

Mark Twain Boyhood Home & Museum
 Lesson Plan for *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*
 Created by Patty and David Polasky
 Fosston Jr/Sr High School, Fosston, MN
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 Hannibal, Missouri

Concept or Topic: Superstitions Then and Now	Suggested Grade Level: 8
Subject: Language Arts	Suggested Time Frame: One Week
<p>Objectives: Students will define the word "superstition." They will identify and list 5 superstitions from <i>Tom Sawyer</i>. They will compare/contrast those with 2 superstitions from today. Students will research and describe any possible scientific basis for the superstitions.</p>	
<p>Minnesota State Standards for Grade 8 Language Arts: Grade 8: D. Literature: The student will actively engage in the reading process and read, understand, analyze, interpret, and appreciate a wide variety of fiction, poetic and nonfiction texts. 1. Read a variety of high quality, traditional, classical and contemporary literary works specific to America, as well as significant works from other countries. 6. Relate a given literary work to historical events (place, time, and custom) [in this case, regarding superstition] 8. Identify and understand recurring themes [superstition] across literary works, citing evidence from texts.</p>	
<p>Assessment Options: --Points will be given for having written down 5 superstitions that are found in the book. Students will orally share these superstitions and a list will be written on the board. --Each student will create a poster that illustrates one superstition, from their research. --An oral report of 1-2 minutes will be presented to the class, using a note card with no more than 25 words. They will share with the class the possible scientific basis or background for the superstition.</p>	
<p>Vocabulary: In groups of 2-3 students, they will come up with a definition for "superstition." This will be shared with the class and written on the white board in the front of the class. This will be followed by a dictionary definition and some listed examples.</p>	
<p>Subject Area Integration: A possibility is the art class. This will depend on what the 8th graders are doing with art. Creating the posters would be a good art project.</p>	
<p>Background Information: Present basic background on Twain using "Mark Twain in 60 Minutes" from the CD. Students will have read and discussed chapters 1-5 of <i>Tom Sawyer</i>. This project will take place as they continue to read the book. Probably 3-4 weeks.</p>	

Materials:

Tom Sawyer text, computers with internet access, poster board, markers, note cards, library
Information resource from Bookrags.com regarding superstitions by chapters:

Chapters 6-10

Superstition 1: While religion is a routine obligation, superstition is the true faithful belief of Tom and many others. The various cures for warts that Tom and Huck discuss cannot be questioned, and there is always an explanation when they fail. Dead cats are especially important to the boys, as they are very powerful and have many uses.

Superstition 2: Although the trick Tom uses to find his marbles fails, he cannot believe that the superstition is false. Instead, he seeks another superstition (a witch) to explain it. Even though it takes three tries to find his lost marble a minute later, the fact that he found it is proof to him that the tricks of superstition work.

Superstition 3: Tom and Huck at first believe that the howling dog means they will die. When they see it howling at Muff Potter, they understand that he is in trouble, not them. Since they never doubt such things, they know nothing they can do will change his fate.

Chapters 11-15

Superstition 4: The adults of St. Petersburg are just as superstitious as the children. When Dr. Robinson's body bleeds when Joe helps move it (a sign that the killer is near) it must be explained. Instead of coming to the proper conclusion, that Injun Joe is guilty, they believe it is because Muff Potter is close to the body. In this way, they tailor the superstition to their own needs.

Superstition 5: Another use of dead cats is mentioned here: they can be used to discover hidden information. Obviously, the boys performing the rituals with the dead cats discover nothing close to the truth. Tom, who normally has a lot of faith in this purpose of dead cats, avoids participating in the ritual, perhaps because he knows more than any dead cat could possibly tell, or perhaps because he believes that his own knowledge of the murder will be revealed.

Superstition 6: Aunt Polly, religious as she is, has her own form of superstition. The patent medicines and health magazines she feels so strongly about make the same empty promises that Tom's superstition does, but she believes in them anyway. Even when the magazines contradict themselves from issue to issue, Aunt Polly goes on believing what they say.

Superstition 7: Tom gets very excited by the worm crawling across his leg and its promise of new, fancy clothes. Here the superstition serves something directly important to Tom, since the night before they boys were discussing the fancy pirate clothes they would be getting soon. This is an example of how Tom's superstition often serves things he's been thinking about recently.

Chapters 16-20

Superstition 8: Tom's bracelet of rattlesnake rattles protects him from cramps. When he loses them, he refuses to go into the water out of fear. This superstition is a powerful force in Tom's life, since it forces him to give up a fun activity.

Chapters 21-25

Superstition 9: Again, Tom and Huck use superstitious beliefs to solve a problem. They prefer to believe that their bad luck in finding treasure is due to witches or not following certain rules of treasure-hunting, that the treasure is where the tree's shadow casts. They fall back on superstition rather than admit they are wrong.

Superstition 10: Huck is more simple about superstition than Tom, and fears ghosts. He doesn't want to have anything to do with the haunted house. Tom, on the other hand, can explain certain superstitions away when they get in the way of his fun, tailoring his beliefs to his needs as the adults to. He convinces Huck that the haunted-house is nothing to fear when it's daytime. However, when they come near the haunted-house, neither boy can help but get very scared and avoid the house and its ghosts as much as possible.

