



Companion Teaching Activities

***To the historical fiction
serialized story for young readers***

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THE BEST STORYTELLER
Chapter 1

Name _____
Date _____

Directions: Answer the questions in complete sentences.

1. How does Emily feel about boating? Use details from the story to explain your answer.

2. Why did Emily feel she was being treated unfairly?

3. Describe a time when you were treated unfairly.

4. What is a pilothouse? What clue words help you know the meaning of pilothouse?

THE BEST STORYTELLER

Chapter 1—Scoring Guide

Directions: Answer the questions in complete sentences.

1. How does Emily feel about boating? Use details from the story to explain your answer.

2pts. States that Emily likes boating and uses at least two details to explain why she likes boating.

1pt. States that Emily likes boating and uses one detail to explain answer.

0pt. Other (may only state that Emily likes boating)

2. Why did Emily feel she was being treated unfairly?

2pts. Uses more than one detail from the story to explain why Emily is treated unfairly.

1pt. Uses one detail to explain why Emily is treated unfairly.

0pts. Other

3. Describe a time when you were treated unfairly.

2pt. Student gives a detailed description of a time when he/she was treated unfairly.

1pt. Student gives a description of a time when he/she was treated unfairly, but may lack development.

0pt. Other

4. What is a pilothouse? What clue words help you know the meaning of pilothouse?

2pts. Gives correct meaning of pilothouse and states clue words from the story that describe pilothouse.

1pt. Gives correct meaning of pilothouse or states clue words from the story to describe pilothouse.

0pt. Other

THE BEST STORYTELLER
Chapter 2

Name _____
Date _____

Directions: Answer the questions in complete sentences.

1. List three details from the story that describe Sam.

2. What problem did Emily, John and Rose encounter? Name at least one way they could have avoided the problem.

3. Besides the darkness, what are some other dangers of cave exploring?

4. Would you ever go spelunking, or cave exploring? Explain your answer.

THE BEST STORYTELLER

Chapter 2

Scoring Guide

Directions: Answer the questions in complete sentences.

1. List three details from the story that describe Sam.

2pts. Lists three details that describe Sam

1pt. Lists one or two details that describe Sam

0pt. Other

2. What problem did Emily, John and Rose encounter? Name at least one way they could have avoided the problem.

2pts. Describes problem (no light in cave) and names at least one way they could have avoided the problem.

1pt. Describes problem **or** names a way they could have avoided the problem.

0pts. Other

3. Besides the darkness, what are some other dangers of cave exploring?

2pts. Names two or more dangers of cave exploring.

1pt. Names one danger of cave exploring.

4. Would you ever go spelunking, or cave exploring? Explain your answer.

2pts. Tells whether he/she would go spelunking and gives an explanation why he or she would (or would not) go spelunking.

1pt. Tells whether he/she would go spelunking or gives an explanation why he or she would (or would not) go spelunking.

THE BEST STORYTELLER

Chapter 2

Performance Task—Part 2

Name _____

Date _____

PROMPT

Draw and label a picture of Captain Todd’s riverboat. Label at least five parts of the boat. You can use other resources to examine pictures of popular riverboats in 1850.



Chapter 2
Performance Task—Part 2
Scoring Guide

PROMPT

Draw and label a picture of Captain Todd’s riverboat.
Label at least five parts of the boat.
You can use other resources to examine pictures of popular riverboats in 1850.

- 4pts. Draws an example of an 1850 riverboat and accurately labels at least five parts.
- 3pts. Draws an example of an 1850 riverboat and accurately labels three or four parts.
- 2pts. Draws an example of an 1850 riverboat and accurately labels one or two parts.
- 1pt. Draws a riverboat.

THE BEST STORYTELLER
Chapter 3

Name _____
Date _____

Directions: Answer the questions in complete sentences.

1. What does distress mean? What clue words help you know the meaning of distress?

2. Use details from the story to describe the inside of a cave.

3. If you were going to pack a backpack for a spelunking trip, what items would you pack? Name at least three items, and explain why you chose each item.

