

**Short Story Lesson Plan: “The Californian’s Tale”**  
**Mark Twain Teachers Workshop - Mark Twain Museum**  
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**Short Story Title:** “The Californian’s Tale” (Written in 1892)

**Grade Level:** 7th & 8th grade (but can be modified for high school level)

**Time Frame for Lesson:** 5 class periods (one partial lesson for prewriting, one for vocabulary, one for reading story and responding, two for assessment); this can be modified to be longer or shorter as desired.

**Background Information:** Samuel Clemens had been traveling overseas in 1892 when this story was written. He had just learned that his wife’s health concerns were not as severe as he had feared. This story is one of two novels, five stories, and nine essays written during that summer. The inspiration to write this story came from the miners of Angel’s Camp during the winter of 1864-1865. Clemens had been impressed by the aging miners who were unwilling to leave the West after years of searching for gold. The notes and a rough plot of the story are in Twain’s notebook from 1882, but it wasn’t written as a story until a decade later. This is one of Twain’s stories that shows he had a sensitive side. Other works that are similarly sentimental include “Was It Heaven? or Hell?”, “Death Disk”, “A Dog’s Tale”, and “A Horse’s Tale”. This tale lacks his usual wit, irony, and humor, as well as sophisticated narrative. It is an excellent example of Twain’s command of setting and plot. According to Twain scholar Jim Wilson, “In short, the story testifies to the remarkable resilience of the human spirit.”

**Literary/Language Arts Focus:** context clues, visualizing, predicting/checking predictions, foreshadow, plot development, mood

**State Standards:** Missouri Grade Level Expectations

- 7.CA.RE.2.C. TLW use details from text to
  - a. identify theme, plot and sub-plot, and various types of conflict
  - b. analyze cause and effect
  - c. identify and explain point of view and mood
  - d. determine how an incident foreshadows a future event
  - e. evaluate the problem-solving processes of characters and the effectiveness of solutions
  
- 8.CA.RE.1.E TLW develop vocabulary through text, using
  - a. roots and affixes
  - b. context clues
  - c. glossary, dictionary, and thesaurus
  
- 8.CA.RE.1.G TLW orchestrate strategies (during reading) to
  - a. self-question and correct
  - b. infer
  - c. visualize
  - d. predict and check using cueing systems (i. meaning, ii. structure, iii. visual)
  
- 8.CA.RE.1.I. TLW compare, contrast, analyze, and evaluate connections between
  - a. information and relationships in various fiction and nonfiction works
  - c. text ideas and the world by identifying and explaining how literature reflects a culture and historic time frame
  
- 8.CA.RE.2.C. TLW use details from text to
  - a. analyze point of view, mood, and theme
  - b. interpret actions, behaviors, and motives of characters
  - c. evaluate the problem-solving processes of characters, consequences of character's actions, and effectiveness of solutions

**Curriculum Connections:** California Gold Rush (history), daguerreotype (art history)

**Vocabulary:** tramping, balmy, populous, counterpane, profanation, furtive, daguerreotype, supplicating, tranquil, whence, imploring, cow (not bovine), bodings

**Materials:**

- Prepared cards with definition of each vocabulary word and cards with each vocabulary word for Inside-Outside Circle vocabulary activity.
- Copies of “The Californian’s Tale”
- PowerPoint depicting mining camps/homes of miners

**Technology Support:**

- Elmo (overhead) projector to provide enlarged copy of short story for entire class
- Online daguerreotype source  
[http://www.yesnet.yk.ca/schools/carcross/album\\_goldrush/index.htm](http://www.yesnet.yk.ca/schools/carcross/album_goldrush/index.htm)
- Another online daguerreotype source  
[http://www.calcgoldrush.com/part2/images/resting\\_miner400.jpg](http://www.calcgoldrush.com/part2/images/resting_miner400.jpg)
- Online source for “The Californian’s Tale”  
<http://www.worldwideschool.org/library/books/lit/marktwain/TheCaliforniansTale/Chap1.html>

**Content Objectives:**

- Students will determine how an incident foreshadows a future event by citing two examples of foreshadowing from the text.
- Students will match vocabulary words and sentences using them correctly in context with 80% vocabulary.
- Students will orchestrate strategies (during reading) to visualize, question, and predict by writing one page in response to a story, discussing how each strategy aided comprehension.
- Students will analyze information and relationships in various fiction and works by writing a persuasive piece to compare a Mark Twain quote and “The Californian’s Tale” and scoring at least a 3 on the holistic scoring guide.

