

Lesson Plan- *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*

Concept: Superstition

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Suggested Grade Level: Middle School

Time Frame: 120 minutes

Objectives: Students will identify one example of the presence of superstition in their own lives, three examples in their society, and five examples in *Tom Sawyer*.
Students will analyze and describe how superstitions in our society and *Tom Sawyer* reflect the cultural and historical time frame with at least two supporting details.

State Standards: Missouri Standards: GLE: Reading 1.I Content: CA 2, 3, 7 Process: 1.5, 1.6, 1.9

Assessment/ Evaluation:

Activity #1: informal evaluation- the teacher should be able to tell that the students are participating through observation during the “thinking and writing” time and through discussion.

Activity #2: “Baby Bridge, Stolen Kidneys, and the Hookman”- point value can be determined by individual teacher. Examples need to be valid superstitions or urban legends from modern times and offer a satisfactory explanation. In addition, some observance on the reflection of the superstitions/urban legends to the culture, generation, geographical area, etc. needs to be offered.

Example: Superstition #1- The Stolen Kidney
Explanation- A lonely individual is drugged by a supposedly friendly stranger and wakes up disoriented in a bathtub full of ice. Next to the tub is a note instructing the victim to call 911. During this call, the emergency personnel, familiar with this crime, informs the victim that his/her kidneys have been harvested.
Statement/Reflection- Many of these stories have a medical basis. This is because our generation is probably living in one of the healthiest times in history- we have operations, transplants, and other opportunities to improve and extend our lives. In addition, we have availability to drugs that have

more recently been used to take advantage of people. It is only natural that some of these themes are present in our modern tales.

Activity #3: “Dead Cats, Spunk Water, and Split Beans”- point value can be determined by individual teacher. Examples need to be valid. superstitions from *Tom Sawyer* and offer a satisfactory explanation. In addition, some observance on the reflection of the superstitions to the culture, generation, geographical area, etc. in *Tom Sawyer* needs to be offered.

Example: Superstition #1- dead cats, spunk water, and split beans can get rid of warts.
Explanation: Tom and Huck discuss the various ways that these items can be used to remove warts. Each of the boys has his own opinion as to the validity of the other’s preferred method. In addition to these items, magical chants and the mystery of midnight are involved in these rituals, as well.
Statement/Reflection: Because Tom and Huck are living in a world where the art of healing and medicine are still developing, people didn’t always know what would work. They were still very open to trying different methods, no matter how unconventional the methods seem to us today. It also seems like this time period was more open to accepting “the unknown”- the powers of magic, spirits, etc. Therefore, it is only natural that these elements are going to be present in the tales of the time of *Tom Sawyer*.

Language/Vocabulary:

superstition- belief or notion, not based on reason or knowledge.
urban legend- a form of modern folklore consisting of stories thought to be factual by those circulating them; urban legends are not necessarily false, but they are often distorted, exaggerated, or sensationalized over time.

Integrate Curriculum:

science- research of scientific basis for historical and modern superstitions
history- research superstitious leaders and the influence of superstition in history

Background Information:

The students must have read or be in the process of reading *Tom Sawyer*.

Materials:

Audio of “Superstitious” by Stevie Wonder
Tom Sawyer text
Pen or pencil
Paper
Computers with internet access for the students
Smartboard (optional)
“Baby Bridge, Stolen Kidneys, and the Hookman” worksheet
“Dead Cats, Spunk Water, and Split Beans” worksheet

Technology Support:

Superstition identification game:
<http://www.learnenglish.org.uk/words/activities/superstitions01.html>
For research of modern superstitions and urban legends:
<http://www.oldsuperstitions.com/index.php?query=death>
<http://www.corsinet.com/trivia/scary.html>
<http://www.factmonster.com/spot/superstitions1.html>

Related Twain Quotes/Other Readings:

When the human race has once acquired a superstition nothing short of death is ever likely to remove it.

