

**Short Story Lesson Plan: “The £1,000,000 Bank Note”**  
**Mark Twain Teachers Workshop - Mark Twain Museum**  
**June 19-23, 2006 – Hannibal, Missouri**  
**Developed by:** Kathleen Twombly, DeKalb High School, DeKalb, MO

**Short Story Title:** “The £1,000,000” Bank Note by Mark Twain

**Synopsis:** Two wealthy brothers of London, England, disagree over what would happen if some penniless individual were loaned a one million pound bill for thirty days. To solve their argument, they engage in an experiment with a Yankee, Henry Adams. The overall effect is cheerfully melodramatic and appeals to fantasies about windfalls of money; the reader can share Adams’ pleasure in the surprise and awe he arouses by pulling the one million pound bill from his tattered pocket to pay for his purchases. This amusing story indicts a society in which the mere show of wealth can so quickly raise one’s standing.

**Grade Level:** 7-9 (can be adapted for other grade levels)

**Background Information:**

Samuel (Sam) Clemens was born in Florida, Missouri, on November 30, 1835, in a small two-room cabin. With his family, he moved to Hannibal, Missouri in 1839. Young Sam often returned to Florida, Missouri, to spend summers on the farm of his uncle John Quarles’ farm. While there, a slave, Uncle Dan’l entertained Sam by telling tales. Uncle Dan’l would later become a character (Jim) in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Following the death of Sam’s father in 1847, 12 year-old Sam quit school to work on Hannibal’s newspaper as a “printer’s devil” (a printer’s assistant). He later became a traveling writer as he traveled the world. Sam loved the Mississippi River and even became a steamboat pilot. Sam’s pen name, Mark Twain, was derived from a river term “mark twain” which meant safe water. Samuel Clemens first used his pen name—Mark Twain—as a newspaper reporter for the *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise* at the age of twenty-eight. In 1861, Twain traveled to Europe and the Holy Land writing and recording events all along the way. He later published a book *Innocents Abroad* about that trip. In 1870, he married Olivia Langdon who came from a wealthy family; they had four children: Langdon, Susy, Clara, and Jean. Throughout his life, Mark Twain knew that he had been born under Halley’s Comet. He predicted that he would “go out with the comet.” Mark Twain died on April 21, 1910 – and Halley’s Comet was, indeed, in the sky.

Background needed for this story would include a discussion of the times (late 1890s), the setting (London, England), and the concept of a million pounds. Ask students if any of them have traveled to a foreign country. If so, encourage them to discuss currency, customs, culture, etc.

**Literary/Language Arts Focus:** symbolism, irony, tone, sarcasm, vocabulary

**State Standards:** Missouri—Communication Arts Show-Me Standards For Assessment

CA 2: 1.5 The student will comprehend and evaluate written, visual and oral presentations and works; students will find and identify information presented in the story.

CA 2: 1.6 The student will define words in the story using context clues, and explain how the clues help them figure out the meaning. They will identify symbolism as well as compare and contrast the values and intent of the characters.

**Curriculum Connections:** travel (geography); calculating currency exchange (math)

**Vocabulary:** pound, banknote, flunkey, pluck, coil, nettled, ducally nobby, waistcoat, fortnight, perpendicular lunch, dissipated, cribbage, dissipated, synopsisized

**Materials:** picture of Samuel Clemens/Mark Twain; photo of his birth home and/or boyhood home; photo of the home provided to Clemens and his wife by her wealthy father as a wedding gift; a copy of the short story for each student; visual definitions of vocabulary (e.g., British pound, waistcoat, etc.); poster/tag paper; magazines, scissors, glue, markers, string, etc.

**Technology Support:**

- [www.twainquotes.com/Money.html](http://www.twainquotes.com/Money.html)
- [www.suhsd.k12.ca.us/mvm/netlink/1twain8/](http://www.suhsd.k12.ca.us/mvm/netlink/1twain8/)
- [www.readbookonline.net](http://www.readbookonline.net)
- Currency and exchange rates/historic look-up of prices then and now: <http://www.x-rates.com/>

**Content Objectives:**

- Students will compare real events of Mark Twain's life to events of the story.
- Students will identify point-of-view, its purpose, and reliability by citing two examples.
- Students will describe the tone of the story using four examples.
- Students will identify irony using three examples.
- Students will use symbolism to describe the use of social class and values, money, and clothing as symbols with at least two supporting details.

