

## Mark Twain Boyhood Home & Museum

Lesson Plan for *“How I Edited an Agricultural Paper Once.”*

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LESSON PLAN FOR “How I Edited an Agricultural Paper Once”	
<b>Concept or Topic:</b> Critical thinking and written media (and vocabulary review)	<b>Suggested Grade Level:</b> 5-8 (can be modified for other levels)
<b>Subject:</b> Language Arts	<b>Suggested Time Frame:</b> 120-150 minutes
<b>Objective(s):</b> Students will analyze written media to determine the validity of the information and the reliability of the author by providing 6 details that support or refute the validity and the reliability of the selection. Students also will recognize the use of satire and absurd humor in Twain’s work to illustrate opinions on editors.	
<b>State Standards:</b> Missouri Reading 1.I. 3.C. Information Literacy 2.A.	
<b>Assessment Options:</b> Upon receiving a passage, students will evaluate using research methods available to them. They will check the validity of information in the passage and reliability of the author, providing 6 details that support or refute the validity and reliability.	
<b>Vocabulary Review:</b>  Words found in story: furrow, harrow, gander, guano, mucilage, spittoon, moult, apothecary, impudent  Students will be given the words to define/discuss/explain. Together they will identify the part of speech for each word and use each word in a complete sentence. Teacher then will lead a review of the words in class, discussing their modern usage.	
<b>Subject Area Integration:</b> Political Science, Journalism, Social Studies, History, Research Methods	
<b>Background Information:</b> Students should have basic information on how to access information on the internet, such as using search engines and accessing online databases.	
<b>Materials:</b> Excerpt from “How I Edited an Agricultural Paper Once,” along with the full story. Access to dictionary. Vocabulary quiz (attached). Access to internet resources. See below for excerpt, vocabulary quiz, and links to examples of bogus essays from the internet.	

## LESSON PLAN FOR “How I Edited an Agricultural Paper Once”

### Technology:

Possible resources:

- Online dictionary ([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com), etc.)
- Online periodical search tool (EBSCOhost, etc.)
- Online encyclopedias (Grolier, World Book, etc.)
- Online examples of bogus websites:  
<http://www.dillon2.k12.sc.us/teachers/searchtools.asp>
- <http://www.opposingviews.com/>
- <http://www.theonion.com>

### Related Twain Quotes/Passages:

“If a spectacle is going to be particularly imposing I prefer to see it through somebody else's eyes, because that man will always exaggerate. Then I can exaggerate his exaggeration, and my account of the thing will be the most impressive.” – Mark Twain (see also full text of story)

### Lesson Sequence:

Intro: Provide the class with a copy of the excerpt from “How I Edited an Agricultural Paper Once.” Have students underline or mark any word they do not know or any phrase that doesn't make sense to them as they read.

Teaching of the Concept: Once students have read the excerpt, ask students for examples of what they have marked. Use resources to answer questions of meaning of words and to clarify any usage issues.

Suggested Questions: What words did you not recognize? What words or phrases looked misplaced? What were examples of information that seemed incorrect? Describe the professionalism of the grammar and format of the paragraphs. How would you describe the tone of the selection?

### Learning Activity:

1. Students will read the entire story of Twain's and discuss the intent and motivation of an editor or essayist according to Twain in this piece as well as their own opinions. Point out that even though an essay can look or sound professional, facts may be incorrect. Point out that the editor had no expertise in the area of agriculture, as well as showing how Twain used humor and satire for entertainment.
2. Students will complete the attached vocabulary activity.
3. In order to understand the importance of reliability and validity of a source, give the students another piece of writing and have them analyze the information in the same way they did the excerpt. Have them check the credentials of the author. Students should provide 6 examples or non-examples of the validity and reliability of the piece.
4. Discuss in class the reliability and validity of the selection(s) and author(s).

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### Review/Closure:

For final assessment of mastery regarding validity and reliability of a work, present an editorial or a selection currently in the news and have the students independently provide 6 examples or non-examples of validity and reliability of the selection.

### **Homework:**

Vocabulary worksheet provided (if necessary)  
Practice selection from #3 described in learning activity above.

### **Strategies for Exceptional Students:**

- Provide options for cooperative work for students who may need it, allowing them to highlight their strengths within a group setting.
- Provide options for students to present their findings using an area of strength such as would be indicated in a multiple intelligence survey or learning style inventory.
- Use a high interest topic selection for students that lack self-motivation skills.
- Provide initial selections in an area that students have more personal knowledge to allow them to activate their prior schema and experience success.
- For students seeking more of a challenge, see follow-up activities for extension opportunities.

### **Suggested Follow-Up Activities:**

- Have students examine and describe the motive for the actions of the editor in Twain’s story. Possible motives could be economic (increased circulation), status (different “class” of readers), personal advancement (other editing opportunities with other publications), etc.
- Have students write a “believable” bogus essay, similar to Twain’s work.
- Have students analyze the validity and reliability of differing positions on a controversial issue, such as could be found in an Opposing Viewpoints selection.

### **Handout #1 Excerpt from Twain story:**

Excerpt from “How I Edited an Agricultural Paper Once,” by Samuel Clemens

The guano is a fine bird, but great care is necessary in rearing it. It should not be imported earlier than June nor later than September. In the winter it should be kept in a warm place, where it can hatch out its young. It is evident that we are to have a backward season for grain. Therefore, it will be well for the farmer to begin setting out his corn-stalks and planting his buckwheat cakes in July instead of August.

Concerning the Pumpkin. -- This berry is a favorite with the natives of the interior of New England, who prefer it to the gooseberry for the making of fruit cake, and who

likewise give it the preference over the raspberry for feeding cows, as being more filling and fully as satisfying. The pumpkin is the only esculent of the orange family that will thrive in the North, except the gourd and one or two varieties of the squash. But the custom of planting it in the front yard with the shrubbery is fast going out of vogue, for it is now generally conceded that the pumpkin, as a shade tree, is a failure.

## Handout #2 Vocabulary Activity

### VOCABULARY QUIZ

Use the word bank provided and information from research and discussion to fill in the blanks below.

Word bank: mucilage, guano, gander, harrow, spittoon, furrow, apothecary, moult, impudent

1. \_\_\_\_\_ is often found in caves.
2. The papers were stuck together with \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The man spit into the \_\_\_\_\_.
4. We planted pea seeds in the \_\_\_\_\_.
5. We \_\_\_\_\_ the garden with a plow.
6. The \_\_\_\_\_ boy had to sit in the corner.
7. The woman purchased her medicines from the \_\_\_\_\_.
8. The \_\_\_\_\_ swam across the pond.
9. The gander will \_\_\_\_\_ his feathers.

(Note: These words will have been presented and discussed in context. Therefore, a quiz may not be necessary.)

**Resource #3. An example of a bogus internet-based essay:**

<http://zapatopi.net/treeoctopus/>