**Related Twain Quotes/Stories:**

“The Death Disk” - This short story, published in 1901, is well-suited to teaching the concept of foreshadowing. There are many places within the text that allow the reader to imagine what will happen as the plot continues. Frequently in the story, new visions of the resolution to the conflict and ending of the story flood the reader’s mind. Possible lessons could include orally reading the story, stopping periodically to allow discussion/prediction. It would also be possible, and maybe preferable, in order to maintain continuity, to read the story without stopping. Once the story is over, students could discuss what they thought was going to happen and what parts of the texts led their thinking. (See additional quotes under “Assessment.”)

**THE LESSON (Vocabulary):**

Time	Teacher Activity/Questions	Student Activity
5-10 minutes of prep time	Vocabulary Development—Before the lesson, the teacher should prepare three sets of cards for an Inside-Outside Circle (Kagan). Each set should be on a different color of paper, or should in some other way be distinct from each other. One set of cards will contain vocabulary words from the passage. Words to prepare include <i>tramping, balmy, populous, counterpane, profanation, furtive, daguerreotype, supplicating, tranquil, whence, imploring, cow (not bovine), and bodings</i> . A matching set of cards will contain definitions of words that reflect the appropriate context for the story. The third set of cards will contain sentences using each word in the same context it is used in the text.	Teacher preparation-no student activity

10-20 minutes	Hook: Ask students, "When is the word <i>cow</i> not a noun?" If students cannot think of an example, read the sentence from "The Californian's Tale" that uses <i>cow</i> . Discuss other terms, eliciting background knowledge students may have.	Listen and respond
10 minutes	As students develop awareness of the terms, develop two circles, one literally inside the other with an equal number of students in each circle. Distribute word cards to students in one circle and definition cards to the other. Students will pair with someone from the opposite circle, reading each other's cards. If they have a match, the pair will leave the circles. Students will continue to move around the circles, looking for a match. (Students can do this with or without talking, depending on the teacher's needs, although interaction is recommended for English language learners.) Once pairs are together, students should work together to use the word in a sentence that shows understanding of the meaning. Repeat if needed.	Read, match terms and definitions, work with partner to create new sentence using term correctly
10 minutes	Closure: When students are proficient with the term/definition cards, switch to sentence and definition sets of cards. This time circles will work to find the definition that works for the underlined word in each sentence.	Read, match context clue sentences and definitions

**THE LESSON (Orchestrating Strategies During Reading):**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Teacher Activity/Questions</b>	<b>Student Activity</b>
20-30 minutes	Pre-writing—A week or two before reading "The Californian's Tale", allow students time to write in response to this question: "When you are gone, how do you want to be remembered?" While this may seem a morbid question, ask students to consider how other people will think of them when they are gone.	Write in writing notebooks in response to a given prompt.
5-10 minutes	Hook: On the day after the vocabulary lesson, ask students what they know of the California Gold Rush. Show the PowerPoint of mining camp and cabin daguerreotypes to help access prior knowledge.	Listen and respond with background knowledge
5-10 minutes	Explain background of story and information about Mark Twain's time spent at Angel's Mining Camp. Do not get into his personal issues at the time the story was written. Rather, focus on his adventurous spirit when he traveled West as a young man.	Listen and respond
2-4 minutes	Set a purpose for reading by asking students to visualize the cabin and characters as they read "The Californian's Tale". Students can be given a sheet of white paper to make sketches and write predictions as the story progresses.	Listen
10-15 minutes	Read story aloud. Students can follow along on their own copy. They will also set their copy aside at times to work on a sketch, write a prediction, or jot down a question.	Listen, visualize, predict, draw/write
10-15 minutes	Questions/discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ How did you visualize the cabin, especially in comparison with other mining cabins of the time?</li> <li>✓ What predictions did you make at various points in the story? What led you to make each prediction? Which predictions were confirmed/refuted?</li> <li>✓ As I read this story, I kept thinking the wife was a mail-order bride. I wondered at how she loved this old miner so much when she was so young and beautiful. Did you wonder the same thing? If so, when did you</li> </ul>	Listen and respond