**Related Twain Quotes/Stories:**

- "Some men worship rank, some worship heroes, some worship power, some worship God; over these ideals they dispute and cannot unite—but, they all worship money." (from *Mark Twain's Notebook*)
- "The lack of money is the root of all evil." (from *More Maxims of Mark*, Johnson, 1927)
- "Honest poverty is a gem that even a King might be proud to call his own, but I wish to sell out. I have sported that kind of jewelry long enough." (from a letter to the San Francisco *Alta California*, written 5/26/1867, published 7/21/1867)
- "People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money...have pierced themselves with many griefs." (1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 6:0,10; Serendipity New Testament Bible)

**The Lesson:**

<b>Time-Day 1</b>	<b>Teacher Activity/Questions</b>	<b>Student Activity</b>
10 min.	Hook: Ask, "Is the love of money the root of evil?" ( <i>Note to teachers: Display appropriate Twain quotes around the classroom during the teaching of this story along with the photos listed above.</i> )	Listen & respond
5-10 min.	Some people who have won a large amount of money have said, 'It's the worst thing that ever happened to me.' Why would they feel that way?	Listen & respond
Remainder of class period	Read: Background information about Clemens/Twain. Explain that Twain had been to London, England; although he is not a character in this short story, he was familiar with the setting. Explore students' experiences and prior knowledge regarding the setting of the story. Point-of-view: Ask, "What are the advantages and disadvantages of first-person point-of-view?" stories. Ask students to provide examples. Vocabulary: Introduce and discuss/explain vocabulary words that will be encountered in the story. Discuss: symbols of success; attitudes of wealthy toward the less fortunate; success; sarcasm/irony Closure: Review discussion points; ask students to research (as homework) Twain's financial history and to be able to supply one fact the following day. Also ask them to be prepared to name one symbol of wealth and/or success.	Listen & respond
<b>Time-Day 2</b>	<b>Teacher Activity/Questions</b>	<b>Student Activity</b>
15-25 min.	Hook: Show a picture of a British pound or an actual pound. Ask if students know the value, exchange rate, etc. Review yesterday's discussion; ask students to share their Twain facts and symbols of wealth/success.	Listen & respond

<p>Remainder of the class period</p>	<p>Read the story aloud in class allowing time for questions, clarification, and discussion. Students can follow along with their own copy or just listen.</p> <p>Questions/discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the tone of the story? (humorous, ironic, sarcastic)</li> <li>• How do you know?</li> <li>• <u>Humor</u>—Henry’s appearance in rags; the pear; buying everything without paying a cent, he says, “My opinion of those people changed, I can tell you!” The tailor claims his employee can’t tell a “millionaire from a pauper.”</li> <li>• <u>Irony</u>—Henry is rescued by a boat bound for London, he is penniless, he just happens to be near Portland Place when the brothers are arguing; he falls in love with Portia (she’s the step-daughter of Abel—one of the brothers who made the bet) etc.</li> <li>• <u>Sarcasm</u>—Henry calls the servant “gorgeous flunkey.” Henry states: “...a bet, which is the English way of settling everything.” The tailor said, “I’d only expect <i>gentlemen</i> like you to carry large change.”</li> <li>• There are other instances; have students identify them.)</li> <li>• How long do you think it took Henry to reach London in the small brig?</li> <li>• What kinds of work might he have had to do aboard the small brig? (Cook, clean, swab the decks, etc.)</li> <li>• What had the brothers been discussing, and to what did it lead?</li> <li>• Why was Henry chosen?</li> <li>• What did Henry do first with the money?</li> <li>• What happened? (Henry thought the brothers intended to give him a “one-pounder.”)</li> <li>• What did he do then, and what did he discover?</li> <li>• What did Henry try to figure out about the brothers and the bank note?</li> <li>• What was his next purchase? What happened?</li> <li>• “...but for breakfast I stuck by Harris’s humble feeding-house, where I had got my first meal...I was the making of Harris.” What did Henry mean by this statement?</li> <li>• Why did Henry occasionally wear his old rags?</li> <li>• With whom did Henry live and why?</li> <li>• Who recognized Henry from Frisco?</li> <li>• How did Miss Langham react when Henry told her the truth about the money? Why?</li> <li>• What did Lloyd Hastings want of Henry? What did Henry suggest?</li> <li>• When the brothers returned to London, what did they learn about Henry’s personal and financial situation?</li> <li>• What “situation” of Abel’s did Henry want?</li> <li>• What does Henry mean when he says—“Try me—oh, I beg of you!</li> </ul>	<p>Listen &amp; respond</p>
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	<p>Only try me 30-40 years, and if ____.” (Note to teachers: If students do not identify the connection between this comment and that of Jervis Langdon when Mark Twain proposed to Langdon’s daughter, Olivia, be sure to point this out.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What happened to the bank note?</li> <li>• Did Henry end up a wealthy man? How do we know?</li> </ul> <p>Closure: Following the discussion, review the stated content objectives for this lesson. Explain that the following class period will be used for students to demonstrate their mastery of these objectives. Describe the options for mastery, and encourage them to bring in materials that might be used the following day (e.g., magazines, newspapers, etc.). Encourage them to be thinking about which option they will select and to begin preparations as homework. Provide scoring guide with list of options for students.</p>	
<b>Time-Day 3</b>	<b>Teacher Activity/Questions</b>	<b>Student Activity</b>
5-10 min.	<p>Hook: Play Beatles song, “Can’t Buy Me Love” for students; provide a copy of the lyrics or show lyrics using the overhead projector. Intro: Discuss “the kind of things that money just can’t buy.” Include discussion of the MasterCard commercials (Plane tickets: \$600; hotel: \$400; seeing your grandparents for the first time in three years: “Priceless.”) Review lesson objectives. Have materials ready for students to begin their projects.</p>	Listen & respond
Remainder of class period	<p>Circulate and facilitate</p> <p>Closure: Ask students to share their progress. Tell them that they can finish/finesse their projects as homework. The following day students will be expected to turn in a completed project and present it to the class. Projects should then be displayed in the classroom.</p>	Work on projects

