

## **Concept: Interpreting Literature through Conventions of Language & Vocabulary**

Mark Twain Teachers Workshop – Mark Twain Museum

July, 2008 – Hannibal, Missouri

Developed by: Pickett Lema, Pattonville School District, Missouri

**Titles of Works:** Components for use with *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

**Grade Level:** Middle School/High School

**Time Frame:** Approximately 4 class periods (can be abbreviated or extended)

**Objectives:** (Big Ideas/Essential Questions)

Big Idea: Variations (dialect or slang) on Standard English can support meaning in Literature.

Essential Question: How does Mark Twain use Non-Standard English (Grammar/Usage & Vocabulary) to craft meaning?

Foundation Question: How is Non-Standard English interpreted (into Standard English) to make the meaning of a passage accessible?

Foundation Question: How can we interpret literature to gain a deeper understanding of grammar, usage, and punctuation?

Essential Question: What meaning is Mark Twain trying to demonstrate through the use of Non-Standard English?

Foundation Question: How does punctuation add voice to dialog?

Skills:

Grammar/Usage/Punctuation –oral to written language—dialog, dialect and slang

Author's Purpose

Extension for use with entire works:

Making Connections: Story Content and Historical Context

**State Standards/GLEs:**

CA1 Using Standard English

CA2 Reading Fiction

**Assessment/Evaluation:** Scoring guide (attached)

**Language Conventions/Vocabulary:**

Dialect, Slang, Conventional/Standard English, vernacular, accent, drawl, “Southernese”, accessible (may extend with terms: dash, timing)

As needed: **Passage Vocabulary/Concepts:** fetch, hair ball, fortune telling  
Activities and worksheets provided—translated dialog/dialect in literature

Optional Vocabulary Activity: List-Group-Label--Students organize vocabulary collected throughout the unit by category (done as individuals and/or pairs based on level of need for support). In narrative form, students individually explain the categories chosen and listed words (specific directions and limitations given to students depends upon level of student skill and academic investment/motivation).

## **Background Information:**

Rationale-

Students can connect to literature, particularly in the case of Mark Twain, through a look at how language works. Students often lack enough experience with language to demonstrate the skills necessary for proficiency. Often, students come to the tasks of working within language from the habits accumulated through family rather than academic experience. So, students need diverse opportunities to develop language skills and break out of old habits—both in terms of language conventions (grammar/usage) and meaning—through examples and better yet, non-examples.

As Mark Twain stated:

“Habit is habit and not to be flung out of the window by any man but coaxed down-stairs a step at a time.” -- Pudd’nhead Wilson’s Calendar

And, while going there (learning/applying grammar and usage), why not build knowledge about some of the greatest catalysts in American literature, American history, and American thought?

Mark Twain’s works are often considered inaccessible for students--due to the use of dialect and colloquial language. Yet, Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn are not only classic literature with historical significance but also through manipulation of language. Manipulating the consistencies or conventions of language enable the student--to glean the full understanding of what Mark Twain accomplished through the use of dialect and vocabulary-- makes the literature of Mark Twain food for novices and experts.

“Classic.” A book which people praise and don’t read.

--Mark Twain, Pudd’nhead Wilson’s Calendar

## **Related Twain Quotes/Stories:**

Russell Banks on Mark Twain:

“Literature doesn’t change things at the center but at the edges. The center doesn’t change if not for change at the edges.”

“The common eye sees only the outside of things, and judges by that, but the seeing eye pierces through and reads the heart and soul, finding there capacities which the outside didn’t indicate or promise, and which the other kind couldn’t detect.” --Mark Twain, *Joan of Arc*

“Words are only painted fire; a look is the fire itself.” --Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*

“You can find in a text whatever you bring, if you will stand between it and the mirror of your imagination. You may not see your ears, but they are there.” --Mark Twain, “A Fable”

