

***The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* Introductory Notes**

I. SATIRE

Satire is a literary form that uses wit, ridicule, contempt, and insult to expose human errors, foolishness, hypocrisy, and evil. The purpose of satire is social criticism. But satirical authors do not explicitly prescribe morals or solutions. Their subjects and style might be humorous, or not funny at all. Techniques such as caricature, comparison, exaggeration, irony, sarcasm, and parody lace these texts.

Famous examples of satire in English include Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and *A Modest Proposal* (1729), and Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961). Satire and parody are combined in the television cartoons *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy*, and the faux news of *The Onion*, *The Daily Show*, and *The Colbert Report*.

II. ORAL STORYTELLING

Oral storytelling is an ancient and universal human experience. Stories preserve history, share experiences, explain society and values, and teach children. Unlike written narrative, storytelling is shared immediately.

Across cultures, storytellers use common techniques to engage an audience. Storytellers rely on memory, so they repeat familiar characters, phrases and other story elements. They exaggerate. They suggest mental images with words. They find local connections to be relevant.

Storytellers vary voice, facial expressions, and gestures in order to distinguish exposition from dialogue, give personality to characters, and change the mood and pace. They can adjust their stories to an audience's reaction.

Mark Twain was famous for humorous stories, both as a lecturer and author. Twain analyzed the art of storytelling, and used its ingredients in his writing. He detected a unique American style of storytelling, which was separate from inherently comic material.

Twain said that an American storyteller talked seriously, as if unaware that his story was funny (what we call a deadpan delivery). The narrator might play a simple-minded or ignorant character. He might wander off on tangents, adding details and absurdities. He made his points casually, as if he didn't realize what he had said. Most important, the storyteller manipulated pauses to create silent tension. Then he dropped a surprise punch line.

III. CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

According to the American Antiquarian Society, most early American children's books were reprints of English tales, novels, and instructional texts. Tom Sawyer's reading of the Robin Hood tales is representative of this trend.

After 1820, American writers and publishers began producing their own children's works reflective of this country's values and experiences. They emphasized Christian morals, good behavior, hard work, democratic citizenship, American geography and inhabitants, and adventure.

Horace Mann (1796-1859) was a reformer who campaigned for better public schools available to all children. Through the early 19th century, most students attended classes for a few weeks in winter with poorly trained teachers. Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888) wrote *Little Women* in 1868. She was a feminist and wrote other popular books for girls.

Horatio Alger (1832-1899) wrote novels in which poor boys worked hard to become wealthy and respected men. The so-called "Horatio Alger story" still reflects a central ideal in American life.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich (1836 to 1907) was a poet, novelist, editor, and a friend of Mark Twain. Aldrich wrote *The Story of a Bad Boy* (1870) recalling his boyhood mischief growing up in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The book was praised for its realism, though the narration seems stilted. Twain didn't admire it, but it did serve as a model for Twain's writing.

Mark Twain considered taking *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* through Tom's adulthood but decided the story suited the children's market. *Tom Sawyer* was published in 1876, and cited for its authentic depictions of the Western frontier and of children's behavior. Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* followed in 1884.

IV. MARK TWAIN'S BIOGRAPHY

Mark Twain was already a popular author of humorous tales of the West and American foibles by the time he wrote *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. The novel recalls his childhood in Hannibal, Missouri. Many of Tom's experiences were actual incidents in the young Samuel Clemens's life: roaming the hills, caves, and river, painting the fence, drugging the cat. As a boy, Twain was a liar and prankster, and feared God's punishment during thunderstorms. Like Tom, Twain hated school and church. But he was a good speller and loved stories like *Robin Hood*.

Aunt Polly was based on his mother's kind and forgiving nature. Huckleberry Finn was based on Tom Blankenship, the abandoned son of an alcoholic who nonetheless grew up to be a justice of the peace. Becky Thatcher was Laura Wright, an unrequited love who became a school teacher. There was a drunken Injun Joe who got lost in the cave, though he didn't die.

Mark Twain was the pen name of Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835-1910). As a young man before the Civil War, Clemens was a Mississippi River steamboat pilot. "Mark twain" was a pilot's measurement of water two fathoms, or twelve feet, deep—safe for a boat to pass through.

Clemens's father moved the family west from Tennessee, hoping to prosper on cheap land and business ventures, but he faced repeated nancial setbacks. The Clemenses owned slaves that were sold as the family became poorer. John Clemens failed as a lawyer and storekeeper, but was elected justice of the peace and court clerk. He died when Sam was 11, after getting pneumonia from traveling in a sleet storm.

Clemens's mother let him quit school to become a newspaper apprentice. While still in his teens, he began writing spoofs of news stories that he signed with silly bylines. He took newspaper jobs from St. Louis to New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C., before tiring of the long hours and poor pay.

