

Mark Twain Boyhood Home & Museum

Lesson Plans for “Cannibalism in the Cars” and “A True Story”

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Hannibal, Missouri

“Twain’s Short Stories as an Introduction to *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*”

LESSON PLANS for “Cannibalism in the Cars” and “A True Story”	
Concept or Topic: Twain’s departure from the romantic period of American literature and his movement into humorous realism	Suggested Grade Level(s)/Course: 9-10 Grade English/American Literature
Subject: Literature and Writing	Suggested Time Frame: 3 days of 50-minute lessons
Objective(s): First day: 9-10 grade American Literature students will use annotations on print or digital copies of the story to identify at least five dark romantic conventions Twain uses in the first part of “Cannibalism in the Cars,” scoring at least 8 out of 10 points (80% accuracy) on the _____ (name of rubric). Second day: 9-10 grade American Literature students will use print or digital copies of the story to create a venn diagram comparing and contrasting “Cannibalism in the Cars” to previously read dark romantic stories, with at least 4 specific examples in each of the three parts of the diagram, scoring at least 10 out of 12 points (83% accuracy) on the _____ (name of rubric).	
Common Core State Standards: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone). CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5 Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.	

Assessment:

First day: Students will annotate the first part of “Cannibalism in the Cars” for at least five dark romantic conventions that have previously been discussed in class.

Second day: Students will create a venn diagram comparing and contrasting “Cannibalism in the Cars” to previously read dark romantic stories. They will list at least four specific examples in each section of the diagram (e.g. The men in the train car debate about cannibalism as if they are debating who will be the next treasurer of the town. A dark romantic story would never take such a serious matter so lightheartedly).

Vocabulary (Tiers 2 & 3):

foreshadowing, figurative language, suspense, setting, conflict, romanticism, realism, tone/mood, humor, irony, dialect, authenticity, racism.

Subject Area Integration:

This lesson plan focuses mostly on literature and writing, but it could be integrated with social studies or 19th century American history.

Background Information Required for Unit/Lesson:

Students should be familiar with the romantic period of American literature, particularly dark romanticism (i.e. Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Irving, etc.). This may be part of an American Literature course or part of a series of units over American romanticism.

Materials:

- Students will need copies of Mark Twain’s “Cannibalism in the Cars” (print or digital) and a writing journal.
- Youtube videos of parliamentary style arguments and debates.(see links below)
- DVD - A live reading of Mark Twain’s “A True Story.” This is available through The Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum’s website.

<https://www.marktwainmuseum.org/>

Technology:

An audio clip of the parliamentary style argument among the passengers as well as an audio clip of an actual parliamentary style debate (this could also be actual video footage). Examples are linked below. A DVD copy of a live reading of Mark Twain’s “A True Story.”

“Free Audiobook - Cannibalism In The Cars by Mark Twain”

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

“Heated Moments in the British Parliament Debate on Syria”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QnKKPwEX_ac&t=93s

“‘Grow Up’ and ‘Get Real’ Geoffrey Cox Tells Heckling MPs During Brexit Deal Debate”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0y0cAtNsN5Q>

“Chaos in Commons Over Brexit White Paper”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xk7uA1v8TWM&t=70s>

Lesson Sequence:

Day 1: (50 minutes)

Hook/Intro:

5 minutes - When students enter, the room should be dark and the air conditioning should be turned to cold, if possible. Ask them to (carefully) find their seats and explain that they are all on a broken down train in the middle of the 1800's, it is winter, and they are 50 miles from civilization. Begin a discussion about what might happen the first day, the second day, the third day, and so on. Eventually, the concept of cannibalism should surface.

Teaching of the Concept(s):

1. 5 minutes - Read the first part of “Cannibalism in the Cars” with the students. End after the sentence “We must determine which of us shall die to furnish food for the rest.” Discuss the conventions Twain uses when setting up the conflict of the story. Students should be familiar with the dark romantic elements of the story.
2. 15 minutes - Students should then do a second reading of the story and annotate for conventions. Annotating individually, pairing with a partner, and sharing responses would be a good strategy for this portion of the lesson.
3. 20 minutes - Then, have the students read along as they listen to an audio version of the rest of the story. Discuss the students’ opinions using Think, Pair, Share. What was confusing? What did they understand?
4. 5 minutes - Exit slip: What is one question you still have about the story?