- *Autobiography of Mark Twain*

When even the brightest mind in our world has been trained up from childhood in a superstition of any kind, it will never be possible for that mind, in its maturity, to examine sincerely, dispassionately, and conscientiously any evidence or any circumstance which shall seem to cast a doubt upon the validity of that superstition. I doubt if I could do it myself.

- "Is Shakespeare Dead?"

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

- *Following the Equator*, Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar

Lesson Plan Format-**A. Introduction (20 min.):**

(The teacher should have “Superstitious” by Stevie Wonder playing in the background as students are taking their seats.)

-The teacher should discuss the definition of “superstition” and follow with the following introductory questions:

Do you think that there is truth behind superstitions?

What things are considered lucky? Unlucky?

What numbers are considered lucky? Unlucky?

-With the following websites on the Smartboard, select students to come forward and participate in the “Superstition Game.” The game allows the student to match

a picture of each superstition with its explanation.

<http://www.learnenglish.org.uk/words/activities/superstitions01.html>

<http://www.learnenglish.org.uk/words/activities/superstitions02.html>

B. Lesson (80 min.):

Activity #1 (20 minutes)

-Teacher: "Now let's discuss how superstitions are involved in our everyday lives. Our superstitions can involve everything from wearing a lucky pair of socks on the day of a big test to consistently taking three deep breaths before every free throw."

-The teacher should ask the following discussion questions:

What are some superstitions today in your life?

Do you consider yourself a superstitious person?

-Teacher: "Take a few moments to think of three superstitious acts that you or someone you know practices."

-Once students have finished, ask students to volunteer to read some of their answers. This will probably lead to some humorous stories and discussion.

Activity #2 (30 min.)

-Teacher: "Now let's take some time to look at how superstitions are still alive in our modern time and culture.

-The teacher should ask the following discussion questions:

What are some superstitions or urban legends that are alive in our area? In our country?

How do some of our superstitions make a statement about us as a geographical area? As a country? As a culture?

-Teacher: "Take some time to research modern superstitions or urban legends. You may access any websites you wish, however here are three that can get you started:"

<http://www.oldsuperstitions.com/index.php?query=death>

<http://www.corsinet.com/trivia/scary.html>

<http://www.factmonster.com/spot/superstitions1.html>

-Pass out "Baby Bridge, Stolen Kidneys, and the Hook Man" worksheet

-Teacher: "Following the directions of the worksheet that you have been given, select three modern superstitions or urban legends that are the most fascinating to you. Describe the superstition or urban legend and explain, if any, the basis for the creation of the tale.

-Once students have finished, ask students to volunteer to read some of their favorites.

-Collect the activities for assessment.

Activity #3 (35 min.)

-Teacher: "Now let's connect what we have learned about superstitions to our reading of Tow Sawyer."

-Pass out "Dead Cats, Spunk Water, and Split Beans."

-Teacher: "Following the directions of the worksheet, look up five examples of superstitions from *Tom Sawyer*. For each superstition, explain it to the best of your ability and discuss how the superstition reflects on the time period or culture of the time.

-Once the students are finished completing the activity, ask for volunteers to present some of their examples and historical or cultural connections.

-Collect the activities for assessment.

C. Closure (15 min.):

-Teacher: "OK, so can anyone tell me in their own words what a "superstition is?"

"How do our superstitions reflect and connect to our time period and culture?"

"How are our superstitions different from those in the time period of *Tom Sawyer*?"

Homework: "For next class period, talk to family members about various superstitions that may be practiced in your family, either now or in the past. Each student should bring at least one family superstition. As a culminating activity, we will create a bulletin board displaying all of our family superstitions."

Strategies/Accommodations to Support Students with Exceptionalities:

Students needing accommodations may be allowed to identify fewer examples on each of the worksheets or be given an opportunity to identify superstitions that are present in the text as opposed to those that are not discussed or seem out of context or historically inaccurate. In addition, some students may need the audio version of *Tom Sawyer* for the previous reading assignments building to this lesson.

Possible Follow-Up Activities:

-As a class, create a class superstition or urban legend.

