

**One Outspoken Fellow:
Mark Twain**

7

Main Goals

Students can analyze historical situations in which dramatically nonconforming thought meets up with strongly held societal norms.

They understand the importance of our country’s constitutional protections for religious liberty to its free and independent thinkers.

Affective: Cultivate in students a sense that those who think “too differently” may be vulnerable and in need of legal protection.

Subgoal

To have students contemplate how someone could jeopardize or advance his or her career by writing and saying caustic and irreverent things.

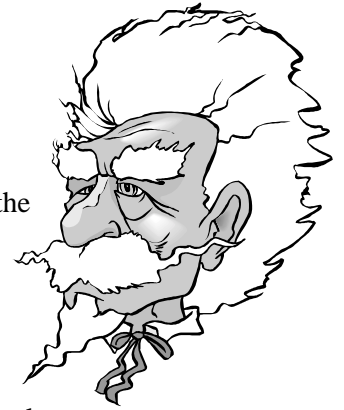
Lesson Context

Knowledge and Cultural Understanding		Skills Attainment and Social Participation	
X	<i>Historical Literacy</i>		<i>Basic Study Skills</i>
	<i>Ethical Literacy</i>		<i>Critical Thinking Skills</i>
X	<i>Cultural Literacy</i>	X	<i>Participation Skills</i>
	<i>Geographic Literacy</i>	Democratic Understanding and Civic Values	
	<i>Economic Literacy</i>	X	<i>National Identity</i>
X	<i>Sociopolitical Literacy</i>		<i>Constitutional Heritage</i>
Check the Table on page 4. Make your students have the concepts in Rows 1 and 2.		X	<i>Civic Values, Rights, and Responsibilities</i>

One Outspoken Fellow

Concept Building Objective

After study of this highly creative and nonconforming individual, the student will demonstrate that she understands that an individual's free and independent thinking may both enhance *and jeopardize* the person's position in relation to society.



Contextual Introduction

Mark Twain is considered by many to be the best American author who has ever lived. Many deem his classic work "Huckleberry Finn" the finest book ever written on American life. In some ways he was a maverick with respect to society, and in other ways he was able to use society's conventions to his professional and personal advantage. In the sense of Shakespeare, Molière, and Will Rogers, he held up a mirror to society.

Twain was an author and lecturer, and the foremost celebrity of his day. At the same time, his views were often caustic, irreverent, challenging, and totally nonconforming with popular opinion. How can a person who makes his living writing books and lecturing violate so many of the beliefs of the dominant conforming culture?

It seems as if Twain made "being a contrarian" the mark of his celebrity. People paid good money to read and hear Twain criticize their most cherished beliefs. Of course at the same time, many would not walk across the street to hear or meet the man, and would have preferred him to be struck blind, deaf, and dumb by the God he so often criticized.

Twain is perhaps America's foremost free thinker.

Materials

1. Original quotations from the writings of Mark Twain—Although Mark Twain is featured, it is appropriate to provide students with similar selected source material on other figures trying to make their life and living within the society of their times and ridiculing it all the same.
2. (Optional; to be supplied by teacher) Reference material, such as encyclopedia entry, on the life of Mark Twain, and any additional information deemed useful to enhance the goals and specific instructional objective. (For words, an aged dictionary is helpful, too.)

There is an overabundance of information on Twain. So, as a general rule, you will want to limit whatever you provide to students beyond what is included in this lesson. Use the instructional objectives as your primary guide to selecting and presenting any added information.

Strategies

Preparation: Beforehand, read over the basic elements of the "Contextual Introduction" above. Plan for any additional ideas or resources you will want to use.

1. If your class is not already studying Twain, then in your own fashion acquaint them with him, and provide a few tidbits to entice their interest in studying him further.

It will be helpful if your students are acquainted with Twain's ventures in life and also the *time frame* and *society* within which this individual lived. It will aid the lesson if students are aware of the nature of the general population, the living conditions, and so forth, so they can compare it with their own society as they interpret the man's sayings.

2. Point out the source materials available for their inspection. Assign individuals (or teams) this task: to *interpret and rewrite quotations with the purpose of trying to say Twain's idea in today's language*. [You may wish to select and group the quotations, or simply leave it to students to choose quotations of personal interest.]
3. Ask that students CREATE a written product, "Twain Talk" (or other such title), to contain their work. [One option is that they list paired (side by side) versions of the sayings—the original, along with its modern rendition. Another is to produce two booklets—one vintage, and the other suited to modern times.]
4. Students may then "speak Twain's ideas" to "an audience" using one or both of these protocols, their presentations accompanied or followed by whole class discussion.
 - *Time Comparisons*: Representative "speakers" may read aloud to the class an original quotation and its "modern translation." The class of listeners can compare the versions and analyze whether the underlying meaning *still fits modern times and whether or not it is funny*.
 - *Audience Comparisons*: Divide the class into different "audiences" to listen to what Twain has to say. Or, if steeped in study of Victorian times, the class might have fun considering an audience (a ladies' social, church meeting, men's club, etc.) to match their inclination to be either supportive or hostile to the messages of Mr. Twain.
5. Lastly, conduct a discussion to analyze how Twain's comments might go over in present society. If he were to try to say these things today: *Where would he find his most receptive audiences? What, if any, audiences would likely be unreceptive or unfriendly? Would he be able to make a living? If so, where?*