	<p>realize she wasn't a mail-order bride? If not, how did you place an old miner and young woman together in your mind?</p> <p>✓ What other questions went through your mind as we read this story?</p>	
As homework	Students will write in their Reading Response Notebooks, or in any format the class is accustomed to using, related to the discussion questions from class. Students should be reminded to include evidence of prediction, visualization, and questioning in their responses. It would also be interesting for students to reflect on their pre-writing about how others may remember them in relation to the way the wife is remembered in the tale. After reading this story, have their feelings changed?	Write in response to story in Reading Response Notebooks.
10-20 minutes	Students will return their reading responses on the following day. Provide students with further background information about how this story came to be written. (1864-1865 Clemens stayed in Angel's Camp, 1882 Clemens wrote rough plot outline in his notebook, 1892—after learning his wife's illness was not life-threatening—Clemens finally wrote "The Californian's Tale.") Ask students to consider the plot development of this story, and the actions of characters, in relation to this new information. How did Clemens' state of mind affect the mood of the piece? Lead discussion to include whether or not students think the way in which the characters helped the aging miner was appropriate. If they disagree, ask students to offer other solutions to the miner's lapses.	Return reading responses; listen and respond
1 ½ class periods	When it is clear students have a solid understanding of the story, begin writing assessment as described below. Allow another class period for students to complete writing.	Write in response to story and quote

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

Students will write responses to literature, analyzing information and relationships in various fiction and nonfiction works that show an understanding of theme and characters, using details/examples from the text as support. Students will write a short piece comparing/contrasting the motivations and actions of characters from "The Californian's Tale" with a quote from Mark Twain. All assignments must be edited for conventions to insure few errors in grammar/usage, punctuation, capitalization, and/or spelling are present. Precise and vivid language will be used while students clearly address the quote and provide specific and relevant details from the tale.

**Grading Rubric for Writing Assignment:**

The Six + 1 Writing Traits will be used to assess student writing. The prompt, quotes, and scoring guide are included with this lesson.

**"The Californian's Tale" Assessment**

Mark Twain loved to talk and loved to write. And people loved to listen and write down what he said. The quotes listed below are not from the story "The Californian's Tale," but each is in some way related to one or more characters from the tale.

You are a literary critic. Select a quote that Twain seems to be illustrating in "The Californian's Tale." Write a persuasive piece that defends Twain's point of view or argues against it, based on one or more characters from the text.

- ✓ “Of course, no man is entirely in his right mind at any time.” (from *The Mysterious Stranger*)
- ❖ “No man has a wholly undiseased mind...in one way or another all men are mad.” (from *The Memorable Assassination*)
  - “When we remember we are all mad, the mysteries of life disappear and life stands explained.”
  - “No woman or man really knows what perfect love is until they have been married a quarter of a century.”
  - “It is human to exaggerate the merits of the dead.” (from *Notebook*)
- “The universal brotherhood of man is our most precious possession, what there is of it.”
- “Grief can take care of itself; but to get the full value of a joy you must have somebody to divide it with.”
- “Don’t part with your illusions. When they are gone you may still exist, but you have ceased to live.” (from *Following the Equator*)
- ◆ “...man never does a single thing which has any first and foremost object except one—to secure peace of mind, spiritual comfort, for himself.” (from “What Is Man?”)
- “After all these years, I see that I was mistaken about Eve in the beginning; it is better to live outside the Garden with her than inside it without her.” (from *Adam’s Diary*)
- “Marriage—yes, it is the supreme felicity of life. I concede it. And it is also the supreme tragedy of life. The deeper the love, the surer the tragedy.” (from *a letter to Father Fitz-Simon, 6/5/1908*)
- ⇒ “Do your duty today and repent tomorrow.” (from *More Maxims of Mark*)