-Give the students the opportunity to write their own urban legend or superstition. Once they are completed, let the students hear them read and determine if they are believable or not.

-Gather and write a collection of superstitions or urban legends for your school, town, county, etc.

Possible Guest Speakers/Other Resources:

Book Rags- superstitions in *Tom Sawyer*

<http://www.bookrags.com/notes/ts/TOP4.htm>

"Are You Superstitious" Game

http://encarta.msn.com/quiz_18/Are_You_Superstitious.html

Ladders and Stairs Interview

<http://fuv.hivolda.no/prosjekt/birteindresovde/ladders&stairswork.html>

Other Resources Used in the Creation of this Plan:

Some of the discussion questions came from textbooks, Copyright © 1982-2000 by Charles Kelly and Lawrence Kelly (Used by Permission) and Copyright © 1997-2008 by The Internet TESL Journal.



"BABY BRIDGE, STOLEN KIDNEYS, AND THE HOOKMAN"

DIRECTIONS: NOW THAT YOU UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT OF "SUPERSTITION," LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT HOW SUPERSTITION IS ALIVE IN OUR SOCIETY TODAY. SOME OF OUR SUPERSTITIONS CAN ALSO BE REFERRED TO AS URBAN LEGENDS.

USING THE FOLLOWING WEBSITES, AND OTHERS IF YOU CHOOSE, RESEARCH SOME MODERN SUPERSTITIONS AND URBAN LEGENDS. SELECT THREE THAT ARE MOST FASCINATING TO YOU AND EXPLAIN THE BASIS FOR THE CREATION OF THE TALE. IN CONCLUSION, WRITE HOW YOUR CHOSEN SUPERSTITIONS OR URBAN LEGENDS MAKE A STATEMENT ABOUT OUR CULTURE, GENERATION, GEOGRAPHICAL AREA, ETC.

<http://www.oldsuperstitions.com/index.php?query=death>

<http://www.corsinet.com/trivia/scary.html>

<http://www.factmonster.com/spot/superstitions1.html>

SUPERSTITION/URBAN LEGEND #1 _____

EXPLANATION _____

SUPERSTITION/URBAN LEGEND #2 _____

EXPLANATION _____

SUPERSTITION/URBAN LEGEND #3 _____

EXPLANATION _____

HOW DO YOU FEEL YOUR FAVORITE SUPERSTITIONS/URBAN LEGENDS MAKE A STATEMENT ABOUT OUR CULTURE, GENERATION, GEOGRAPHICAL AREA, ETC.



**"DEAD CATS, SPUNK WATER,
AND SPLIT BEANS"**

DIRECTIONS: IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT THE SAME KINDS OF SUPERSTITIONS AND STORIES THAT ARE TOLD TODAY ARE SIMILAR TO THOSE TOLD, AND EVEN READILY BELIEVED, IN THE TIME OF TOM SAWYER. LOOKING BACK THROUGH THE PREVIOUSLY ASSIGNED TEXT, LOCATE FIVE EXAMPLES OF SUPERSTITIONS IN TOM SAWYER AND EXPLAIN THE SUPERSTITIONS TO THE BEST OF YOUR ABILITY. IN CONCLUSION, WRITE HOW THE IDENTIFIED SUPERSTITIONS MAKE A STATEMENT ABOUT THE CULTURE, GENERATION, GEOGRAPHICAL AREA, ETC.

SUPERSTITION#1 _____

EXPLANATION _____

SUPERSTITION#2 _____

EXPLANATION _____

SUPERSTITION#3 _____

EXPLANATION _____

SUPERSTITION#4 _____

EXPLANATION _____

SUPERSTITION#5 _____

EXPLANATION _____

HOW DO YOU FEEL THE IDENTIFIED SUPERSTITIONS MAKE A STATEMENT ABOUT THE CULTURE, GENERATION, GEOGRAPHICAL AREA, ETC. PORTRAYED IN TOM SAWYER?