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

Some assessment of content objectives will occur during class discussions (e.g., point-of-view, tone of story, irony, etc.) The following options are provided for students to 1) compare real events of Twain’s life to events of the story and 2) use symbolism to describe uses of social class and values along with symbols of wealth. All projects must be neat, accurate, and meet the stated requirements of the Scoring Guide by scoring a minimum of 80% (a score of at least 16/20).

- Create a two-sided mobile of symbols that reflect your own values on one side and the values depicted in the story on the other side. Include related Twain quotes and/or Twain facts. Include at least one “value” that money can’t buy. A minimum of 5 symbols per side is required.
- Create a poster or collage of symbols (minimum of 10) that reflect the values depicted in the story on the other side. Include related Twain quotes and/or Twain facts. Include at least one “value” that money can’t buy. (Creative option: Create a MasterCard ad that meets these criteria.)
- Create a word search or crossword puzzle using vocabulary from the story (with an emphasis on words that indicate symbolism). Minimum of 35 words.
- Design a picture postcard that reflects the setting of the story. Write a message “from Henry” to his former employer in Frisco that reveals his thoughts on social class and his standing in society.
- Design a picture postcard that reflects the setting of the story. Write a message “from Henry” to Mark Twain describing at least 3 things the two have in common.
- Create a timeline of Henry’s month-long adventure. Include at least 10 pictures/illustrations and at least 3 events that correspond with events from Twain’s life and a brief explanation of how they are related.
- Students can suggest an option, which is subject to approval by the teacher.

**Scoring Guide:**

Criteria	Possible Score
Grammar and punctuation	5=Free of punctuation and grammatical errors 3=Few punctuation and grammatical errors 1=Several punctuation and grammatical errors
Spelling	5=Free of spelling errors 3=Few spelling errors 1=Several spelling errors
Creativity	5=Highly creative, unusual, and interesting; neat and attractive presentation 3=Idea has been done before, but is still handled creatively; eye-catching presentation that is relatively neat 1=Idea is unoriginal and presented without creativity; sloppy and/or unattractive presentation
Symbolism <b>OR</b> Twain comparisons	5=Provides excellent examples of symbolism <b>OR</b> provides at least 3 accurate comparisons between Twain's life and the events of the story 3=Provides few examples of symbolism <b>OR</b> provides few (or several inaccurate) comparisons between Twain's life and the events of the story 1=Provides no examples of symbolism <b>OR</b> provides no (or inaccurate) comparisons between Twain's life and the events of the story

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

- Background, prior knowledge, and vocabulary discussion are provided before reading to support comprehension.
- Visuals are provided for some of the vocabulary.
- Reading aloud allows the students to hear inflections that carry meaning.
- Opportunities are provided for discussion and interaction.
- Options for assessment provide choice and promote student interest.

**Possible Follow-up Activities:**

- Read related short stories, such as *The Princess and the Tin Box*, *You Can't Take It With You*, and *How Much Land Does A Man Need?*
- Have students write a short essay titled "I Wouldn't Take a Million Dollars for \_\_\_\_\_." They must justify why their choice is priceless.
- Write an extension of Twain's story that shows how the events impacted Henry's life over the course of many years.
- Research philanthropic organizations (such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) and report on how wealthy people really do support those who are much less fortunate.
- Establish an ongoing class project that would support a worthy cause (homeless shelters, etc.); encourage students to organize appropriate fundraising events, etc.
- Write a sarcastic or ironic story in the style of this story.