Chapters 26-30

Superstition 11: When Huck says they can't dig, it is as much out of his stronger fear of the haunted-house as his belief that Friday is an unlucky day. He uses one superstition to cover up his fear of another.

Chapters 31-35

Superstition 12: Tom and Huck's last encounter with Injun Joe is worrying about his ghost. Alive, they feared him, and there is no reason to stop fearing him after his death. This superstition comes close to ending their treasure-hunting mission, and Tom cannot talk Huck out of it. He even begins to believe they are in danger. It is only when they realize that the cross on the wall of the cave will protect them that they can go on. Safe from Injun Joe's ghost, they can move forward to get the treasure.

Definitions and expressions:

excessively credulous belief in and reverence for supernatural beings : *he dismissed the ghost stories as mere superstition.*

• a widely held but unjustified belief in supernatural causation leading to certain consequences of an action or event, or a practice based on such a belief : *she touched her locket for luck, a superstition she had*

had since childhood.

ORIGIN Middle English : from Old French, or from Latin *super-* 'over' + *stare* 'to stand' (perhaps from the notion of "standing over" something in awe).

1 *the old superstitions held by sailors* myth, belief, old wives' tale; legend, story.

2 *medicine was riddled with superstition* unfounded belief, credulity, fallacy, delusion, illusion; magic, sorcery; informal humbug, hokey.

Technology:

Students can use the websites listed below or find their own internet sources.

<<http://www.thefreedictionary.com>> is a good starting place for viewing definitions from several different sources

<<http://www.brownielocks.com/superstitions.html>>

<<http://www2.islandnet.com/~luree/silly.html>>

<<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/eng/osc/index.htm>>

<http://www.allsands.com/history/originscommons_ssd_gn.htm>

Related Twain Quotes/Passages:

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

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

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?"

Lesson Sequence:

Day One:

A. Hook/Intro (10 min.): I will show the class some objects such as a horseshoe, clover, mirror, salt, and a picture of a black cat, seeing if someone will come up with the word *superstition*.

Questions:

--What do you think of when you see these objects?

--What these objects represent?

--Do you believe what you've heard about these things?

--Are there any of the objects that you do not associate with a belief?

--Why or how did these beliefs come about?

Activity #1 (15 min.)

Individually, write a definition of superstition.

In groups of 2-3, share definitions and create what they think is the best way to say it.

Groups share with the class.

With the website, see what <<http://www.thefreedictionary.com>> shows for a definition.

Activity #2 (10 min.)

Students do a quick-write about some superstitions they are familiar with that we have not yet talked about. Share with the class.

Do they themselves believe this? Why or why not?

Why do people have superstitions?

Who decides what is/is not a superstition?

Activity #3 (10 min.)

There won't be much time left at this point, so I will pass out the assignment sheet and we will begin to listen to a recording of ch. 6. They are to finish reading the chapter and complete the worksheet as homework.

Day Two: (entire period)

Activity #4

--Students share the superstitions that they found for chapter 6.

--Using our mobile computer lab, students will research superstitions both past and present. Some websites will be suggested, but they may search for their own. They need to find 2 superstitions and describe any possible scientific basis for the superstitions. They will bring this information to class with them for tomorrow.

Day Three: (entire period)

--Each student creates a poster that illustrates one superstition from their research.

--An oral report of 1-2 minutes will be presented to the class, using a note card with no more than 25 words. They will share with the class the possible scientific basis or background for the superstition.

--Homework will be to read chapter 7.

Day Four:

--Share the oral reports and posters.

Review/Closure: Return to the original set of questions posed in activities #1 and 2.

Why did Twain include these beliefs in this story?

Homework:

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain

Name _____

Anyone need a dead cat?

As you read through chapters 6-10, keep a record of examples of superstitions. Record the chapter and page number(s) for each. Continue on the back if needed. Be ready to share your "finds" with the class.

Example 1. Chapter ___ Page(s) _____

Example 2. Chapter ___ Page(s) _____

Example 3. Chapter ___ Page(s) _____

Example 4. Chapter ___ Page(s) _____

Example 5. Chapter ___ Page(s) _____

Example 6. Chapter ___ Page(s) _____

Example 7. Chapter ___ Page(s) _____

Strategies for Exceptional Students:

1. Students can listen to the story with the CD recordings.
2. Require fewer superstitions to be found in the text and in their research.
3. Artistic students can illustrate more than one superstition.
4. Conduct a survey about superstitions and report to the class. Some questions that might be used:
What superstitions did you believe when you were younger? How did you find out about them? Do you still believe them? Why or why not?

Suggested Follow-Up Activities:

1. Students will continue to list superstitious beliefs found in the novel. Each student will be responsible for 1-2 chapters as the reading assignments continue. Students will continue to share these with the class as the chapters are discussed. A brief description will be added to the ongoing list posted on the bulletin board.
2. Students create their own superstition and explanation of its origin.
3. Play the game "More Urban Myth" by Rumba Games, which I have used with my homeroom students. Students are divided into teams to see which urban legends are true and which are false.