## **Integrated Connections:**

English/Communication Arts, Social Studies

## **Materials:**

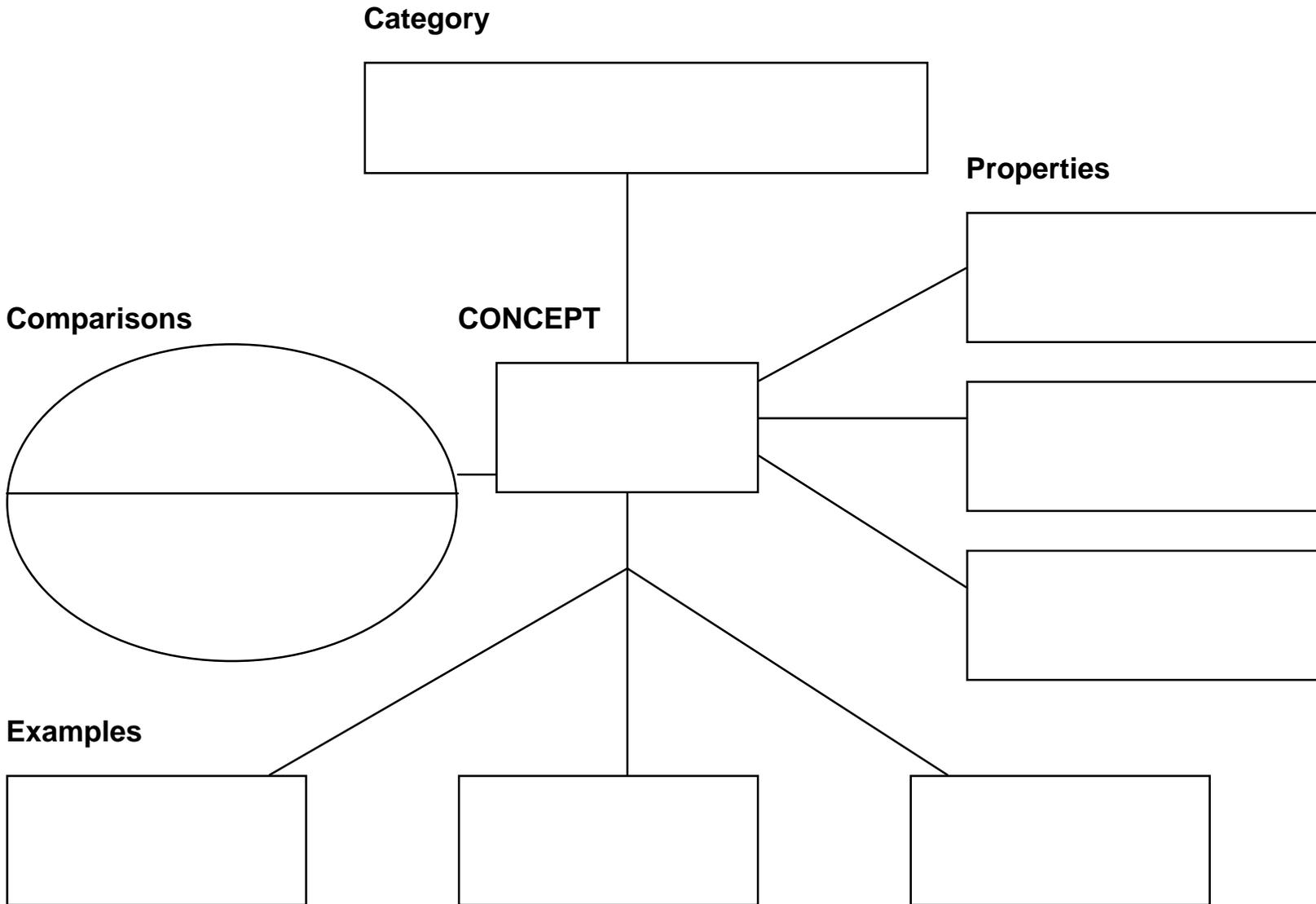
Passages and Handouts attached

If available: Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer: Whitewashing the Fence*, a play adaptation by Jeannette Sanderson, Benchmark: Reader’s Theater Classics, Pelham, New York, 2007.

Copies of *Tom Sawyer* and/or *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain



# Concept Definition Map



### Notes on Concept Definition Map:

1. Choose a concept(s) that is important to student understanding and relates to broader vocabulary.
2. If this is a new strategy, model with a simple noun:
  - a. Tree
  - b. Category: science
  - c. Properties: live, plant, has bark and leaves/needles, etc.
  - d. Examples: Maple, Oak, Pine, etc
  - e. Comparison—Like: Bush; Not like: rock (important to discuss why—similarities have most of properties, differences have none or almost none)
3. When modeling an abstract or less concrete concept, “properties” is a collection of meaning parts rather than a complex and/or rote definition. And, examples, may be indirect (e.g. Industrial Revolution example: spinning jenny). Comparisons can be challenging but remember, the discussion helps students gain a depth of understanding about the concept (e.g. Industrial Revolution—Like-working on my model trains; Not like- standing still)

Rationale: Using a concept definition map makes using prior knowledge and expanding vocabulary while writing original definitions accessible to all students!

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Hour \_\_\_\_\_

**Talkin' in Literature:  
How Grammar and Punctuation Give Us Meaning**

**Background:** Not only what people say, but how they speak is often used by authors in their writing. The famous American author, Mark Twain, made the use of dialog in his writing famous through the kinds and ways he used it. In the late 1800s, it was new for author's to use actual character speech in the written word.

Further, to read these famous works--or passages from these works and understand as well as enjoy them, the reader must be able to translate what is being said--using conventional or Standard English. This is true as far as changes from Standard English as well as an understanding for Twain's use of punctuation. (Note: A humorist, Mark Twain is known for his use of the pause, much as a comedian uses today. So, pay attention to his use of the dash!)

