

Short Story Lesson Plan
Mark Twain Teachers' Workshop ~ Mark Twain Museum
June 19 – 23, 2006 ~ Hannibal, Missouri
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Short Story Title: "Mrs. McWilliams and the Lightning" (1880)

Grade Level: Elementary Grades 3-4

Time Frame for Lesson: 1 day; depending on lesson extension - 1 week unit

Background Information: Events related to the time period, for example their (mis)conceptions about science, their superstitions, and their furniture.

Literary/Language Arts Focus:

- Outlining the text
- Finding absurdity, irony, analogous / metaphorical writing
- Further developing of vocabulary
- Increase reading with expression, fluency, and comprehension
- Identifying sensory details
- Dialogue

State Standards:

- **Communication Arts: Reading**
- Reading with fluency, accuracy, and expression
- Explain examples of sensory details and figurative language
- Use details from the text to organize a sequence of events
- Use details from the text to make predictions and inferences
- **Communication Arts: Listening**
- Demonstrates listening behaviors
- Listen for enjoyment and information
- Speak clearly, stay on topic, use appropriate volume and pace when sharing ideas

Curriculum Connections:

Language Arts and Art; Depending on lesson extension - Music, Science, and Social Studies/History

Vocabulary:

- Words - Fear, infirmities, reasoned, lightning, lightning rod, smote, deliberately, profligate, Providence, marksmanship, cipher, pantaloons, woolen stuffs, peril, augment, lunatic, remnant, imprudence, conductor, preservation
- Phrases - "takes the sand out of a person", "that sound smote dead the sharp speech that was on my lips", "as dark as the inside of an infidel", "I'll be hanged if...", "see the light of another day", and "and two of them died"
- Concepts - Dilemmas, Darned if you do, darned if you don't/No-win situation

Materials:

- Text (copyright is out of date, you can copy it by law), poster board or large paper, markers or colored pencils or crayons, and magnets or tape to hang up papers.
- Optional (but recommended) - helmet, saber, spurs, and bell
- Performance Guide (below); pictures of lightning

Note - You should predetermine how the students will be put into small groups (ideally groups of three) so that you can highlight ahead of time the different parts of the text that each group will focus on. You can either make one copy for each group or for each individual student. Just make sure that each student has the same parts highlighted as their group members.

Technology Support:

If computer access is available - students can type, draw, create sound effects, and assemble the storyboard through PowerPoint, Publisher, or other similar programs. Or, after creating a paper storyboard, students can videotape the scenes while they read the text. Either version would be great for sharing with parents or other classes.

Content Objectives:

- Students will identify 5 sensory details within the story.
- Students will interpret 2 metaphors from the story.
- Students will collaborate in organizing events in a chronological order.
- Students will retell the story using storyboard illustrations.

Related Twain quotes / Stories or Other Texts:

- “Thunder is good. Thunder is impressive. But it is lightning that gets the work done.” (from letter dated 8/28/08)
- “The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug.” (from letter to George Bainton dated 10/15/1888)
- “You can’t reason with your heart, it has its own laws and thumps about things which the intelligence scorns” - to show how Mr. McWilliams knows that he’s being put into a preposterous situation, but one that he is willing to go through because he loves his wife.
- “Experience of the McWilliamses with Membranous Croup” – Twain short story (1875) to provide character background
- “Mr. McWilliams and the Burglar Alarm” – Twain short story (1882) to provide character background

THE LESSON:

Introduction –

If possible, dress with helmet, saber, spurs, and bell, or at least some make-shift version. Welcome the students back (for example) after lunch or P.E., and ring the bell a few times. Ideally the outrageousness will ‘hook’ their attention. After they finish giggling, read the first paragraph aloud.

Developmental Procedures –

Ask, “What do you think that this story is about?” and “Why?” “Why do you think that I am wearing this?” and “Do you think that it (the costume) has anything to do with the story?” “How many characters have been introduced so far?” Just ask a few questions to make sure that they are comprehending, or are at least starting to think into the story.

Here you could suggest that the students listen for sensory details, and provide an example (it’s up to you though as to when you want them to start thinking about these. You may not want to interrupt your reading this much. It will depend on the ol’ attention span)

Recommend that you continue reading aloud. Read the rest of the story. Be sure to read with expression. This is really a silly and fun story that can be very easy for students to follow along with in their minds. It uses a lot of sensory details, where you can practically hear, see and feel what is happening.