**“The Californian’s Tale” Scoring Guide**

**Student** \_\_\_\_\_

	<b>3 points</b>	<b>2 points</b>	<b>1 point</b>
<b>IDEAS</b>	Clearly addresses the topic and provides specific and relevant details/examples.	A clear topic is evident but lacks development with details from the text.	The topic is unclear and is not developed with details from the text.
<b>VOICE</b>	Clearly shows an awareness of audience and purpose.	Shows an awareness of audience and purpose but lacks development.	Shows no awareness of audience or purpose.
<b>ORGANIZATION</b>	Uses paragraphing appropriately.	Attempts to use paragraphing.	Does not use paragraphing.
<b>SENTENCE FLUENCY</b>	Contains sentences that are clear and varied in structure.	Contains some run-on sentences or fragments. May lack variety.	Contains sentences with errors & little variation in structure.
<b>WORD CHOICE</b>	Uses precise and vivid language.	Uses safe and common language.	Uses dull word choice and/or repetition.
<b>CONVENTIONS</b>	Contains few errors in grammar/usage, punctuation, capitalization, and/or spelling.	Contains many errors in grammar/usage, punctuation, capitalization, and/or spelling that do not interfere with meaning.	Frequent errors in grammar/ usage, punctuation, capitalization, and/or spelling interfere with meaning.
<b>PRESENTATION</b>	Writing is easy to read and margins are even. Name and date are present.	Paper is easy to read but margins may not be even. Name and date are present.	Writing makes paper difficult to read. No attention may be paid to margins.

**Analytic score for each writing trait is circled above.**

**Holistic (overall) Score** \_\_\_\_\_ /4

**Optional Reading Assessment/Evaluation (Options for mastery):**

Students will identify theme and plot, identify point of view and mood, and determine how an incident foreshadows a future event. The ending of "The Death Disk" will be rewritten by students, employing the theme, point of view, and mood of the text to pick up the tale from the point of an event that foreshadows an ending other than the one written by Twain.

**Grading Rubric for Reading Assignment:**

	<b>3 points</b>	<b>2 points</b>	<b>1 point</b>
<b>Theme/Plot</b>	New ending shows awareness of major plot points of original text and is written consistent to the theme.	New ending shows some awareness of plot and theme, but not consistently.	New ending does not develop from the plot of the original text and is inconsistent with the theme.
<b>Point of View</b>	Is written from the same point of view as the text.	Attempts to write from the same point of view but strays.	No attempt made to match point of view to original text.
<b>Mood</b>	Mood of new ending is consistent with original text.	Mood of new ending attempts to match original text.	Mood of new ending is inconsistent with original text.
<b>Foreshadowing</b>	New ending picks up from an event that clearly foreshadows an ending unlike Twain's and demonstrates understanding of previous events.	New ending attempts to pick up from an event that clearly foreshadows an ending unlike Twain's but may show misunderstanding of previous events.	New ending is inconsistent with previous events and does not show that the student understands how an event foreshadows future events.
<b>New Ending</b>	New ending shows creativity and is completely developed.	New ending attempts to resolve plot but may lack creativity.	New ending is abrupt and uncreative.

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

- Use of the daguerreotype PowerPoint presentation included with this lesson will help give students a better understanding of not only the look of that kind of picture, but of the mining cabins themselves.
- During the vocabulary lesson, it is more challenging to have students remain silent while they are moving within the circles. This requires everyone to be a reader. If needed, though, students can read from their cards in order to assist students who may have difficulty, such as English language learners.
- Scribes and readers can be used during assessment for students who have these modifications provided through an Individualized Education Plan.
- "The Californian's Tale" can be read silently by students or orally by the teacher, depending on the needs of the class. The language used by Twain lends itself to oral reading.
- Students interested in going further with this lesson can be encouraged to read one of the other related stories recommended earlier in this lesson.

