

Mark Twain Boyhood Home & Museum

Lessons for *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

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Mark Twain Teachers' Workshop--July 16, 2021

Hannibal, Missouri

“‘Translating’ Twain into Contemporary American Standard English (CASE)”

LESSONS for *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Concept or Topic: Reading Comprehension and Understanding Complex/Unfamiliar Words	Suggested Grade Level(s)/Course: Advanced English, grades 11-12
Subject: American Literature/English Linguistics/American History	Suggested Time Frame: Variable; at least 2 class periods
Objective(s): American Literature (and/or English Linguistics and/or American History) students will translate 1840's Missouri African American Vernacular English (AAVE) into Contemporary American Standard English (CASE) by selecting and “translating” a passage, containing Jim’s dialogue, from Mark Twain’s <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> with at least 80% accuracy (based on the number of words that are accurately translated divided by the number of words in passage divided). They will also explore the history and evolution of AAVE throughout American history. Students will contemplate the place of dialects in language development.	
Common Core State Standards: RL.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. RL.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text,	

including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

RL.11-12.5 . Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

Assessments:

Students will select a passage (at least one paragraph of at least 5 sentences and containing primarily dialogue from Jim) from *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. They will copy the paragraph onto their document as it exists in the text. They will then "translate," word for word, the original 1840's Missouri AAVE into 2021 CASE, using the example demonstrated for them by the teacher. After they provide an exact translation, they will write a third paragraph summarizing the main idea of the paragraph. Lastly, they will translate the paragraph into "modern American English teenage slang."

Vocabulary:

African American Vernacular English (AAVE)
Contemporary Standard American English (CASE)
Translate
Dialect
Linguistics

Subject Area Integration:

History
Linguistics

Background Information Required for Unit/Lesson:

- This lesson can be performed numerous times throughout the duration of reading/studying *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*
- An overview/understanding of US History during and before Twain's time and the setting of the novel
- An understanding of dialects within American English
- An understanding of linguistics and language development and evolution
- An understanding of slave life at this time and place

Materials:

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain

“What is Linguistics? An Introduction to Linguistics” video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DF679Ks8ZR4>

“The Field of Linguistics: An Overview” <https://www.linguisticsociety.org/resource/domain-linguistics>

“What is Ebonics (African American English)?” <https://www.linguisticsociety.org/content/what-ebonics-african-american-english>

“Is African American Vernacular English a Language?” <https://www.britannica.com/story/is-african-american-vernacular-english-a-language>

“The Linguistics of AAVE” video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkzVOXKXfQk>

“Black English Matters” by Chi Luu <https://daily.jstor.org/black-english-matters/>

“The United States of Accents: African American Vernacular English”

<https://www.babbel.com/en/magazine/african-american-vernacular-english>

Teacher may choose to print the attached documents.

Technology:

Teacher’s preference: laptops for students, if desired

Class computer with projector/Smartboard

Related Twain Quotes/Passages:

Jim: “I didn’ know dey was so many. I hain’t hearn ‘bout none un um, skasely, but ole King Sollermun, onless you counts dem kings dat’s in a pack er k’yards. How much do a king git?”

...

Huck: “... But mostly they hang round the harem.”

Jim: “Roun’ de which?”

Huck: “Harem.”

Jim: “What’s de harem?”

Huck: "The place where he keeps his wives. Don't you know about the harem? Solomon had one; he had about a million wives."

Jim: "Why, yes, dat's so; I-I'd done forgot it. A harem's a bo'd'n-house, I reckon. Mos' likely dey has rackety times in de nussery. En I reckon de wives quarrels considerable; en dat 'crease de racket. Yit dey say Sollermun de wises' man dat ever live' I doan' take no stock in dat. Bekase why: would a wise man want to live in de mids' er sich a blimblammin' all de time? No-'deed he wouldn't. A wise man 'ud take en buil' a biler-factory; en den he could shet down de biler-factory when he want to res'."

Lesson Sequence:

Day 1: (50 minutes)

Hook/Intro:

- Ask students: "Does what Jim is saying sound like another language to you? Is it a way of speaking that you hear often today?"
- Project excerpt above onto the board and read with students.
- Together (modeling, but working as a class), "translate" Jim's dialogue into CASE.

Original AAVE:

Jim: "I didn' know dey was so many. I hain't hearn 'bout none un um, skasely, but ole King Sollermun, onless you counts dem kings dat's in a pack er k'yards. How much do a king git?"

