

**Short Story Lesson Plan: “Journalism in Tennessee”**  
**Mark Twain Teachers Workshop – Mark Twain Museum**  
**June 19-23, 2006 – Hannibal, Missouri**

**Developed by:** Kathy Rolwes, Osage County RIII Fatima High School, Westphalia, Missouri

**Short Story Title:** “Journalism in Tennessee”

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

**Time Frame for Lesson:** Three – four class periods (one for introduction, reading and discussion of the story, one to two days to introduce and work on assignment and one for presentations).

**Background Information:** Mark Twain began his writing career as a reporter and worked on the following newspapers: the *Territorial Enterprise* in Virginia City, Nevada, the *Morning Call* in San Francisco, California, the *Sacramento Union* in Sacramento, California, and the *Daily Morning* in San Francisco, California. As a reporter, Twain would know that each newspaper has its own slant when presenting information.

**Literary/Language Arts Focus:** slant in journalism, humor, hyperbole, and creative writing

**State Standards:** Missouri Grade Level Expectations (2/20/04)

Reading Standard 1C: Apply decoding strategies to “problem solve” unknown words when reading;

Reading Standard 1E: Develop vocabulary through text;

Reading Standard 1F: Apply pre-reading strategies to aid comprehension;

Reading Standard 1H: Apply post-reading skills to comprehend and interpret text;

Reading Standard 1I: Compare, contrast, analyze and evaluate connections between information and relationships in various fiction and non-fiction works;

Reading Standard 2C: Use details from text to evaluate the effect of author’s style and complex literary techniques (including tone);

Writing Standard 1A: Apply a writing process to write effectively in various forms and types of writing;

Writing Standard 2B: Use conventions of capitalization in written text;

Writing Standard 2D: Use parts of speech correctly in written text;

Writing Standard 2E: In writing, use dictionary, spell-check and other resources to spell correctly;

Writing Standard 2F: In composing text, use a variety of sentence structure and length for stylistic effect, cohesive devices, and active voice construction;

Writing Standard 3E: Compose texts for various audiences and purposes, selecting and applying appropriate format, style, tone and point of view.

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

**Vocabulary:** infamy, countenance, portentous, inveterate, fulsome, propensity, disseminate, eradicate, calumny, vituperation, fusillade, sanguinary

**Materials:**

- A copy of *National Enquirer*, *The Globe*, *Weekly World News* or other similar tabloid
- Copies of local newspapers

**Technology Support:**

- Twain quotes about newspapers online at <http://www.twainquotes.com/newspaper.html>
- Online tabloids at <http://www.weeklyworldnews.com/> and <http://www.nationalenquirer.com/>
- Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics online at [http://www.spj.org/ethics\\_code.asp](http://www.spj.org/ethics_code.asp)

**Content Objectives:**

- Students will compare and contrast connections between Twain’s idea of journalism with present day according to attached scoring guide.
- Students will define vocabulary with 80% accuracy.
- Students will identify at least three examples of hyperbole.
- Students will identify and describe at least three examples of journalistic slant.
- Students will identify and describe at least three examples of humor.

**Related Twain Quotes/Stories:**

- “It has become a sarcastic proverb that a thing must be true if you saw it in a newspaper. That is the opinion intelligent people have of that lying vehicle in a nutshell. But the trouble is that the stupid people – who constitute the grand overwhelming majority of this and all other nations – do believe and are molded and convinced by what they get out of a newspaper, and there is where the harm lies.” (from *License of the Press* speech)
- “We like to read about rich people in the newspapers; the papers know it, and they do their best to keep this appetite liberally fed.” (from *Mark Twain in Eruption*)
- “There is no suffering comparable with that which a private person feels when he is for the first time pilloried in print.” (from *Life on the Mississippi*)
- “. . . news is history in its first and best form, its vivid and fascinating form, and . . . history is the pale and tranquil reflection of it.” (from *Mark Twain’s Autobiography*)
- “It seems to me that just in the ratio that our newspapers increase, our morals decay. The more newspapers the worse morals. Where we have one newspaper that does good, I think we have fifty that do harm. We ought to look upon the establishment of a newspaper of the average pattern in a virtuous village as a calamity.” (from *License of the Press* speech)
- “The old saw says, “Let sleeping dogs lie.” Right. Still when there is much at stake it is better to get a newspaper to do it.” (from *Following the Equator*)
- “How I Edited an Agricultural Paper” (short story by Mark Twain)