4. Why were the two strangers like angels to Emily?

THE BEST STORYTELLER

Chapter 3

Scoring Guide

Directions: Answer the questions in complete sentences.

1. What does distress mean? What clue words help you know the meaning of distress?

2pts. Gives an accurate definition of distress and names clue words from the story.

1pt. Gives an accurate definition of distress or names clue words from the story.

0pt. Other

2. Use details from the story to describe the inside of a cave.

2pts. Uses at least two details to describe the inside of a cave.

1pt. Uses one detail to describe the inside of the cave.

0pts. Other

3. If you were going to pack a backpack for a spelunking trip, what items would you pack? Name at least three items, and explain why you chose each item.

2pts. Names at least three things that may be needed in a backpack on a spelunking trip.

1pt. Names one or two things that may be needed in a backpack on a spelunking trip.

0pts. Other

4. Why were the two strangers like angels to Emily?

2pts. Gives a detailed explanation of why the two strangers were like angels.

1pt. Gives an explanation why the angels were like angels to Emily.

0pts. Other

THE BEST STORYTELLER

Chapter 3

Performance Task

Scoring Guide

PROMPT

List facts and opinions about caves in the chart below.

Facts	Opinions
4pts. Names more than two facts and two opinions. 3pts. Names two facts and opinions. 2pts. Names one fact and two opinions or two facts and one opinion. 1pt. Names one fact and/or one opinion.	

Use your facts and opinions to write a persuasive paragraph to friend. Persuade your friend to go into a cave (or stay out of a cave). Be sure to support your opinions with facts.

***Use Writing Scoring Guide

THE BEST STORYTELLER
Chapter 4

Name _____
Date _____

Directions: Answer the questions in complete sentences.

1. Mrs. Todd spoke to Emily in a strong language? What do you think that means? Use details from the story to explain your answer.

2. Name someone who has talked to you in a strong language. Why did they speak to you in that way?

3. Why do you think the two men were running down the alley?

4. Use the chart to contrast the way Mrs. Todd washed clothes to the way we wash clothes today.

Washing Clothes in 1850	Washing Clothes Today

THE BEST STORYTELLER

Chapter 4

Directions: Answer the questions in complete sentences.

1. Mrs. Todd spoke to Emily in a strong language? What do you think that means? Explain your answer.

2pts. Explains “strong language” and uses details from the story to explain answer.

1pt. Explains “strong language” but does not support with details from the story.

0pts. Other

2. Name someone who has talked to you in a strong language. Why did they speak to you in that way?

2pts. Names someone who used a strong language and explains why.

1pt. Names someone who used a strong language or explains why.

0pts. Other

3. Why do you think the two men were running down the alley?

2pts. Gives a logical and detailed explanation why the men may have been running down the alley.

1pt. Gives an explanation why the men may have been running down the alley (may be vague).

0pts. Other

4. Use the chart to contrast the way Mrs. Todd washed clothes to the way we wash clothes today.

2pts. Names two corresponding differences.

1pt. Names one corresponding difference.

0pts. Other

THE BEST STORYTELLER
Chapter 5

Name _____
Date _____

Directions: Answer the questions in complete sentences.

1. Do you think Emily should help the sheriff find the robbers? Explain your answer.

2. What was Emily's dilemma? Explain a time when you've been in a dilemma.

3. Why would a cave be a good hiding place? Use details from the story to explain your answer.

4. Predict what will happen in the next chapter.

THE BEST STORYTELLER

Chapter 5

Scoring Guide

Directions: Answer the questions in complete sentences.

1. Do you think Emily should help the sheriff find the robbers?

Explain your answer.

2pts. Tells whether Emily should help the robbers and gives detailed explanation.

1pts. Tells whether Emily should help the robbers, but gives no explanation or vague explanation.

0 pts. Other

2. What was Emily's dilemma? Explain a time when you've been in a dilemma.

2pts. Explains Emily's dilemma and explains own dilemma.

1pt. Explains Emily's dilemma **or** explains own dilemma.

