

**Short Story Lesson Plan**  
**Mark Twain Teachers Workshop ~ Mark Twain Museum**  
**June 19-23, 2006 ~ Hannibal, Missouri**  
**Developed by:** Cindy Oliver, Stetson University, DeLand FL

**Short Story Title:** “How I Edited an Agricultural Paper Once” (in recent years shortened to “How I Edited and Agricultural Paper”)

**Grade Level:** Grades 9-12 (can also be used with gifted middle school students)

**Time Frame for Lesson:** 3 class periods (one to introduce/read/discuss story, one to work on writing and editing, one for students to present); this can be modified to be shorter or longer as desired.

**Background Information:** Mark Twain worked as an editor but was primarily a writer. As a writer he was subjected to the editor’s revisions. Also, as an author he was subjected to the critics’ opinions of his work. Story was first published in 1870 in *The Galaxy*. Tap into prior knowledge by asking if anyone has ever lived on a farm or been an editor.

**Literary/Language Arts Focus:** perspective, satire, irony, deadpan humor, absurdity, creative writing, critique, editing, tabloids/yellow journalism

**State Standards:** Florida – Language Arts: Reading Standard 1 (LA.A.1.4): The student uses the reading process effectively; Reading Standard 2 (LA.A.2.4): The student constructs meaning from a wide range of texts; Writing Standard 1 (LA.B.1.4): The student uses the writing process effectively; Writing Standard 2 (LA.B.2.4): The student writes to communicate ideas and information effectively; Listening, Viewing, Speaking Standard 1 (LA.C.1.4): The student uses listening strategies effectively; L, V, S Standard 3 (LA.C.3.4): The student uses speaking strategies effectively; Language Standard 2 (LA. D.2.4): The student understands the power of language.

**Curriculum Connections:** agriculture (FFA), journalism (school newspaper), art (illustrate story/articles)

**Vocabulary:** editor, guano, agriculture, cadaverous, vogue, pie-plant, diffident, mucilage, ganders, spawn, spitoon, lunacy, rudiments, infirmities, gooseberry, adios, temperance appeals, impudent, solitary, reprieve, pole-cat, superfluous, horse-chestnut

**Materials:**

- Illustrations of editors by Mark Twain (found on [twainquotes.com](http://twainquotes.com))
- Visuals depicting vocabulary
- A copy of the *National Enquirer* or *Weekly World News* or similar tabloid
- Copies of movie reviews (with poor ratings)

**Technology Support:**

- Twain quotes about editors online at: <http://www.twainquotes.com/Editors.html>
- Twain’s World CD-rom (with complete works)
- MP3 version available for students who are English language learners, etc. at: [http://www.literalsystems.org/abooks/doku.php?id=audiobook:how\\_i\\_edited\\_an\\_agricultural\\_paper](http://www.literalsystems.org/abooks/doku.php?id=audiobook:how_i_edited_an_agricultural_paper)
- Disney’s “The Plausible Impossible” video: <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B000BUGACG/002-9028895-7805615?v=glance&n=404272>
- Online movie reviews:
  - <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/>
  - <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/frontpage>
- Online tabloids:
  - <http://www.weeklyworldnews.com/>
  - <http://www.nationalenquirer.com/>

**Content Objectives:**

- Students will identify the point of view of the story.
- Students will describe tone of story using at least 3 examples.
- Students will describe satire and provide at least 3 examples.
- Students will identify and describe at least 3 examples of irony.
- Students will write and share a short work using the technique employed by Mark Twain.

**Related Twain Quotes/ Stories:**

- “How often we recall, with regret, that Napoleon once shot at a magazine editor and missed him and killed a publisher. But we remember with charity, that his intentions were good.”
- “This editor is a critic. He has pulled out his carving-knife and his tomahawk and is starting after a book which he is going to have for breakfast.” (Show Twain’s illustration with this.)
- Journalism in Tennessee (short story by Twain)
- The Petrified Man (hoax journalism by Twain)

**THE LESSON:**

Include the following and describe length of time, teacher activity, questions, and student activity.

- “Hook” or motivational statement/question
- Intro to lesson (background, vocabulary, etc.)
- Activities and questions
- Closure (review, homework, etc.)

