

Great American Lives

of Nineteenth Century Missouri

Mark Twain



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Samuel Langhorne Clemens, later known as Mark Twain, was born in Florida, Mo., in 1835. His family moved to Hannibal, on the banks of the Mississippi River. His father, an unsuccessful lawyer and a failure in business, died in 1847, leaving the family penniless. Then only 12, Twain became an **apprentice** typesetter for the local newspaper. He went to work for his older brother, Orion Clemens, who owned several newspapers. But Orion's papers eventually failed, and Samuel changed careers.

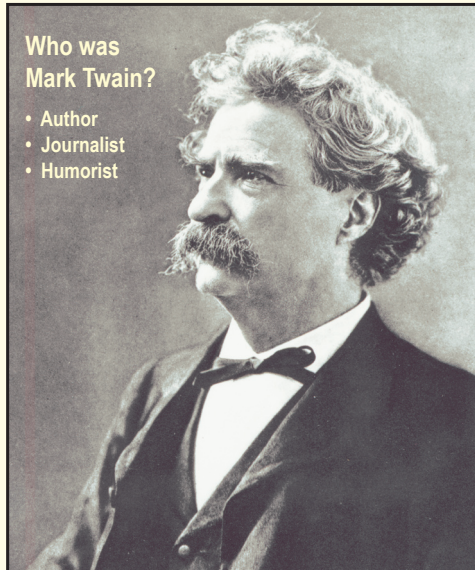
Haunted by his father's failures, Twain was determined to achieve the financial independence that had **eluded** his family. Knowing that steamboat pilots made a lot of money, Twain had aspired to become one as a boy. As a young adult, he set out to make it happen.

In 1857, he met veteran steamboat captain Horace Bixby and for the next two years served as the captain's apprentice. In 1859, he obtained his pilot's license. Working steadily on the Mississippi, Twain navigated between St. Louis and New Orleans, gaining from these travels the material for some of his most **inspired** writings.

With the beginning of the Civil War, however, travel closed on the Mississippi and Twain's career as a **steamboat pilot** ended. Twain's brother, Orion, had been appointed Secretary to the Nevada Territory, so Twain joined his brother in a stagecoach journey to Virginia City in the territory. While there he **prospected** for silver and dreamed of striking it rich, but when that failed, he turned to

Who was Mark Twain?

- Author
- Journalist
- Humorist



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journalism and became a reporter for the Territorial Enterprise in Virginia City.

By the 1870s, Twain had married, started a family, and was becoming famous as a writer of novels and short stories. In 1876, he published "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" and started work on its sequel and his most famous novel, "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn." The Missouri of Twain's youth was a slave state, and Twain drew on his experiences with slavery in writing "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn." Describing the **escapades** of an abused orphan boy and a runaway slave, the novel became Twain's powerful voice against **racism**.

Although Twain found success as a writer – authoring dozens of books, short stories, letters and sketches – he struggled with personal tragedy and money problems brought on by bad investments in new inventions. In 1891, financial hardship

forced him to move his family to Europe, where they could live less expensively. He declared bankruptcy but paid off his **debts** by earning money lecturing around the world. He also continued to publish and travel.

Through the years, three of Twain's four children died, followed by his wife in 1904. In 1910 at the age of 74, Mark Twain died at his home in Connecticut of heart failure. Upon Twain's death, President William H. Taft summed up the legacy of his life.

"Mark Twain gave real intellectual enjoyment to millions, and his works will continue to give such pleasure to millions yet to come."

Vocabulary

Match the vocabulary word with the correct definition, then write a sentence using each word.

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|------------------|---|
| ___ Apprentice | A – Money owed |
| ___ Elude | B – Adventurous actions done without regard for consequences |
| ___ Steamboat | C – A belief that a particular race of people is superior |
| ___ Pilot | D – Someone who believed slavery should end |
| ___ Inspire | E – Someone who learns a craft, art, trade or profession under the instruction of an expert |
| ___ Prospected | F – To arouse thought, feeling or emotion |
| ___ Escapades | G – Looking for something thought to have a financial reward |
| ___ Racism | H – A person licensed or qualified to operate a steamboat |
| ___ Abolitionist | I – To escape or get away |
| ___ Debts | |

Question & Answer

1. What was Mark Twain's first job?
2. Why did Mark Twain stop being a steamboat pilot, the career he had dreamed of as a boy?
3. What did Mark Twain do while he was in Nevada Territory with his brother?
4. Why was money a particularly important issue to Mark Twain?
5. Why was "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" banned from some libraries when it was published?

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