Suggested Questions:

What would the cabin of a passenger train car look like in the 1800's? How might people feel being trapped in a snowstorm far away from civilization? What might people resort to after several days? What might people resort to after over a week? What romantic conventions does Twain use to create the conflict, mood, setting, and tone of the story? How does the tone of the story shift once the debate begins? What did you understand from the debate? What was confusing about the debate?

Review/Closure:

Exit slip asking students to write one question they still have about the story. The lesson will continue the following day.

Day 2: (50 minutes)

Hook/Intro:

5 minutes - As the students take their seats, bang a gavel (or some type of loud wooden instrument) on a desk or podium, and instruct the class to come to order. Once the students have quieted down, remind them that they are on a stranded train in the 1800's and that a decision must be made about the previous day's problem of hunger. For a bellringer, have the students write predictions about how they think the story will end. Have the students share their predictions with a partner and then discuss their predictions as a class.

Teaching of the Concept(s):

1. 20 minutes - Have the students get out their stories and follow along as you play an audio version of the second part of "Cannibalism in the Cars." Ask the students simply to listen for understanding. Tell them that it's not important to try and remember every character's name and every suggestion that is made, but rather they should listen for the basic meaning of the debate and the mood/tone of the story.
2. 5 minutes - Have a brief discussion about the students' findings. What did they gain? What were they confused about?
3. 10 minutes - Inform the students that the second half of Twain's story is meant to be taken as humorous (even if it is about a morbid topic). Play one or more parliamentary style debates (linked above), noting the seriousness of the debates but the potential for humor.
4. 10 minutes - Use the remainder of the class period to discuss Mark Twain's intent. Explain again that the specific details of the debate are not meant to be understood completely, but rather the gist of the arguments should be understood. After this discussion, use a Think, Pair, Share to discuss similarities and differences between Twain's story and dark romantic stories.
5. Exit slip - Students should begin filling out a venn diagram, noting similarities and differences between Twain's story and dark romantic stories.

Suggested Questions: How do you predict the story will end? Why do you think this? How would a typical dark romantic story with this setting end? Could this potentially turn into a humorous situation? Do humans sometimes find serious situations humorous? How is this story similar to some of the dark romantic stories we have read? How is it different?

Review/Closure: As exit slips, students will show their progress on venn diagrams.

Day 3: (50 minutes)

Hook/Intro:

5 minutes - As the students enter the classroom, do your best (or worst) impersonation of an American dialect most of the students won't be familiar with (e.g. Boston accent, southern accent, northern accent, etc. Remember to keep it respectful!). Ask the students to write a short journal entry explaining their encounters with other dialects. Or, if they haven't had any, ask them to write what they thought about your class introduction.

Teaching of the Concept(s):

1. 5 minutes - Explain to the students that the use of dialect plays a major role in Twain's works, and in order to understand his stories, sometimes it is best to hear them aloud. Pass out copies of "A True Story" and inform the students that Mark Twain often writes using what he calls the "Missouri Negro dialect." Explain that Twain attempted to write words as he heard them, not as they were supposed to be spelled, in order to give his works authenticity.
2. 20 minutes - Have the students follow along in their stories while you play the live reading from the DVD. You may also simply have the students watch the video and listen for understanding.
3. 10 minutes - Have the students write a short journal over their impressions of the live reading. Then, use a pair/share so the students may hear each other's ideas.
- 4.

Suggested Questions:**Review/Closure:****Homework (for the unit):****Strategies for Exceptional Students (for the unit):****Suggested Follow-Up Activities (for the unit):**

This unit is intended as a lead-in activity for *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, but it would work well as an introduction to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* or most other Twain works as well.