**Possible Follow-up Activities:****Possible Guest Speakers/Other Resources:**

Negri, Paul. *The Wit and Wisdom of Mark Twain: A Book of Quotations*. Dover Publications, Inc.: Mineola, New York. 1999

Wilson, Jim. *Reader's Guide to Mark Twain Short Fiction*. G. K. Hall & Co.: Boston, MA, 1987

<b><u>WORD</u></b> <b><u>CARDS</u></b>	<b>bodings</b>	<b>imploring</b>
<b>tramping</b>	<b>tranquil</b>	<b>counterpane</b>
<b>furtive</b>	<b>whence</b>	<b>supplicating</b>
<b>populous</b>	<b>balmy</b>	<b>profanation</b>
<b>daguerreotype</b>		<b>cow</b> <b>(not bovine)</b>



<u>DEFINITION</u> <u>CARDS</u>	indications of something particular that is about to happen	earnestly asking for something
a long journey on foot, for example, as part of a walking tour	free of any disturbance or commotion; showing no anxiety	a cover for a bed and its bedding (dated)
with the appearance, or giving the impression, of somebody who has something to hide	to frighten somebody into submission or obedience	in a manner of humbly appealing to somebody with the power to grant the request
with a large number of inhabitants	used to describe weather that is pleasantly mild	to treat something sacred with disrespect
an early photographic process in which an image was produced on a light-sensitive silver or silver-coated plate and developed in mercury vapor		from what place or source



<p style="text-align: center;"><u>SENTENCE</u> <u>CARDS</u></p>	<p>The darkening sky gave ill _____ for our picnic plans.</p>	<p>The puppy gazed at his owner, with _____ eyes.</p>
<p>“I’m tired of _____ around all day,” whined the hiker.</p>	<p>The lake surface was _____ in the windless dusk.</p>	<p>The maid straightened the rumpled _____ on the bed.</p>
<p>With a _____ glance, my little brother grabbed a cookie from the jar.</p>	<p>Wrinkling my nose, I searched for the source from _____ the foul odor came.</p>	<p>Not wanting to give up, the child began _____ to his angered parents.</p>
<p>The ant colony was overflowing, having grown too _____.</p>	<p>The weather is so _____ that we should have a picnic today.</p>	<p>The gravestones tipped over on Halloween were a _____.</p>
<p>My grandmother was excited to find an old _____ of her parents.</p>		<p>The lead wolf of the pack found it easy to _____ weaker wolves.</p>

# Mine Camp Daguerreotypes

For use when studying  
"A Californian's Tale"

By Mark Twain

(Pictures compiled by Heather Erickson)

Accommodations were primitive...



Men of all ages worked the mines...

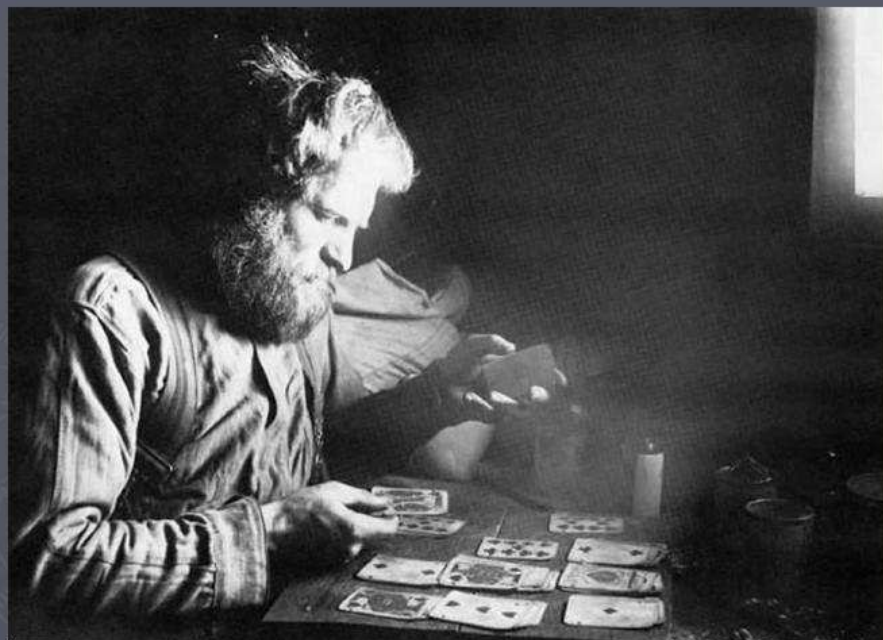


Men did their own  
cooking and cleaning...





A game of solitaire in a solitary life...



Notice the “woman’s touch”  
in this home...





It was a hard life...



Mining camps were deserted when  
the gold and silver ran out...