Ask, “Why did Mr. McWilliams go through that ridiculous charade?” “How do you think that Mr. McWilliams felt when his friends discovered him?” “Does he stand behind what he did at the end of the story?” Here you might talk about the things that people do for the people they love / use the Twain quote about the heart and intelligence, or what the possible outcomes of his ‘no win situation’ were.

Here I would also discuss metaphors and ask the students to write their own (individual) interpretations / definitions of two of the metaphorical phrases mentioned earlier under vocabulary. For example, “and two of them died” - they laughed so much that they couldn’t recover - they probably couldn’t get up off the ground and couldn’t catch their breath. Or, it “takes the sand out of a person” - lightning makes you feel afraid and weak, but it’s all of a sudden like the life was just sucked out of you, and you’re hollow.

THE ACTIVITY:

If the students are not already in some kind of small group arrangement, separate them into such. (Ideally, three per group)

Hand out copies of the text to each student. Make sure that you pre highlighted the focus parts for each group. Also, if you made copies for each individual student make sure that each student has the same parts highlighted as their group members. As you hand out the text explain what it is and why it is highlighted.

Make sure that they understand that their groups have different parts to focus on and that they will be responsible for them. Tell them to read over it with their groups.

Read through a section first two paragraphs and note / mark the sights and sounds (and any other sense related details) as an example. Then have the groups do the same thing / reading for specific purposes. You may want to recommend circling or underlining.

Then have them brainstorm within their groups how they will create the **sounds** in their scene, and how they will incorporate the **sights** into their illustration of their scene as well as any **smells, tastes**, or how something **feels** (if appropriate). The focus is on providing sensory details.

Also, let them decide how they want to read it, and give them time to note each of their parts. One student can do the sound, another can read and the other can point out the sight. Or if there are two people talking in the text - two people can read and another student can create the sounds and point out the sights.

Let the students create an illustration and sound effects for their scenes. Then have them put the scenes / posters in order (set them on the chalkboard tray or tape them on the wall).

Closure –

Have the students read the story to you using their storyboard. You could also ask them if they would like to share their story with others. Younger grades would love to visit and be read to. Your students will get to be the role models and practice reading at the same time.

Time / Pacing:

Minutes (approximate)	Teacher Activity	Student Activity
10	The hook, read first paragraph	Buying into the literature
< 5	Ask questions get them thinking	Discuss and infer
20	Reading aloud	Listening
< 5	Ask questions, reflecting	Discussing and reflecting
10	Hand out copies, give directions	Get into groups, read their scenes
5	Help with the example	Do an example as a class
15	Circulate room, monitor	Reread, note details, brainstorm
15	Circulate, monitor	Make posters, review parts
25	Monitor and enjoy	Read their story - board

Assessment / Evaluation:

Since the students will have worked together as groups, they ought to be reviewed as groups. Use the guide at the end of the lesson plan to assess their performance during this lesson. Circle the option (and each corresponding score) that best describes your response. Then, add up the scores and divide by 24 (highest possible total) to get a percentage grade. Make sure that you give them a copy of these expectations before they begin the activity so that they know what they are, too.

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

- Hands-on activity
- Working in a small group setting
- Using visual aides
- Reviewing the text multiple times

Possible Extension and / or Follow-Up Activities:**Storyboards –**

Talk about storyboards. There are some great behind the scenes snippets on Disney movies about the story boards that they have used. There are also different types of storyboards. Some are very elaborate, while some are just sketches in the director's notebook. This would be a great topic to learn about if you plan to have the students create any videos or animation as a project (easy and fun even for a book report).

Music & Art –

See if your music teacher will collaborate with you. He or she could let them make music out of some of the noises in the story (kind of like how the group Stomp made music out of garbage cans and other daily items). Or, they could focus on the kinds of music that were popular at the time. You could also collaborate with your art teacher to focus on art from that time.

Science –

You could also do a science lesson about lightning (lightning rods, etc.). They could separate facts from fiction and myths, or set Mrs. McWilliams straight with the truths about lightning. They could even look for myths that are in the news today. They could use the newspaper archive at <http://www.nieworld.com/> or <http://nieonline.com/> along with other news sites.