Time	Teacher Activity/Questions	Student Activity
5-10 min.	Hook: Read aloud a brief, absurd article from the <i>National Enquirer</i> . Invite discussion about absurd stories.	Listen and respond
15 min.	Explain background of story. Don't dwell on Twain's feelings about editors. Save for end discussion. Introduce key vocabulary using visuals and by questioning. Ask if students consider themselves an "expert" in any topic (e.g., video games, etc.) and if they would be able to write an article about the topic. This discussion helps to make the story personal, meaningful, and relevant.	Listen and respond
10 min.	Read story aloud. Students can follow along on their own copy or simply listen.	Listen
30-45 min.	Questions/discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the point of view?</li> <li>• Why was the old gentleman so flustered and the towns people so fascinated?</li> <li>• Was the author an agriculture expert? How do we know? Cite examples of irony and satire.</li> <li>• How long did the author serve as editor? (Long vs. short stint)</li> <li>• How did the author feel about critics? Editors?</li> <li>• Why do you think he felt this way?</li> <li>• Have you ever tried to do something you knew nothing about? What were the results?</li> <li>• Have you ever been berated for a job you did poorly? How did it feel? How about a job you believed you did well but for which you were still criticized?</li> <li>• Was this story intended to be funny or serious? Could it be both? If so, what is the "serious" message?</li> <li>• Did the author feel remorse for his actions? Why or why not?</li> <li>• What was meant by the line, "the less a man knows the bigger the noise he makes and the higher the salary he commands"?</li> <li>• What did the author mean at the end of the story when he said,</li> </ul>	Listen and respond

	<p>“You are the loser, not me”?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you agree or disagree with the author?</li> <li>• Have you ever read a movie or book review with which you didn't agree? How did you feel? How about an editorial? Have you ever written a letter to the editor?</li> <li>• What kind of knowledge should the author have had to edit an agricultural paper?</li> <li>• Although the author increased subscriptions, the real editor was displeased. Why?</li> <li>• Do today's media sensationalize news to increase viewers/readers? If so, cite examples. How? Why? How does today's journalism compare to the journalism in this story?</li> <li>•</li> </ul> <p>Read the Twain quote about Napoleon. Lead discussion. Show pictures of editors drawn by Mark Twain. Ask students to read corresponding quotes and discuss Twain's feelings about editors. Provide copies of movie reviews. After students read them, discuss whether or not they agree with the critic.</p>	
10 min.	Closure: Quick review – ask students to summarize the story, describe absurdities, explain the author's frustration with the real editor. Assign homework – students are to select from the assessment options.	Listen and respond
2 <sup>nd</sup> day	Circulate and provide feedback.	Edit, revise homework in class using peer editing, etc.
3 <sup>rd</sup> day	Set up class presentations.	Read/perform their work

### Assessment/Evaluation (Options for mastery):

Students will explain satire and irony in class discussion by suggesting examples; students will write a short piece using Twain's style of satire/irony or the “plausible impossible” and writing in the first person as the voice of authority. All assignments must be edited for spelling and grammar. Students must earn at least an 80% for mastery. (See grading rubric below.) Possible topics:

- Identify a topic about which you believe yourself to be an expert, and then write a satirical short story about this topic.
- Write a satirical movie/book/music review.
- Write a *National Enquirer*-type story that sounds plausible but is impossible.
- Write a satirical editorial for the school paper.
- Write a satirical lengthy excuse for an absence or tardy.
- Write a satirical letter to the editor.
- Write a brief satirical skit about the school cafeteria.
- Write a brief satirical autobiography.
- Write a “Daily Show” style news story about a real event.
- Create a Sunday-style color cartoon with a satirical storyline or a satirical political cartoon (illustrations can depict examples of irony).
- Identify the Top 10 absurdities in the story and illustrate them (e.g., boy climbing up the turnip tree, etc.).
- Students can suggest an appropriate topic.

**Grading Rubric for Writing Assignment:**

	3 (Meets expectations)	2 (Approaches expectations)	1 (Expectations not met)
Grammar 10%	Free of punctuation and grammatical errors.	Few punctuation and grammatical errors.	Several punctuation and grammatical errors.
Spelling 10%	Free of spelling errors.	Few spelling errors.	Several spelling errors.
Creativity/Originality 10%	Idea is highly creative and unusual.	Idea has been done before, but is still handled creatively.	Idea is unoriginal and presented without creativity.
At least 3 excellent uses of irony and/or satire 70%	Includes excellent examples of irony and/or satire; student clearly understands and employs these literary devices. Work requires little to no editing.	Humor is evident, but student does not clearly employ the literary devices of irony and/or satire. Work would benefit from a rewrite.	There is little to no use of irony or satire. Student does not appear to understand these literary devices. Work must be rewritten.