In 1857, at age 21, Clemens apprenticed himself as a riverboat pilot. He was responsible for learning every feature of the Mississippi River between St. Louis and New Orleans to navigate safely. He loved this prestigious job. Tragically, Clemens's younger brother, Henry, also worked on a steamboat and was fatally burned in an explosion in 1858. Henry's horrible death ended Samuel Clemens's religious faith.

When the Civil War broke out in 1861, Union blockades on the river stopped commercial steamboat traf c. Clemens went home to Missouri and spent a few weeks with a Confederate militia. He didn't like soldiering. His older brother, Orion, had campaigned for Abraham Lincoln for president and got appointed secretary of the Nevada territory. Clemens went to Nevada with his brother and avoided the war. Samuel Clemens became a newspaper reporter in Nevada and California. He wrote mock articles about the Wild West, capturing the local dialect and rough humor. In 1863, he began signing articles as Mark Twain. Newspapers and magazines across the country reprinted them for Americans eager to learn what the West was like. Twain's story "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" was his rst big hit. In 1863, Twain met Artemus Ward, a popular humor writer who was on a lecture tour. Ward's success encouraged Twain to pursue a similar career. Twain also met Bret Harte and Ambrose Bierce, fellow journalists and writers of realistic Western fiction.

After a reporting assignment to the Hawaiian islands, Twain retooled his articles into a lecture series he delivered throughout California and Nevada. He eventually traveled to New York and Boston to meet Eastern publishers. In 1867, Twain joined a ship full of American tourists bound for Europe and the Holy Land. His accounts became the satirical travel book *The Innocents Abroad*. He'd made his transition from journalism.

Twain married Olivia Langdon of Elmira, N.Y., in 1870. She was a serious, well-educated woman from a wealthy family. They had four children. Their son, Langdon, died in infancy. They raised their daughters, Susy, Jean, and Clara in a mansion in Hartford, Conn. Their next-door neighbor was Harriett Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Both the Twain and Stowe houses are now museums. Twain's wife would edit his manuscripts for the rest of their life together, removing profanity and judging any rough content by Victorian standards. Nonetheless, Twain was a prolific and careful writer. His advice to others has endured:

"The difference between the right word and the almost right word is really a large matter—it's the difference between a lightning bug and lightning."

"I notice that you use plain, simple language, short words and brief sentences. That is the way to write English—it is the modern way and the best way. Stick to it; don't let uff and owers and verbosity creep in. When you catch an adjective, kill it."

Twain rose to international celebrity, but he lost his wealth through bad business investments. To repay debts, he undertook a round-the-world lecture tour in 1895, accompanied by his wife and daughter Clara.

Daughter Susy died of meningitis at age 24, in 1896, just before the Clemens returned to the United States. Twain's beloved wife died in 1904. Jean died of epilepsy at age 29 in 1909. Those losses depressed and embittered Twain in the last years of his life.

VI. MISSOURI AND THE WEST

In 1820, Congress enacted the Missouri Compromise as settlement expanded across the continent. Maine became a free state without slavery. Missouri became a slave-holding state. Other territory in the Louisiana Purchase north of Missouri's southern border would ban slavery. Residents in territory to the south could decide the slavery issue for themselves.

There were then 12 free states and 12 slave states. Any new states were to maintain a balance of free and slave-holding territory. But the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 allowed residents of those states to decide whether to allow slavery. Pro-slavery Missourians incited turmoil in neighboring Kansas, causing a guerrilla war along the border.

Although Missouri remained a Union state during the Civil War (1861-1865), the population's loyalties were divided, and lawlessness was rampant. Confederate guerrillas Cole Younger, William Quantrill, and Frank and Jesse James became outlaws after the war.

Indians were also uprooted by Western settlement. Government treaties designating tribal lands were rewritten. Tribes that had relocated from Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois were removed yet again—from Missouri to Oklahoma.

VII. RELIGIOUS REVIVAL

There have been several periods of religious revival in America, spread from Britain and Europe. The First Great Awakening was from 1730 to 1770, when evangelical Protestant preachers emphasized personal belief and biblical truth over intellectual reasoning, perfunctory participation in worship, social hierarchy, and stability. This led to the formation of new religious denominations and a spirit of equality and rebellion against authority. To some believers, slavery violated this spirit.

In the early 19th century, the Second Great Awakening inspired revival and camp meetings as the United States expanded to the West. Besides bringing Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist clergy and congregations to frontier states, it emphasized personal and social reform.

Religious conversion meant admitting sinfulness, fear of damnation, accepting God's salvation, and doing God's will. The abolition, women's suffrage, temperance, and prison reform movements were offshoots of religious revival.