**Possible Guest Speakers/Other Resources:**

Movies to use with this story (if not the entire movie, excerpts can be shown to support the theme of the story):

- *Man With A Million* -1953 adaptation of Twain's story starring Gregory Peck as Henry Adams.
- *My Fair Lady* - A snobbish phonetics professor agrees to a wager that he can take a poor, uneducated flower girl and make her presentable in high society. This is based upon the novel *Pygmalion*.
- *Great Expectations* - The 1989 version by Disney. A bitter, wealthy spinster is thought to be the person responsible for Pip's rise from rags to riches. Pip becomes ashamed of his family and is shocked when he discovers his benefactor.

- *Trading Places* - A down and out street hustler trades places with a well-to-do investor. This movie stars Eddie Murphy and is rated R for language. Excerpts could be selected by the teacher prior to viewing (such as the scene where the two gentlemen make the bet).
- *A Million to Juan* - A man wins the lottery.

Possible guest speakers:

- President of local United Way or other charitable organization
- Local college professor that specializes in sociology to discuss societal values and symbolism as it relates to the story

Song Lyrics:

"Can't Buy Me Love" (Artists: The Beatles; Words and Music by John Lennon and Paul McCartney)

Can't buy me lo-ove, lo-ove  
Can't buy me lo-ove

I'll buy you a diamond ring my friend  
If it makes you feel all right  
I'll get you anything my friend  
If it makes you feel all right  
I don't care too much for money  
Money can't buy me love

I'll give you all I've got to give  
If you say you love me too  
I may not have a lot to give  
What I've got I'll give to you  
I don't care too much for money  
Money can't buy me love

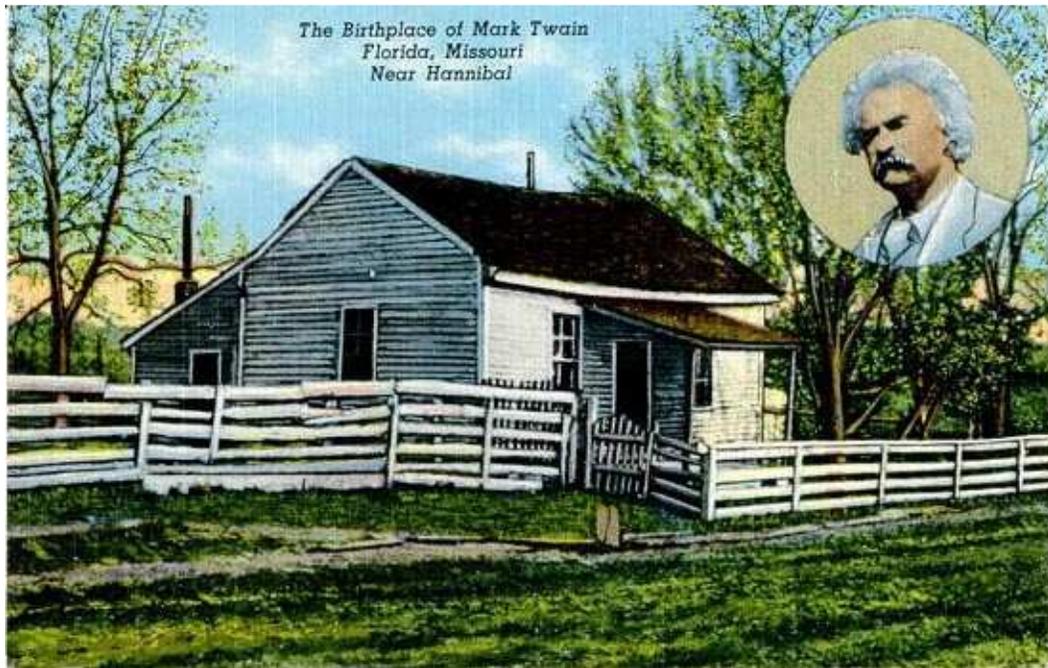
Can't buy me lo-ove  
Everybody tells me so  
Can't buy me lo-ove  
No, no, no, no

Say you don't need no diamond ring  
And I'll be satisfied  
Tell me that you want the kind of things  
That money just can't buy  
I don't care too much for money  
Money can't buy me love

Can't buy me lo-ove  
Everybody tells me so  
Can't buy me lo-ove  
No, no, no, no

Say you don't need no diamond ring  
And I'll be satisfied  
Tell me that you want the kind of things  
That money just can't buy  
I don't care too much for money  
Money can't buy me love

Can't buy me lo-ove, lo-ove  
Can't buy me lo-o-ove



Postcard depicting Twain's humble beginnings



Five pound note