**Strategies used in lesson to support English language learners, gifted, ESE, etc.:**

- Background, prior knowledge, and vocabulary and discussed ahead of time to support comprehension.
- Visuals are provided for some of the vocabulary.
- Reading aloud to students allows them the opportunity to hear inflections that carry meaning. They can also follow along to see how certain words are pronounced.
- Providing an MP3 source allows them to hear the story again at home.
- Opportunities are provided for discussion and interaction.
- Options for assessment provide choice and promote student interest.
- The use of “realia” or primary documents (movie reviews, *National Enquirer* article) provides real life examples and is especially effective with gifted students.

**Possible Follow-up Activities:**

- Adapt the story for a readers’ theatre performance and act it out in class.
- Time this lesson to coincide with April Fools Day and publish your own satirical class newsletter.
- Read related stories such as “Journalism in Tennessee” and compare/contrast.
- Read movie reviews and have students rate the reviews as to whether or not they agree with the critic. Bring in some movie critic books and discuss the ratings of popular movies. Investigate how one becomes a critic, etc. Discuss the difference between “critique” and “criticize.”

**Possible Guest Speakers/Other Resources:**

- Editor from local paper
- News clips from television that depict exaggeration and/or satire
- Excerpts from The Onion <http://www.theonion.com/content/>
- Excerpts from The Daily Show [http://www.comedycentral.com/shows/the\\_daily\\_show/index.html](http://www.comedycentral.com/shows/the_daily_show/index.html)
- Create a satirical bulletin board for students to bring in examples

## "How I Edited an Agricultural Paper"

Title: How I Edited an Agricultural Paper Once  
Author: Twain, Mark  
Date: 1870

I did not take temporary editorship of an agricultural paper without misgivings. Neither would a landsman take command of a ship without misgivings. But I was in circumstances that made the salary an object. The regular editor of the paper was going off for a holiday, and I accepted the terms he offered, and took his place.

The sensation of being at work again was luxurious, and I wrought all the week with unflagging pleasure. We went to press, and I waited a day with some solicitude to see whether my effort was going to attract any notice. As I left the office, toward sundown, a group of men and boys at the foot of the stairs dispersed with one impulse, and gave me passage-way, and I heard one or two of them say: "That's him!" I was naturally pleased by this incident. The next morning I found a similar group at the foot of the stairs, and scattering couples and individuals standing here and there in the street, and over the way, watching me with interest. The group separated and fell back as I approached, and I heard a man say, "Look at his eye!" I pretended not to observe the notice I was attracting, but secretly I was pleased with it, and was purposing to write an account of it to my aunt. I went up the short flight of stairs, and heard cheery voices and a ringing laugh as I drew near the door, which I opened, and caught a glimpse of two young rural-looking men, whose faces blanched and lengthened when they saw me, and then they both plunged through the window with a great crash. I was surprised.

In about half an hour an old gentleman, with a flowing beard and a fine but rather austere face, entered, and sat down at my invitation. He seemed to have something on his mind. He took off his hat and set it on the floor, and got out of it a red silk handkerchief and a copy of our paper.

He put the paper on his lap, and while he polished his spectacles with his handkerchief, he said, "Are you the new editor?"

I said I was.

"Have you ever edited an agricultural paper before?"

"No," I said; "this is my first attempt."

"Very likely. Have you had any experience in agriculture practically?"

"No; I believe I have not."

"Some instinct told me so," said the old gentleman, putting on his spectacles, and looking over them at me with asperity, while he folded his paper into a convenient shape. "I wish to read you what must have made me have that instinct. It was this editorial. Listen, and see if it was you that wrote it: -

"'Turnips should never be pulled, it injures them. It is much better to send a boy up and let him shake the tree.'

"Now, what do you think of that? - for I really suppose you wrote it?"

"Think of it? Why, I think it is good. I think it is sense. I have no doubt that every year millions and millions of bushels of turnips are spoiled in this township alone by being pulled in a half-ripe condition, when, if they had sent a boy up to shake the tree - "

"Shake your grandmother! Turnips don't grow on trees!"

"Oh, they don't, don't they? Well, who said they did? The language was intended to be figurative, wholly figurative. Anybody that knows anything will know that I meant that the boy should shake the vine."

Then this old person got up and tore his paper all into small shreds, and stamped on them, and broke several things with his cane, and said I did not know as much as a cow; and then went out and banged the door after him, and, in short, acted in such a way that I fancied he was displeased about something. But not knowing what the trouble was, I could not be any help to him.