0pts. Other

3. Why would a cave be a good hiding place? Use details from the story to explain your answer.

2pts. Uses two or more details from the story to explain why a cave is a good hiding place.

1pt. Uses one detail from the story to explain why a cave is a good hiding place, or give details that are not mentioned in the story.

0pts. Other

4. Predict what will happen in the next chapter.

2pts. Makes a detailed prediction based on the story so far.

1pt. Makes a prediction.

0pts. Other

THE BEST STORYTELLER

Chapter 5

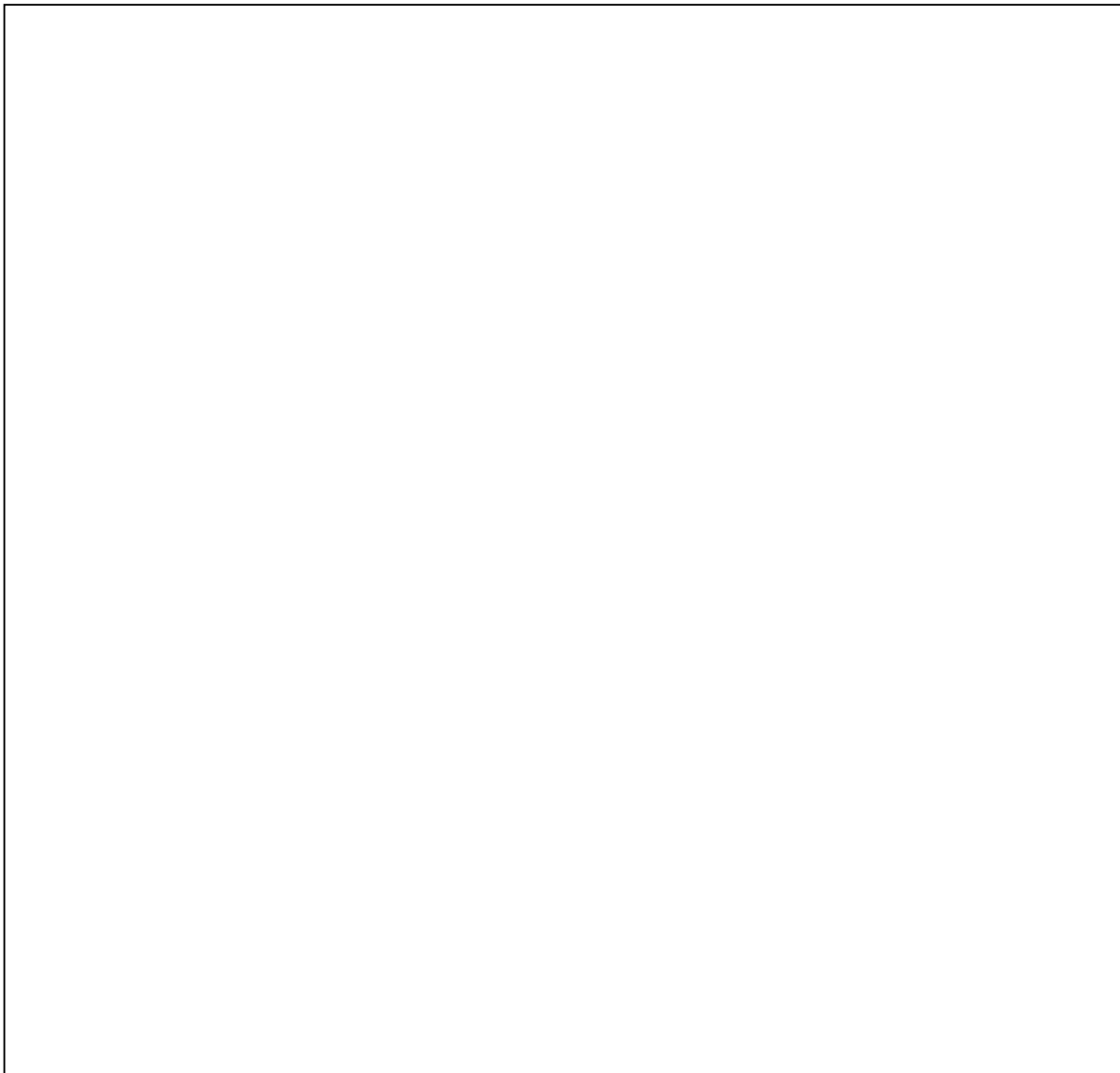
Performance Task

Name _____

Date _____

PROMPT

Emily lives in a village. From what you've read so far, visualize how that village looks. Draw and color a picture of Emily's village. Make sure you draw and label at least five places and things that have been mentioned in the story so far.



THE BEST STORYTELLER

Chapter 5

Performance Task

Scoring Guide

PROMPT

Emily lives in a village. From what you've read so far, visualize how that village looks. Draw and color a picture of Emily's village. Make sure you draw and label places and things that have been mentioned in the story so far.

- 4pts. Draws and colors a picture of Emily's village including at least five places and things (labeled) that would be seen there.
- 3pts. Draws and colors a picture of Emily's village including at least four places and things (labeled) that would be seen there.
- 2pts. Draws and colors a picture of Emily's village including two or three places and things (labeled) that would be seen there. Or, includes four places and things that would be seen in the village, but are not colored.
- 1pt. Draws a picture of Emily's village, but does not label items in the picture.

THE BEST STORYTELLER
Chapter 6

Name _____
Date _____

Directions: Answer the questions in complete sentences.

1. How did Emily return a favor to the two men who saved her?

2. Why do you think the robbers left the money in the cave?

3. Describe the bank robbers' escape.

4. Do you think Emily will ever tell anyone about the bank robbers' escape? Explain your answer.

THE BEST STORYTELLER

Chapter 6

Scoring Guide

Directions: Answer the questions in complete sentences.

1. How did Emily return a favor to the two men who saved her?

