Tom's eyes, before, but now it did not strike him so. He remembered that there was company at the pump. White, mulatto, and negro boys and girls were always there waiting their turns, resting, trading playthings, quarrelling, fighting, skylarking. And he remembered that although the pump was only a hundred and fifty yards off, Jim never got back with a bucket of water under an hour – and even then somebody generally had to go after him. Tom said:

“Say, Jim, I'll fetch the water if you'll whitewash some.” Jim shook his head and said:

“Can't, Mars Tom. Ole missis, she tole me I got to go an' git dis water an' not stop foolin' roun' wid anybody. She say she spec' Mars Tom gwine to ax me to whitewash, an' so she tole me go 'long an' 'tend to my own business – she 'lowed she'd 'tend to de whitewashin'.”

“Oh, never you mind what she said, Jim. That's the way she always talks. Gimme the bucket – I

won't be gone only a a minute. She won't ever know."

"Oh, I dasn't, Mars Tom. Ole missis she'd take an' tar de head off'n me. 'Deed she would." "She! She never licks anybody – whacks 'em over the head with her thimble – and who cares for that, I'd like to know. She talks awful, but talk don't hurt – anyways it don't if she don't cry. Jim, I'll give you a marvel. I'll give you a white alley!"

Jim began to waver.

"White alley, Jim! And it's a bully taw."

"My! Dat's a mighty gay marvel, I tell you! But Mars Tom I's powerful 'fraid ole missis – " "And besides, if you will I'll show you my sore toe."

Jim was only human – this attraction was too much for him. He put down his pail, took the white alley, and bent over the toe with absorbing interest while the bandage was being unwound. In another moment he was flying down the street with his pail and a tingling rear, Tom was whitewashing with vigor, and Aunt Polly was retiring from the field with a slipper in her hand and triumph in her eye. But Tom's energy did not last. He began to think of the fun he had planned for this day, and his sorrows multiplied. Soon the free boys would come tripping along on all sorts of delicious expeditions, and they would make a world of fun of him for having to work – the very thought of it burnt him like fire. He got out his worldly wealth and examined it – bits of toys, marbles, and trash; enough to buy an exchange of work, maybe, but not half enough to buy so much as half an hour of pure freedom. So he returned his straitened means to his pocket, and gave up the idea of trying to buy the boys. At this dark and hopeless moment an inspiration burst upon him! Nothing less than a great, magnificent inspiration.

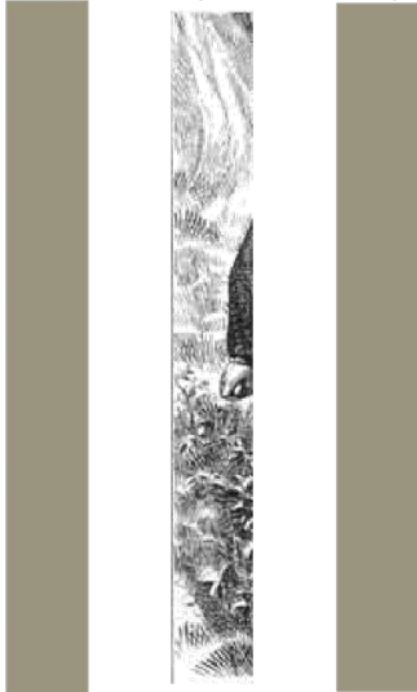


Illustration
from
Tom
Sawyer
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Court

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The
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He took up his brush and went tranquilly to work. Ben Rogers hove in sight presently – the very boy, of all boys, whose ridicule he had been dreading. Ben’s gait was the hop-skip-and-jump – proof enough that his heart was light and his anticipations high. He was eating an apple, and giving a long, melodious whoop, at intervals, followed by a deep-toned ding-dong-dong, ding-dong-dong, for he was personating a steamboat. As he drew near, he slackened speed, took the middle of the street, leaned far over to star-board and rounded to ponderously and with laborious pomp and circumstance – for he was personating the Big Missouri, and considered himself to be drawing nine feet of water. He was boat and captain and engine-bells combined, so he had to imagine himself standing on his own hurricane-deck giving the orders and executing them:

“Stop her, sir! Ting-a-ling-ling!” The headway ran almost out, and he drew up slowly toward the sidewalk.