Appraisal of Understanding

1. Evidence. Each student has completed translations.
2. Assessment. Ask students to write an open response to the following:

"Mark Twain seemed to be able to say things other people didn't say. Was that good or bad for him? For his society? For us? Explain."
3. Transfer: You could identify other nonconforming thinkers from American history that fit your interest and curriculum. There needs to be sufficiency of resources to permit your pursuing similar analyses and accomplishing the same instructional objective.

Continuation Activities

1. Ask students to generate present-day examples of celebrities who make a living by what they say, and compare their situations with Twain's.
2. Use the "Celebrity Traits Analysis" Activity to involve students in characterizing the persons they identified in #1.

3. Play for students the piece, "Noah," on audiotape, by Bill Cosby. (Cosby first rendered this performance on phonograph album quite early in his career as a comedian. It had a considerable role in waking up the world to the talents of this well-known celebrity.) Conduct a class discussion related to the lesson's instructional objective.
4. Invite students to bring in examples of the "work" of people who are making their living today by criticizing some aspect of our culture (e.g., Mark Russell on TV, focusing on politics in Washington, or comic artists Garry Trudeau (politics and pop culture) or Scott Adams (business)).

Background for Teachers

SOURCE MATERIALS FOR MARK TWAIN

THINGS OTHER PEOPLE HOLD DEAR

A soiled baby, with a neglected nose, cannot be conscientiously regarded as a thing of beauty.

Answers to Correspondents (1865; published in Complete Humorous Sketches and Tales, ed. by Charles Neider, 1961). Twain was replying to a young mother.

There are several good protections against temptations but the surest is cowardice.

Following the Equator, ch. 36, "Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar" (1897). The epigram also appeared as an entry in 1898 in Twain, Notebook

Often, the less there is to justify a traditional custom, the harder it is to get rid of it.

Tom Sawyer, ch. 5 (1876).

Get your facts first, and then you can distort them as much as you please.

Quoted in: Rudyard Kipling, From Sea to Sea, Letter 37 (1899).

PRINCIPLES

I find that principles have no real force except when one is well fed.

Adam, in Extracts from Adam's Diary, "Wednesday" (1893).

Be virtuous and you will be eccentric.

Motto, in Mental Photographs (first published 1869; reproduced. in Complete Humorous Sketches and Tales, ed. by Charles Neider, 1961).

Hardly a man in the world has an opinion upon morals, politics or religion which he got otherwise than through his associations and sympathies. Broadly speaking, there are none but corn-pone opinions. And broadly speaking, Corn-Pone stands for Self-Approval. Self-approval is acquired mainly from the approval of other people. The result is Conformity.

“Corn-Pone Opinions” (1923; repr. in *What Is Man?*, ed. by Paul Baender, 1973).

What, then, is the true Gospel of consistency? Change. Who is the really consistent man? The man who changes. Since change is the law of his being, he cannot be consistent if he sticks in a rut.

“Consistency,” paper, read in Hartford, Connecticut, 1884 (published in 1923; repr. in *Complete Essays*, ed. Charles Neider, 1963).

LIFE AND HUMANITY

There was never yet an uninteresting life. Such a thing is an impossibility. Inside of the dullest exterior there is a drama, a comedy, and a tragedy.

The bos'n, in *The Refuge of the Derelicts*, ch. 4 (1905-6; published in *Fables of Man*, ed. by John S. Tuckey, 1972).

Let us consider that we are all partially insane. It will explain us to each other; it will unriddle many riddles; it will make clear and simple many things which are involved in haunting and harassing difficulties and obscurities now.

Christian Science, bk. 1, ch. 5 (1907; repr. in *What Is Man?* ed. by Paul Baender, 1973).

Familiarity breeds contempt. How accurate that is. The reason we hold truth in such respect is because we have so little opportunity to get familiar with it.

Notebook ch. 31 (ed. by Albert Bigelow Paine, 1935), entry for 1898.

Let us be grateful to Adam, our benefactor. He cut us out of the “blessing” of idleness and won for us the “curse” of labor.

Following the Equator, ch. 33, “Pudd’nhead Wilson’s New Calendar” (1897).

Nothing so needs reforming as other people’s habits.

Pudd’nhead Wilson, ch. 15, “Pudd’nhead Wilson’s Calendar” (1894).

The rule is perfect: in all matters of opinion our adversaries are insane.

Christian Science, bk. 1, ch. 5 (1907; represented in *What Is Man?*, ed. by Paul Baender, 1973).

HISTORY

The very ink in which history is written is merely fluid prejudice.

Following the Equator, ch. 69, “Pudd’nhead Wilson’s New Calendar” (1897).