Pretty soon after this a long cadaverous creature, with lanky locks hanging down to his shoulders, and a week's stubble bristling from the hills and valleys of his face, darted within the door, and halted, motionless, with finger on lip, and head and body bent in listening attitude. No sound was heard. Still he listened. No sound. Then he turned the key in the door, and came elaborately tiptoeing toward me till he was within long reaching distance of me, when he stopped, and after scanning my face with intense interest for a while, drew a folded copy of our paper from his bosom, and said -

"There, you wrote that. Read it to me - quick? Relieve me. I suffer."

I read as follows; and as the sentences fell from my lips I could see the relief come, I could see the drawn muscles relax, and the anxiety go out of the face, and rest and peace steal over the features like the merciful moonlight over a desolate landscape:

"The guano is a fine bird, but great care is necessary in rearing it. It should not be imported earlier than June or 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 cornstalks 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 goose-berry 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.

"Now, as the warm weather approaches, and the ganders begin to spawn - "

The excited listener sprang toward me to shake hands, and said -

"There, there - that will do. I know I am all right now, because you have read it just as I did, word for word. But, stranger, when I first read it this morning, I said to myself, I never, never believed it before, notwithstanding my friends kept me under watch so strict, but now I believe I am crazy; and with that I fetched a howl that you might have heard two miles, and started out to kill somebody - because, you know, I knew it would come to that sooner or later, and so I might as well begin. I read one of them paragraphs over again, so as to be certain, and then I burned my house down and started. I have crippled several people, and have got one fellow up a tree, where I can get him if I want him. But I thought I would call in here as I passed along and make the thing perfectly certain; and now it is certain, and I tell you it is lucky for the chap that is in the tree. I should have killed him, sure, as I went back. Goodbye, sir, good-bye; you have taken a great load off my mind. My reason has stood the strain of one of your agricultural articles, and I know that nothing can ever unseat it now. Good-bye, sir."

I felt a little uncomfortable about the crippings and arsons this person had been entertaining himself with, for I could not help feeling remotely accessory to them. But these thoughts were quickly banished, for the regular editor walked in! [I thought to myself, now if you had gone to Egypt as I

recommended you to, I might have had a chance to get my hand in; but you wouldn't do it, and here you are. I sort of expected you.]

The editor was looking sad and perplexed and dejected.

He surveyed the wreck which that old rioter and these two young farmers had made, and then said, "This is a sad business - a very sad business. There is the mucilage-bottle broken, and six panes of glass, and a spittoon and two candlesticks. But that is not the worst. The reputation of the paper is injured - and permanently, I fear. True, there never was such a call for the paper before, and it never sold such a large edition or soared to such celebrity; - but does one want to be famous for lunacy, and prosper upon the infirmities of his mind? My friend, as I am an honest man, the street out here is full of people, and others are roosting on the fences, waiting to get a glimpse of you, because they think you crazy. And well they might after reading your editorials. They are a disgrace to journalism. Why, what put it into your head that you could edit a paper of this nature? You do not seem to know the first rudiments of agriculture. You speak of a furrow and a harrow as being the same thing; you talk of the moulting season for cows; and you recommend the domestication of the pole-cat on account of its playfulness and its excellence as a ratter! Your remark that clams will lie quiet if music be played to them was superfluous - entirely superfluous. Nothing disturbs clams. Clams always lie quiet. Clams care nothing whatever about music. Ah, heavens and earth, friend! if you had made the acquiring of ignorance the study of your life, you could not have graduated with higher honor than you could to-day. I never saw anything like it. Your observation that the horse-chestnut as an article of commerce is steadily gaining in favor is simply calculated to destroy this journal. I want you to throw up your situation and go. I want no more holiday - I could not enjoy it if I had it. Certainly not with you in my chair. I would always stand in dread of what you might be going to recommend next. It makes me lose all patience every time I think of your discussing oyster-beds under the head of 'Landscape Gardening.' I want you to go. Nothing on earth could persuade me to take another holiday. Oh! why didn't you tell me you didn't know anything about agriculture?"