“Ship up to back! Ting-a-ling-ling!” His arms straightened and stiffened down his sides. “Set her back on the stabboard! Ting-a-ling-ling! Chow! ch-chow-wow! Chow!” His right hand, meantime, describing stately circles – for it was representing a forty-foot wheel. “Let her go back on the labboard! Ting-a-ling-ling! Chow-ch-chow-chow!” The left hand began to describe circles.

“Stop the stabboard! Ting-a-ling-ling! Stop the labboard! Come ahead on the stabboard! Stop her! Let your outside turn over slow! Ting-a-ling-ling! Chow-ow-ow! Get out that head-line! Lively now! Come – out with your spring-line – what’re you about there! Take a turn round that stump with the bight of it! Stand by that stage, now – let her go! Done with the engines, sir! Ting-a-ling-ling! Sh’t! s’h’t! sh’t!” (trying the gauge-cocks).

Tom went on whitewashing – paid no attention to the steamboat. Ben stared a moment and then said: “Hi- yi ! You’re up a stump, ain’t you!”

No answer. Tom surveyed his last touch with the eye of an artist, then he gave his brush another gentle sweep and surveyed the result, as before. Ben ranged up alongside of him. Tom’s mouth watered for the apple, but he stuck to his work. Ben said:

“Hello, old chap, you got to work, hey?”

Tom wheeled suddenly and said:

“Why, it’s you, Ben! I warn’t noticing.”

“Say – I’m going in a-swimming, I am. Don’t you wish you could? But of course you’d druther work – wouldn’t you? Course you would!”

Tom contemplated the boy a bit, and said: “What do you call work?”

“Why, ain’t that work?”

Tom resumed his whitewashing, and answered carelessly:

“Well, maybe it is, and maybe it ain’t. All I know, is, it suits Tom

Sawyer.” “Oh come, now, you don’t mean to let on that you like it?”

The brush continued to move.

“Like it? Well, I don’t see why I oughtn’t to like it. Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?”

That put the thing in a new light. Ben stopped nibbling his apple. Tom swept his brush daintily back and forth – stepped back to note the effect – added a touch here and there – criticised the effect again – Ben watching every move and getting more and more interested, more and more absorbed. Presently he said:

“Say, Tom, let me whitewash a little.”

Tom considered, was about to consent; but he altered his mind:

“No – no – I reckon it wouldn’t hardly do, Ben. You see, Aunt Polly’s awful particular about this fence – right here on the street, you know – but if it was the back fence I wouldn’t mind and she wouldn’t. Yes, she’s awful particular about this fence; it’s got to be done very careful; I reckon there ain’t one boy in a thousand, maybe two thousand, that can do it the way it’s got to be done.”

“No – is that so? Oh come, now – lemme, just try. Only just a little – I’d let you, if you was me, Tom.”

“Ben, I’d like to, honest injun; but Aunt Polly – well, Jim wanted to do it, but she wouldn’t let him; Sid wanted to do it, and she wouldn’t let Sid. Now don’t you see how I’m fixed? If you was to tackle this fence and anything was to happen to it – ”

“Oh, shucks, I’ll be just as careful. Now lemme try. Say – I’ll give you the core of my apple.” “Well, here – No, Ben, now don’t. I’m afeard – ”

“I’ll give you all of it!”

Tom gave up the brush with reluctance in his face, but alacrity in his heart. And while the late steamer Big Missouri worked and sweated in the sun, the retired artist sat on a barrel in the shade close by, dangled his legs, munched his apple, and planned the slaughter of more innocents. There was no lack of material; boys happened along every little while; they came to jeer, but remained to whitewash. By the time Ben was fagged out, Tom had traded the next chance to Billy Fisher for a kite, in good repair; and when he played out, Johnny Miller bought in for a dead rat and a string to swing it with – and so on, and so on, hour after hour. And when the middle of the afternoon came, from being a poor poverty-stricken boy in the morning, Tom was literally rolling in wealth. He had besides the things before mentioned, twelve marbles, part of a jews-harp, a piece of blue bottle-glass to look through, a spool cannon, a key that wouldn’t unlock anything, a fragment of chalk, a glass stopper of a decanter, a tin soldier, a couple of tadpoles, six fire-crackers, a kitten with only one eye, a brass door-knob, a dog-collar – but no dog – the handle of a knife, four pieces of orange-peel, and a dilapidated old window sash.