The radical invents the views. When he has worn them out the conservative adopts them.

Notebook, ch. 31 (ed. by Albert Bigelow Paine, 1935), 1898 entry.

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

Following the Equator, ch. 32, “Pudd’nhead Wilson’s New Calendar” (1897).

Who is this Renaissance? Where did he come from? Who gave him permission to cram the Republic with his execrable daubs?

The Innocents Abroad, ch. 23 (1869), of sightseeing in Venice.

There isn’t a single human characteristic that can be safely labeled as “American.”

What Paul Bourget Thinks of Us (first published in North American Review, Cedar Falls, Ia., Jan. 1895; represented in Complete Essays, ed by Charles Neider, 1963).

Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example.

Pudd’nhead Wilson, ch. 1, “Pudd’nhead Wilson’s Calendar” (1894).

It isn’t safe to sit in judgment upon another person’s illusion when you are not on the inside. While you are thinking it is a dream, he may be knowing it is a planet.

“Three Thousand Years Among the Microbes,” ch. 13 (written 1905; published in Which Was the Dream?, ed. by John S. Tuckey, 1967).

Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.

Huckleberry Finn, “By Order of the Author,” “Notice” (1884).

Monarchies, aristocracies, and religions are all based upon that large defect in your race—the individual’s distrust of his neighbor, and his desire, for safety’s or comfort’s sake, to stand well in his neighbor’s eye. These institutions will always remain, and always flourish, and always oppress you, affront you, and degrade you, because you will always be and remain slaves of minorities. There was never a country where the majority of the people were in their secret hearts loyal to any of these institutions.

Satan, in “The Mysterious Stranger,” ch. 9 (1916; repr. in The Complete Short Stories, ed. by Charles Neider, 1957).

RELIGION

I cannot see how a man of any large degree of humorous perception can ever be religious—except he purposely shut the eyes of his mind and keep them shut by force.

Mark Twain’s Notebooks and Journals, vol. 3, (ed. by Frederick Anderson, 1979), Notebook 27 (Aug. 1887–July 1888).

It is a good and gentle religion, but inconvenient.

Following the Equator, ch. 49 (1897), of Hinduism.

No God and no religion can survive ridicule. No political church, no nobility, no royalty or other fraud, can face ridicule in a fair field, and live.

Mark Twain's Notebooks and Journals, vol. 3 (ed. by Frederick Anderson, 1979), Notebook 28 (July 1888–May 1889).

O Lord our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of the guns with the shrieks of their wounded, writhing in pain; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows with unavailing grief . . . for our sakes who adore Thee, Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives, protract their bitter pilgrimage, make heavy their steps, water their way with their tears, stain the white snow with the blood of their wounded feet! We ask it, in the spirit of love, of Him Who is the Source of Love, and Who is the ever-faithful refuge and friend of all that are sore beset and seek His aid with humble and contrite hearts. Amen.

The aged stranger, claiming to be God's messenger verbalizing a congregation's unspoken prayer, in The War Prayer (dictated 1904–5; published in Complete Essays of Mark Twain, ed. by Charles Neider, 1963).

There is no God, no universe, no human race, no earthly life, no heaven, no hell. It is all a dream, a grotesque and foolish dream. Nothing exists but you. And you are but a thought—a vagrant thought, a useless thought, a homeless thought, wandering forlorn among the empty eternities!

Satan's last words to Theodor Fischer, in "The Mysterious Stranger," ch. 11 (1916; repr. in The Complete Short Stories, ed. by Charles Neider, 1957).

True irreverence is disrespect for another man's god.

Following the Equator, ch. 53, "Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar" (1897).

We may not pay Satan reverence, for that would be indiscreet, but we can at least respect his talents. A person who has for untold centuries maintained the imposing position of spiritual head of four-fifths of the human race, and political head of the whole of it, must be granted the possession of executive abilities of the loftiest order.

"Concerning the Jews," in Harper's (New York, Sept. 1899; repr. in Complete Essays, ed. by Charles Neider, 1963).

INDECISION AND BELIEF

It was the schoolboy who said, "Faith is believing what you know ain't so."

Following the Equator, ch. 12, "Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar" (1897).

To be good is noble, but to teach others how to be good is nobler—and no trouble.

Following the Equator, flyleaf of first edition (1897).

Let me make the superstitions of a nation and I care not who makes its laws or its songs either.

Following the Equator, ch. 51, "Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar" (1897).

Why was the human race created? Or at least why wasn't something creditable created in place of it? God had His opportunity. He could have made a reputation. But no, He must commit this grotesque folly—a lark which must have cost Him a regret or two when He came to think it over and observe effects.

Letter, 25 Jan. 1900, to W. D. Howells (published in *The Twain-Howells Letters*, vol. 2, ed. by Henry Nash Smith and William M. Gibson, 1960).

There was never a century nor a country that was short of experts who knew the Deity's mind and were willing to reveal it.

"As Concerns Interpreting the Deity" (1905; repr. in *What Is Man?*, ed. by Paul Baender, 1973)