2pts. Gives detailed explanation of how Emily withheld the secret of the two men escaping.

1pt. Gives explanation of how Emily withheld the secret of the two men escaping.

Opts. Other

2. Why do you think the robbers left the money in the cave?

2pts. Uses logical reasoning to give detailed answer for leaving money in a cave.

1pts. States reason for leaving money in the cave.

0pts. Other

3. Describe the bank robbers' escape.

2pts. Lists at least three events in order describing the bank robbers' escape.

1pt. Lists one or two events in order describing the bank robbers' escape.

0pts. Other

4. Do you think Emily will ever tell anyone about the bank robbers' escape? Explain your answer.

2pts. Tells whether Emily will tell about bank robbers and gives an explanation.

1pt. Tells whether Emily will tell about bank robbers **or** gives an explanation.

Opts. Other

THE BEST STORYTELLER
Chapter 7

Name _____
Date _____

Directions: Answer the questions in complete sentences.

1. How did Emily feel about her father coming home? Use details from the story to explain your answer.

2. Why do you think Emily told Sam about the robbers?

3. Compare Emily to Sam. Name two ways they are alike and two ways they are different.

4. Do you think Sam will keep Emily's secret? Use details from the story to explain your answer.

THE BEST STORYTELLER

Chapter 7

Scoring Guide

Directions: Answer the questions in complete sentences.

1. How did Emily feel about her father coming home? Use details from the story to explain your answer.

2pts. Uses at least two details to describe Emily's excitement of her father's return.

1pt. Uses one detail describing Emily's excitement of her father's return.

Opts. Other

2. Why do you think Emily told Sam about the robbers?

2pts. Gives a logical explanation of Emily's reasoning.

1pt. Gives an explanation of Emily's reasoning.

0pts. Other

3. Compare Emily to Sam. Name two ways they are alike and two ways they are different.

3pts. Names two corresponding similarities and differences.

2pt. Names one corresponding similarity and difference, or names two similarities, or names two differences.

1pt. Names one similarity or difference

Opt. Other

4. Do you think Sam will keep Emily's secret? Explain your answer.

2pts. States whether Sam will keep secret and gives a detailed explanation.