"Tell you, you cornstalk, you cabbage, you son of a cauliflower? It's the first time I ever heard such an unfeeling remark. I tell you I have been in the editorial business going on fourteen years, and it is the first time I ever heard of a man's having to know anything in order to edit a newspaper. You turnip! Who write the dramatic critiques for the second-rate papers? Why, a parcel of promoted shoemakers and apprentice apothecaries, who know just as much about good acting as I do about good farming and no more. Who review the books? People who never wrote one. Who do up the heavy leaders on finance? Parties who have had the largest opportunities for knowing nothing about it. Who criticize the Indian campaigns? Gentlemen who do not know a war-whoop from a wigwam, and who never have had to run a foot race with a tomahawk, or pluck arrows out of the several members of their families to build the evening camp-fire with. Who write the temperance appeals, and clamor about the flowing bowl? Folks who will never draw another sober breath till they do it in the grave. Who edit the agricultural papers, you - yam? Men, as a general thing, who fail in the poetry line, yellow-covered novel line, sensation-drama line, city-editor line, and finally fall back on agriculture as a temporary reprieve from the poorhouse. You try to tell me anything about the newspaper business! Sir, I have been through it from Alpha to Omaha, and I tell you that the less a man knows the bigger the noise he makes and the higher the salary he commands. Heaven knows if I had been ignorant instead of cultivated, and impudent instead of diffident, I could have made a name for myself in this cold selfish world. I take my leave, sir. Since I have been treated as you have treated me, I am perfectly willing to go. But I have done my duty. I have fulfilled my contract as far as I was permitted to do it. I said I could make your paper of interest to all classes - and I have. I said I could run your circulation up to twenty thousand copies, and if I had had two more weeks I'd have done it. And I'd have given you the best class of readers that ever an agricultural paper had - not a farmer in it, nor a solitary individual who could tell a water-melon tree from a peach-vine to save his life. You are the loser by this rupture, not me, Pie-plant. Adios."

I then left.



## TOBACCO COMPANY SUES SECONDHAND SMOKERS

By NIGEL FLEMING

CHARLOTTE, N.C. -- The B.S. Raleigh Tobacco Company is fighting back. They're tired of people enjoying their products for free. That's why they've filed a \$5 billion classaction lawsuit to penalize millions of secondhand smokers.

"If people ain't gonna buy our cigarettes, they shouldn't be able to enjoy other people's smoke," declared Raleigh President Frank Thermal.

B.S. Raleigh, which gives consumers a complimentary lung X-ray with every 50 cartons smoked, currently employs 3,000 people, but Thermal expects that number to double when on-leave workers return from cancer, emphysema and heart disease treatment.

Lorraine Wilson, 49, founder of the Environmental Tobacco Smokers Society, sucks in as much passive smoke as she can. "I enjoy the mainstream variety, which is exhaled by smokers. But my husband, Tim "Iron Lung", prefers sidestream smoke, which comes directly from lit cigarettes."

The Wilsons frequent bars that don't obey the no-smoking law. "We nurse a beer and suck in as much secondhand smoke as we can," Lorraine revealed. "We're inhaling 4,000 chemical compounds, but only about 60 cause cancer. My favorite is nicotine."

Tim enjoys his hacking cough and reduced lung function. "It makes me seem cool," he bragged. "As for all the phlegm, I can outspit any punk in the bar."

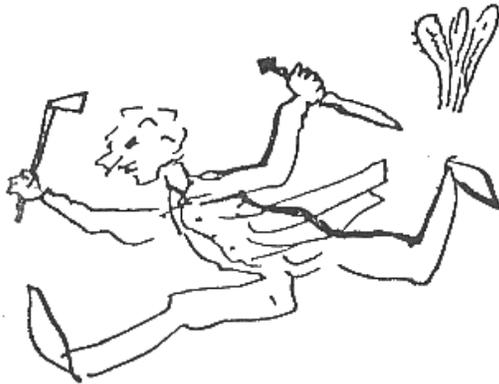
Thermal hates people like the Wilsons. "How'd they like it if I hung out at their bakery and got fat sucking in donut fumes. They'd probably sue me, which is what I'm gonna do to them."





That is an editor. He is trying to think of a word. He props his feet on a chair, which is the editor's way; then he can think better. I do not care much for this one; his ears are not alike; still, editor suggests the sound of Edward, and he will do. I could make him better if I had a model, but I made this one from memory. But is no particular matter; they all look alike, anyway. They are conceited and troublesome, and don't pay enough.

Another editor. That thing behind his ear is his pencil. Whenever he finds a bright thing in your manuscript he strikes it out with that. That does him good, and makes him smile and show his teeth, the way he is doing in the picture. This one has just been striking out a smart thing, and now he is sitting there with his thumbs in his vest-holes, gloating. They are full of envy and malice, editors are.



This editor is a critic. He has pulled out his carving-knife and his tomahawk and is starting after a book which he is going to have for breakfast.

That is a society editor, sitting there elegantly dressed, with his legs crossed in that indolent way, observing the clothes the ladies wear, so that he can describe them for his paper and make them out finer than they are and get bribes for it and become wealthy.