Social Studies –

You could teach about that time period and what life was like for the McWilliams. You could use primary documents, like an announcement of Garfield's nomination, copies of old papers, old books that might show an example of their superstitions (like Mrs. McWilliams' German information book), and essays on scientific theories from that time, maybe a piece of furniture or clothing even.

Reading with Expression –

This is a great text to use when students are learning the differences in reading questions, exclamations, and statements, narration and quotation, and reading with expression. It's also very easy to change it into script form, so that it can be made into a short play.

Big Picture Information –

After the lesson, students could write a summary of the story using the storyboard to help them organize the information. Or, they could make the storyboard more basic by using it to create an outline of the story. Or, you could talk about how Mark Twain usually has a paragraph in the beginning to let the reader know what the following text will be about ("frame story"), and you could tell them that they are going to write their own preview to replace the one that is

already there. Tell them to remember to introduce the main idea, characters, and anything else that they might think is important to help the reader.

Vocabulary –

Of course, don't forget that you can make up some fun vocabulary games. Like vocabulary bingo, where they can write the words on their own cards and if they get bingo they have to give the definition and / or an example. Like a matching game, where you can put them in teams to play and they have look up the definition of each match. Give a point to the team that makes the match and then a point to the team that finds the definition first. Be creative, there are lots of fun ways to use new words.

Word Fun –

Then, of course, your students could make up their own fun vocabulary words. Have them think of and jot down as many prefixes and suffixes as they can and attach them to ordinary words. Then have them try to use them in their own writing, maybe a poem or a story. (This activity is from the *Mark Twain for Kids* book referenced below.)

Superstition Survey –

Have your students think of as many superstitions as they can and then see how many people believe them or not. You could even create a graph to show your data. (This activity is also from the *Mark Twain for Kids* book referenced below)

Facing Fears –

You could use this lesson to initiate a discussion on fears. You could talk about silly things that you or others have done because of a fear. Students usually enjoy sharing things they've done because of a fear or in order to overcome that fear. You could also use (since most have read or seen it) book / movie 4 of Harry Potter when the students are learning how to fight a boggart (creature that turns into whatever they fear most). Other books you could use are *There's a Monster under My Bed*, *The Secret Knowledge of Grown-ups*, and comics like *Calvin and Hobbes*, *Peanuts*, and *Garfield*. You could also discuss astraphobia (fear of lightning): <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astraphobia>

Possible Guest Speakers / Other Resources:

- Someone who has used a storyboard before
- The music teacher, art teacher, or media specialist
- Mr. McWilliams (for pretend, of course)
- Mark Twain Quotes online: www.twainquotes.com
- Newspapers in Education online: <http://www.nieworld.com/> and <http://nieonline.com/>

- *There's a Nightmare in my Closet* by Mercer Mayer
- *There's an Alligator Under my Bed* by Mercer Mayer
- *There's Something in my Attic* by Mercer Mayer
- *The Secret Knowledge of Grown-ups* by David Wisniewski
- *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* by J.K. Rowling

- Negri, P. (1999) *The Wit and Wisdom of Mark Twain: A Book of Quotations*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc.
- Rasmussen, R. (2004) *Mark Twain for Kids*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, Inc.
- Twain, M. (1889) *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. New York: P. F. Collier & Son Company.

Group Members _____

Date _____

Performance Guide				
Did students...?	(Score)			
communicate their ideas with one another?	No 0	A little 1	Well 2	Very well 3
listen to one another?	No 0	A little 1	Well 2	Very well 3
share in the work load?	No 0	A little 1	Well 2	Very well 3
respect other groups?	Unsatisfactory 0		Yes 2	
respect the teacher?	Unsatisfactory 0		Yes 2	
stay on task?	No 0	A little 1	Well 2	Very well 3
interpret 2 metaphorical phrases each?	Unsatisfactory 0		Yes 2	
incorporate at least 2 sights in their illustration?	Unsatisfactory 0		Yes 2	
incorporate at least 2 sounds to accompany their scene?	Unsatisfactory 0		Yes 2	
Do anything extra to enhance their contributions?	No 0	Attempted 1	Wow 2	

Notes -