1pt. States whether Sam will keep secret **or** gives an explanation.

Opt. Other

THE BEST STORYTELLER
Chapter 8

Name _____
Date _____

Directions: Answer the questions in complete sentences.

1. Why did Sam choose Mark Twain for his pen name? What does Mark Twain mean?

2. If you gave yourself a pen name, what would it be? Why?

3. Emily collected all of Mark Twain's books. If you could collect any author's books, whose books would it be? Why?

4. Where did the story take place? Name the town and the river.

Town: _____

River: _____

THE BEST STORYTELLER

Chapter 8

Scoring Guide

Directions: Answer the questions in complete sentences.

1. Why did Sam choose Mark Twain for his pen name? What does Mark Twain mean?

2pts. Explains why Sam chose the pen name Mark Twain and gives the meaning of Mark Twain.

1pt. Explains why Sam chose the pen name Mark Twain **or** only gives meaning of Mark Twain.

0pts. Other

2. If you gave yourself a pen name, what would it be? Why?

2pts. Chooses a pen name for self and gives reason for choosing the name.

1pt. Chooses a pen name, but gives no reason for the name. Or, gives a reason without stating a name.

0pts. Other

3. Emily collected all of Mark Twain's books. If you could collect any author's books, whose books would it be? Why?

2pts. Names an author and gives a detailed reason for choosing that author.

1pt. Names and author and gives vague reason for choosing that author

0pts. Other

4. Where did the story take place? Name the town and the river.

Town: Hannibal, Missouri (1pt.)

River: Mississippi (1pt.)

The Best Storyteller

Middle School Teacher Guide

By: Jennifer Wirthwein—7th-12th grade Gifted Instructor
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These intermediate activities are suitable for middle school students. For each chapter, there is a class discussion question so that students may practice both speaking and listening skills and learn to share and respect different perspectives. There are two activities for each chapter that require the use of a newspaper to develop familiarity with the newspaper and develop and strengthen reading skills. Next, there is a constructed response question to provide practice for standardized tests. Finally, there is a research project that ties into each chapter. The combination of these activities will give students a well-rounded, hands-on experience.

Chapter One

Discussion: Do you think boys have more fun than girls? Do you think they are given special privileges? Why or why not?

Using the Newspaper: Compare boys and girls in the media. Look at the Sports Section in today's newspaper. How many stories cover women's sporting events? How many cover men's sporting events? Write this number in a ratio: Number of stories representing female: Number of stories representing male. Do the same activity for the business section, the front page, the entertainment section, etc. Did the numbers surprise you? What conclusion do you draw from this practice?

Using the Newspaper: Emily had a good imagination. Find and cut 10 descriptive adjectives from today's paper. Compare your results with your classmates. Create a classroom poster of adjectives to use as a word bank for future writing assignments. Be sure to look up the meaning of any words that you do not know.

Constructed Response: What is the tone and mood of chapter one? Give three examples from the text to support your answer.

Research: In the 1850s, the river was a very important form of transportation. In what ways are rivers still important to our society today? Other than transportation, what many purposes do the rivers serve? Write a five paragraph informative essay with your answer.

Chapter Two

Discussion: Emily was 11 years old in 1850. Compare and contrast her behavior with that of an 11-year-old that you know now.

Using the Newspaper: Use today's newspaper to find 10 items you would pack to explore a cave. These items can be text or graphics. Next label your choices as luxury or necessity.

Using the Newspaper: Sam made Emily laugh. Find a humorous photo in today's paper. Write a new caption for the picture. Share your results with the class.

Constructed Response: Predict what will happen to the children. Use details from the story to support your predictions.

Research: Do you live near a cave? Find the cave that is closest to your school. Calculate the distance from your school to the cave in miles and kilometers. Find 10 facts about your cave and create a brochure for tourists who visit your cave.

Chapter Three

Discussion: Strangers rescued Emily and her friends. Has there been a time in your life when you were rescued or helped to rescue someone?