Source	INFORMAL TALK (Quote/word)	Character, Setting, Time Used	FORMAL LANGUAGE	Grammar/Usage/ Punctuation Generalization
<i>The Adventures of Tom Sawyer</i> by Mark Twain Page 11	Example: "Oh, I dasn't, Mars Tom"	-Jim -By the whitewashed fence -1830s	Oh, I dare not, Mister Tom.	Speaker invents a contraction and pronounces Mister in a unique way.
	Example: "Your BFF, Jill"	-Jill -Texting a message -present day	Your best friend forever, Jill	Author uses a commonly used abbreviation to end a message briefly but with special meaning of friendship.



## *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, first published in America in January 1885, has always been in trouble. According to Ernest Hemingway, it was the "one book" from which "all modern American literature" came, and contemporary critics and scholars have treated it as one of the greatest American works of art. Of all MT's novels, it was also the one that sold best at its initial appearance. On the other hand, it was condemned by many reviewers in MT's time as coarse and by many commentators in our time as racist. In 1885 it was banished from the shelves of the Concord Public Library, an act that attracted a lot of publicity and discussion in the press. It is still frequently in the news, as various schools and school systems across the country either ban it from or restore it to their classrooms.

### **The Hair Ball**

Huck knows that Miss Watson's slave, Jim, has a huge hair ball that is supposed to tell the future. Huck is worried that his rough, alcoholic and often abusive father, Pap, is coming back to town. Huck thinks that Jim can tell him—for a price.

Excerpt:

Jim put the quarter under the hair ball, and got down and listened again. This time he said the hair ball was all right. He said it would tell my whole fortune if I wanted it to. I says, go on. So the hair ball talked to Jim, and Jim told it to me. He says:

"Yo' ole father doan' know yit what he's a-gwyne to do. Sometimes he spec he'll go 'way, en den agin he spec he'll stay. De bes' way is to res' easy en let de ole man take his own way. Dey's two angels hoverin' roun' 'bout him. One uv 'em is white en shiny, en t'other one is black. De white one gits him to go right a little while, den de black one sail in en bust it all up. A body can't tell yit which one gwyne to fetch him at de las'. But you is all right. You gwyne to have considable trouble in yo' life, en considable joy. Sometimes you gwyne to git hurt, en sometimes you gwyne to git sick; but every time you's gwyne to git well agin. Dey's two gals flyin' 'bout you in yo' life. One uv 'em's light en t'other one is dark. One is rich en t'other is po'. You's gwyne to marry de po' one fust en de rich one by en by. You wants to keep 'way fum de water as much as you kin, en don't run no resk, 'kase it's down in de bills dat you's gwyne to git hung."

When I lit my candle and went up to my room that night there sat Pap -- his own self!

From: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, University of California Press, 1985, pg. 21-22.

### Mark Twain Language Use and Vocabulary Scoring Guide

	4	3	2	1	0
<b>Language Use and Grammar</b>	Consistently observes dialog changes that differ from Standard English, demonstrations of character type and degree of authenticity. Quickly integrates new knowledge into responses.	Observes most dialog changes that differ from Standard English, demonstrations of character type and degree of authenticity. Integrates most new knowledge into responses.	Observes some dialog changes that differ from Standard English, demonstrations of character type and degree of authenticity. Integrates some new knowledge into responses	Observes few dialog changes that differ from Standard English with few observations related to character type and authenticity. Little new knowledge gained.	Does not observe changes made in character dialog or integrate new knowledge into responses.
<b><u>Punctuation Use</u></b>	Consistently interprets punctuation that demonstrates authenticity of speech in dialog. Quickly integrates new knowledge into responses.	Interprets most punctuation that demonstrates authenticity of speech in dialog. Integrates new knowledge into responses.	Interprets some punctuation that demonstrates authenticity of speech in dialog. Integrates new knowledge into responses some of the time.	Interprets few instances of punctuation that demonstrate authenticity of speech in dialog. Integrates little new knowledge into responses.	Interprets no instances of punctuation use that demonstrates authenticity of dialog.
<b><u>Vocabulary: Processing terminology and recognizing author's purpose</u></b>	Consistently uses/applies vocabulary appropriately (translations) while recognizing author's purpose in original text.	Uses/applies most vocabulary appropriately (translations) while recognizing author's purpose in original text.	Uses/applies some vocabulary appropriately (translations) while recognizing author's purpose in original text.	Uses/applies few vocabulary appropriately (translations) while recognizing author's purpose in original text.	Does not use/apply vocabulary appropriately or recognize author's purpose in original text.
<b><u>Vocabulary: Recognizing meaning through translation of dialect/slang</u></b>	Independently translates all/most dialect/slang appropriately while recognizing meaning in use.	Translates all/most dialect/slang appropriately while recognizing meaning in use with some help.	Translates some dialect/slang appropriately while recognizing meaning in use with assistance.	Translates few dialect/slang appropriately and recognizes little meaning in use even with assistance.	Translates no dialect/slang appropriately or recognizes meaning in use.

**Scoring Guide:**

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