Mark Twain Essay, Research Paper

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Mark Twain, Samuel Clemens, or None of the Above?

Mark Twain was one of the most popular and well-known authors of the 1800?s. He is recognized for being a humorist. He used humor or social satire in his best works. His writing is known for ?realism of place and language, memorable characters, and hatred of hypocrisy and oppression? (Mark Twain 1).

Mark Twain was born Samuel Langhorne Clemens on November 30, 1835. He was born on the Missouri frontier in a small log village called Florida. His parents had come to Florida from their former home in Tennessee (Unger 192). When Clemens was four, he moved with his family to Hannibal, Missouri, a port on the Mississippi River (Mark Twain 1). His father, who had studied law in Kentucky, was a local magistrate and small merchant (Unger 193). When Samuel was twelve, his father died. He was then apprenticed to two local printers (Unger 193). When he was sixteen, Clemens began setting type for the local newspaper Hannibal Journal, which his older brother Orion managed (Mark Twain 1).

In 1853, when Samuel was eighteen, he left Hannibal for St. Louis (Unger 194). There he became a steam boat pilot on the Mississippi River. Clemens piloted steamboats until the Civil War in 1861. Then he served briefly with the Confederate army (Mark Twain 1). In 1862 Clemens became a reporter on the Territorial Enterprise in Virginia City, Nevada. In 1863 he began signing his articles with the pseudonym Mark Twain, a Mississippi River phrase meaning ?two fathoms deep? (Bloom 43).

In 1865, Twain reworked a tale he had heard in the California gold fields, and within months the author and the story, The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County, had become national sensations (Bloom 47). In 1867 Twain lectured in New York City, and in the same year he visited Europe and Palestine. He wrote of these travels in The Innocents Abroad. This book exaggerated those aspects of European culture that impress American tourists (Bain, Flora, and Rubin 103). Many claim that The Innocents Abroad is Mark Twain?s second-best book (Unger 198).

In 1870 he married Olivia Langdon. After living briefly in Buffalo, New York, the couple moved to Hartford, Connecticut (Bain, Flora, and Rubin 104). Much of Mark Twain?s best work was written in the 1870?s and 1880?s in Hartford and during the summers at Quarry Farm, near Elmira, New York (Bain Flora and Rubin 104). It was at Quarry Farm that he wrote Roughing It in 1872, which recounts his early adventures as a miner and journalist.

While vacationing in New York one summer in 1876 he wrote his most famous story of all. Mark Twain wrote The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (Bloom 50). It is about Tom Sawyer, who is a twelve-year-old boy who lives on the Mississippi River. He is mischievous, adventurous, and humorous. Tom is loved by readers around the world. The Adventures of Tom Sawyer brought Twain to the top of the best-seller?s list, where he remained for eight weeks (Unger 199). Mark Twain once said that he liked Tom Sawyer because ?Tom represented everything that he had loved as a boy, and because if the world thought like Tom Sawyer, everyone would forget about their troubles and become happier people? (Kunitz 355).

Twain wrote the sequel to The Adventures of Tom Sawyer in 1884. The sequel, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is considered by many to be Twain?s masterpiece (Mark Twain 1). The book is the story of Tom Sawyer?s best friend, Huck. He flees his father, the town drunk, by raft down the Mississippi River with a runaway slave, Jim. The pair?s adventures show Huck and the reader the cruelty of which men and women are capable. Another theme of the novel is the conflict between Huck?s feelings of friendship with Jim, who is one of the few people he can trust, and his knowledge that he is breaking the laws of the time by helping Jim escape (Mark Twain 2). The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, which is almost entirely narrated from Huck?s point of view, is noted for its authentic language and for its deep commitment to freedom (Marshall 232).

In 1884, Twain formed the firm ?Charles L. Webster and Company? to publish his and other writer?s works. The most famous books published there were The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and Personal Memoirs, which was written by American general and president Ulysses S. Grant (Mark Twain 2). A disastrous investment in an automatic typesetting machine led to the firm?s bankruptcy in 1894. A successful worldwide lecture tour and the book he wrote in 1897 based on those travels, Following the Equator, paid off Twain?s debts.

In Mark Twain?s later years he wrote less, but he became a celebrity, frequently speaking out on public issues. He also came to be known for the white linen suit that he always wore when making public appearances (Unger 204). Twain received an honorary doctorate from the University of Oxford in 1907. He died in 1910, at the age of 75. When Twain died, he left an uncompleted autobiography, which was eventually edited by his secretary, Albert Bigelow Paine, and published in 1924 (Mark Twain 2). Mark Twain is still credited as being a major influence by most writers today. His work is still popular and will live on for many years.

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