Using the Newspaper: Find an article that describes a rescue. Read the article and summarize the main facts (remember who, what, when, where, why, and how) to your classmates. While listening to the presentations make tallies to create a bar graph. How many rescues were local? State? National? International?

Using the Newspaper: Locate an adverb used in this chapter. Compare your answer with your classmates. Use today's newspaper to find 10 adverbs that would spice up a story. Use the dictionary to find the meaning of any unknown words. Remember to use these adverbs in future writing assignments!

Constructed Response: Explain what you would do if you were stranded in the cave. Why is your choice more effective than Emily's choice?

Research: Emily saw a search party on her way home. Research modern search parties. What techniques and technology do they utilize?

Chapter Four

Discussion: Emily was punished for her dangerous behavior. Do you agree with Emily's mother? Why or why not? What punishment have you received? Do you feel it was deserved? Why or why not?

Using the Newspaper: Using a washing machine is sure a lot easier than washing clothes by hand! Use today's newspaper to find eight items that make your life more convenient.

Using the Newspaper: Find an article about punishment. Rewrite the information as a TV script and present it to your class.

Constructed Response: What is the main idea of this chapter? How do you know it's the main idea?

Research: In 1850, laundry was washed by hand. What year was the modern washer and dryer invented? Research this development and sketch an advertisement to sell the product.

Chapter Five

Discussion: Emily's loyalty was divided between helping the men who saved her and by helping her community catch bank robbers. Tell about a time you felt your loyalty was divided.

Using the Newspaper: Use the help wanted ads to search for law enforcement careers. How many ads are there aimed at this profession? How many ads list a phone number? A mailing address? Email? Website? Write each number as a fraction.

Using the Newspaper: Read three sample headlines from your newspaper. What makes them eye catching and interesting? Write a possible headline for this chapter if it were to appear on the front page of a newspaper.

Constructed Response: How is the setting important to this story? Use clues and details from reading to support your answer.

Research: What duties are included in the career of a sheriff? Research this question and write a help wanted ad to recruit a sheriff for your community.

Chapter Six

Discussion: Do you think Emily made the right choice letting the robbers escape? What would you have done? Why?

Using the Newspaper: Emily was excited to be chasing the bank robbers. Read three stories from today's paper. Which one was the most exciting? Paraphrase the article for your classmates.

Using the Newspaper: The robbers were motivated by their desire to obtain money. Study the advertisements in today's paper. Identify four different techniques used to get consumers to part with their money.

Constructed Response: What is the most exciting part of the story so far? Support your answer using details and examples from the story.

Research: Use a map to locate the Mississippi River. Draw a picture of the route Captain Todd traveled home from Memphis. Label cities and landmarks.

Chapter Seven

Discussion: Do you think Emily made the right choice telling her secret about the robbers to Sam? What would you have done? Why?

Using the Newspaper: Sam wishes to be a great writer. Evaluate today's headlines in the newspaper. Choose one that would make a suitable title for a book. Create a book jacket complete with artwork, synopsis and reviews.

Using the Newspaper: Look through photos in today's papers. Find a picture of a girl that could be Emily and a boy that could be Sam. Defend your choices with examples from the text.

Constructed Response: List 10 events that happened in the story in chronological order. Which event had the biggest impact on Emily? How do you know?

Research: Sam wants to write books filled with interesting stories. Who is your favorite author? Research their biography and tell the class about the best story your chosen author has written.

Chapter Eight

Discussion: Sam Clemens used a pen name to spare his family embarrassment. What pen name would you have given Sam? If you had to choose a pen name for yourself what would you choose? Why?

Using the Newspaper: Evaluate the bylines in today's newspaper. Can you find any pen names? Be sure to check all sections of the newspaper.

Using the Newspaper: Locate a book review in the newspaper. Underline all of the facts, and circle all of the opinions. After reading the review, do you wish to read the book? Why or why not?

Constructed Response: What do you think the author's purpose was for writing this story? Support your answer with details from the text.

Research: Find a biography of Mark Twain. Create a poster with information to entice readers to try a Mark Twain book. Ask permission to hang your poster in the school or town library.