**The Lesson:**

| <b>Time</b> | <b>Teacher Activity/Questions</b>  | <b>Student Activity</b> |
|-------------|--|-------------------------|
| 5–10 min.   | Hook: Read an outrageous headline from the <i>National Enquirer</i> (or other tabloid). Intro to lesson: Read aloud a brief article from the <i>National Enquirer</i> (or other tabloid). Read a second article on the same topic from a local daily newspaper. Ask students the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did the first article exaggerate anything? What? How?</li> <li>• Did the first article omit any information? For example?</li> <li>• Which article do you believe is more accurate or reliable? Why?</li> </ul> | Listen and respond      |
| 15-20 min.  | Explain Twain’s background and experiences in journalism. Introduce key vocabulary through listing the words on whiteboard/overhead/chalkboard and then questioning. Have students draw their own pictures and captions for the vocabulary words. Provide illustrations for vocabulary as is appropriate. Review the meaning of hyperbole; ask students to provide examples. Discuss the concept of “slant” (bias, spin) in journalism; provide examples.  | Listen and respond      |
| 10 min.     | Read “Journalism in Tennessee” aloud. Students can follow along with their own copy or simply listen.  | Listen                  |
| 20–30 min.  | Question/discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the funny parts of the story? What makes them funny?</li> <li>• How does Twain use hyperbole in the story?</li> <li>• Why does Twain use hyperbole in the story?</li> </ul>   | Listen and respond      |

|                     |  |   |
|---------------------|--|---|
|                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are newspapers today allowed to use hyperbole? Why or why not?</li> <li>• According to Twain, what is the purpose of journalism?</li> <li>• Has this purpose changed? If so, what is the purpose of journalism today?</li> <li>• How do the subjects of media attention react the same or differently today than they did in Twain’s story?</li> <li>• What is slant in journalism?</li> <li>• What slant is the editor using in the short story?</li> <li>• What slant was the reporter using in the tabloid article read aloud to you at the beginning of the class? The newspaper article? How did this article use their slant to make you a believer?</li> <li>• Should reporters follow certain codes of conduct? Why or why not?</li> <li>• (Read aloud from the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics.) Do today’s journalists follow these codes of conduct?</li> <li>• (Read the first quote listed under “Related Twain Quotes/Stories.”) Do you agree? Why or why not?</li> <li>• Are we, as a society, educated readers? Why or why not?</li> </ul> |   |
| 10 min.             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Closure: Review by asking students to summarize the story, point out the humor, and define slant.</li> <li>• Assign homework (select from options below). Students will bring in drafts, outlines for the next day.</li> </ul>  | Listen and respond  |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Day | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocabulary quiz; score in class; discuss meanings and usage</li> <li>• Circulate and provide feedback; encourage peer exchange and review.</li> </ul>   | Take quiz; participate in discussion; interact with other students to edit, and revise assessment option; peer evaluate |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> Day | Facilitate presentations by students.  | Present   |

**Assessment/Evaluation (Options for Mastery):**

Students will explain humor and hyperbole in class discussion by suggesting examples. Students will demonstrate at least 80% mastery of vocabulary through a verbal or written quiz.

Students will create a project comparing and contrasting connections between Twain’s idea of the purpose of journalism and the purpose of journalism today. Students must earn at least 80% for mastery. (See scoring guide below.) Possible projects include:

- Write an essay comparing and contrasting the change of purpose in journalism (from Twain’s perspective then and from your perspective now)
- Write both a tabloid article and a newspaper article about the same topic (using the style of Twain’s hyperbole for the tabloid article and an obvious “slant” in the newspaper article)
- Create a color political cartoon with caption for both a tabloid and a local paper about the same topic (using hyperbole in one and slant in the other)
- Write a “Daily Show” style news story and a local evening news story about the same real event (adhere to stated guidelines above)
- Students can suggest an appropriate topic

**Scoring Guide for Assessment:**

|  | 3 (Meets Expectations)   | 2 (Approaches Expectations)   | 1 (Expectations Not Met)   |
|--|--|---|--|
| Grammar (10%)                          | Less than three punctuation and grammatical errors                               | Four to seven punctuation and grammatical errors                              | More than seven punctuation and grammatical errors                           |
| Spelling (10%)                         | Less than three spelling errors  | Four to seven spelling errors   | More than seven spelling errors  |
| Creativity (10%)                       | Work is highly creative and unusual  | Work has been done before, but is still handled creatively                    | Work is unoriginal and/or presented without creativity                       |
| At least 3 excellent comparisons (70%) | Includes excellent comparisons and contrasts; work requires little to no editing | Work includes good comparisons and contrasts but would benefit from a rewrite | Work shows no evidence of comparisons nor contrasts. Work must be rewritten. |

**Strategies used in lesson to support learners with special needs, (e.g., English language learners, gifted, learning disabled, etc.):**

- Background, prior knowledge, and vocabulary are 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.
- Opportunities are provided for discussion and interaction.
- Options for assessment provide choice and promote student interest.
- The use of primary documents provides real life examples and is especially effective with gifted students

**Possible Follow-up Activities:**

- Have students search for real newspaper titles that give clues to slant and find articles that support (or denounce) the slant.
- Write a code of conduct and ethical behavior for teenagers and their parents.
- Adapt the story for a readers' theatre performance and act it out as a class.
- Read related stories such as "How I Edited an Agricultural Paper" and compare/contrast.
- Analyze taped news broadcasts for examples of hyperbole and slant.

**Possible Guest Speakers/Other Resources:**

- Reporter/Editor from a local paper
- Excerpts from *The Daily Show* at [http://www.comedycentral.com/shows/the\\_daily\\_show/index.jhtml](http://www.comedycentral.com/shows/the_daily_show/index.jhtml)
- News clips from tabloid type news shows