He had had a nice, good, idle time all the while – plenty of company – and the fence had three coats of whitewash on it! If he hadn’t run out of whitewash he would have bankrupted every boy in the village.

Tom said to himself that it was not such a hollow world, after all. He had discovered a great law of human action, without knowing it – namely, that in order to make a man or a boy covet a thing, it is only necessary to make the thing difficult to attain. If he had been a great and wise philosopher, like the writer of this book, he would now have comprehended that Work consists of whatever a body is obliged to do, and that Play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do. And this would help him to understand why constructing artificial flowers or performing on a tread-mill is work, while rolling ten-pins or climbing Mont Blanc is only amusement. There are wealthy gentlemen in England who drive four-horse passenger-coaches twenty or thirty miles on

a daily line, in the summer, because the privilege costs them considerable money; but if they were offered wages for the service, that would turn it into work and then they would resign. The boy mused awhile over the substantial change which had taken place in his worldly circumstances, and then wended toward headquarters to report.

Teacher Background -*Petrified Man*

Note the position of the Petrified Man's hands. It was a fascinating little blurb. So fascinating that many other papers soon reprinted it. The only problem was that not a word of it was true. It had been written by a young man named Samuel Clemens (known later as Mark Twain), who was a recent employee of the *Territorial Enterprise*. (He had arrived in Nevada in 1861 hoping to make his fortune as a miner, but having failed at that endeavor, accepted a job at the newspaper.)

Twain later admitted that he was surprised at how many people were fooled by his story. It was his first attempt at a hoax, and when he penned it he had considered it "a string of roaring absurdities." But once he realized how well his deception had succeeded, he admitted feeling a "soothing secret satisfaction."

His intention in writing it had been two-fold. First, he wanted to poke fun at the many petrification stories that were all the rage at the time. He later wrote: "One could scarcely pick up a paper without finding in it one or two glorified discoveries of this kind. The mania was becoming a little ridiculous. I was a brand-new local editor in Virginia City, and I felt called upon to destroy this growing evil; we all have our benignant, fatherly moods at one time or another, I suppose. I chose to kill the petrification mania with a delicate, a very delicate satire."

Of course, his satire didn't exactly work, since most people failed to recognize it as satire. Indeed, he was later "stunned to see the creature I had begotten to pull down the wonder-business with, and bring derision upon it, calmly exalted to the grand chief place in the list of the genuine marvels our Nevada had produced."

His second motive was to mock a local politician, Judge Sewall, whom he considered to be a bit of a pompous fool. He explained, "I had had a temporary falling out with Mr.—, the new coroner and justice of the peace of Humboldt, and thought I might as well touch him up a little at the same time and make him ridiculous, and thus combine pleasure with business."

For months the hoax continued to spread, appearing in newspaper after newspaper around the world. According to Twain, it even graced the pages of the London *Lancet*. Twain mischievously sent Sewall copies of all the papers that it appeared in: "I think that for about eleven months, as nearly as I can remember, Mr.—'s daily mail-bag continued to be swollen by the addition of half a bushel of newspapers hailing from many climes with the Petrified Man in them, marked around with a prominent belt of ink. I sent them to him. I did it for spite, not for fun. He used to shovel them into his back yard and curse."

Twain noted that the Petrified Man article did contain one prominent clue that, for careful readers, should have identified it immediately as a farce. Note the position of the Petrified Man's hands. They're arranged in a gesture of ridicule. But the gesture was too obliquely described. Twain admitted that:

"I was too ingenious. I mixed it up rather too much; and so all that description of the attitude, as a key to the humbuggery of the article, was entirely lost, for nobody but me ever discovered and comprehended the peculiar and suggestive position of the

petrified man's hands.”

Your Understandings

Pre-Assessment - Day One

Write a definition of the following literary elements and provide an example of each as you understand it.

Ex: Metaphor is an implied comparison made between two unlike things that actually have something important in common.

"I'm a night owl, Wilson's an early bird. We're different species."

exaggeration

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irony

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sarcasm

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satire

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sense of humor

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slang

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regional dialect

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understatement

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Record of Newspaper Article Facts
Non-fiction Journalistic Documentation
Days Three - Five

Name of
article: _____

The Who

The What

The Where

The When

The Why

The How

—

—

Summarize the main idea of your story

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