Jim: "Why, yes, dat's so; I-I'd done forgot it. A harem's a bo'd'n-house, I reckon. Mos' likely dey has rackety times in de nussery. En I reckon de wives quarrels considerable; en dat 'crease de racket. Yit dey say Sollermun de wises' man dat ever live' I doan' take no stock in dat. Bekase why: would a wise man want to live in de mids' er sich a blimblammin' all de time? No-

‘deed he wouldn’t. A wise man ‘ud take en buil’ a biler-factory; en den he could shet down de biler-factory when he want to res’.”

A “translation” into CASE:

“I didn’t know there were so many. I haven’t heard of any of them but King Solomon, unless you count the kings in a pack of cards. How much does a king make?”

‘Why yes, that’s so; I had forgotten that. A harem is a boarding house, I suppose. Most likely they have noisy times in the nursery. And I bet the wives quarrel a lot and that increases the noise. Yet, they say Solomon was the wisest man that ever lived, but I don’t believe that. A wise man wouldn’t want to live in the midst of such a commotion all the time. A wise man would build a boiler-factory, and then could shut down the boiler-factory when he wants to rest.’”

Teaching of the Concept(s):

- Reading Comprehension--using context clues to decode unfamiliar and/or complex words
- Critical thinking

Suggested Questions:

- Were there any patterns that you noticed while we were translating? If so, what were they?
- Do you have any theories about why Jim says the words the way that he does?

Learning Activity:

- Have students select a passage (at least one paragraph of at least 5 sentences and

containing primarily dialogue from Jim) from *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain.

- Have students first copy the paragraph onto a document as it exists in the text.
- Next, have students “translate,” word for word, the original 1840’s Missouri AAVE into 2021 CASE, using the example demonstrated for them by the teacher.
- Have students write a third paragraph summarizing the main idea of the paragraph that they translated.
- Lastly, have students translate the paragraph into “modern American English teenage slang.” This can be “text talk.”

Review/Closure:

- Have students share their work with their peers (may be helpful to have students work in groups for this)
- As a group, have students identify patterns that show up in their collective translations
- Have students write a short group analysis of their work

Day 2: (50 minutes)

Hook/Intro:

- What did you take away from yesterday’s translation activity?
- What do you think it means to “translate” something?
- What do you think it means to translate English to English?
- Is AAVE another language?

Teaching of the Concept(s):

- Pass out the following articles to student groups:

“What is Ebonics (African American English)?” <https://www.linguisticsociety.org/content/what-ebonics-african-american-english>

“Is African American Vernacular English a Language?” <https://www.britannica.com/story/is-african-american-vernacular-english-a-language>

“Black English Matters” by Chi Luu <https://daily.istor.org/black-english-matters/>

“The United States of Accents: African American Vernacular English”

<https://www.babbel.com/en/magazine/african-american-vernacular-english>

- Have each student in the group read one of the articles and then share a summary of it with their group mates
- Show the following video to the class: “The Linguistics of AAVE” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkzVOXKXfQk> along with the following video on an overview of linguistics: “What is Linguistics? An Introduction to Linguistics”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DF679Ks8ZR4>

Suggested Questions:

- What were your big takeaways from the articles?
- What were your big takeaways from the video?
- What do you think it means to “translate” something?
- What do you think it means to translate English to English?
- Is AAVE another language?
- What has been the history and evolution of AAVE throughout American history?
- What do you think the place of dialects is in language and language development?

Learning Activity:

- Have students write a journal reflection on what they’ve learned about dialects and AAVE

Review/Closure:

- Have a discussion with students about how there is no singular American English.
- Discuss that there is no “best” or “right” dialect, because that would imply that there is a “wrong” one, too.
- Compare old English (perhaps an excerpt from Canterbury Tales) to CASE.
- Discuss the natural evolution of language.
- Compare CASE to “modern teenage American English slang.”
- Use this as an opportunity to free students from any prejudices associated with the way a person speaks their English.

Homework):

None :)

Strategies for Exceptional Stude:

Use of multimedia (YouTube videos)
Use of group work
Use of group summary of articles
Modeling

Suggested Follow-Up Activities (for the unit):

Have students continue to “translate” throughout reading the novel

Have students “translate” Huck’s dialogue

Have students “translate” Tom’s dialogue

Have students research and read primary sources from the era (newspaper articles, letters, etc.) and compare the dialect in those to what Twain creates in his novel