

Stepping Into

TIME

# MARK TWAIN'S WORLD



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# Twain's Time

An older-looking man sits relaxed in a chair, wearing a summer suit of soft, light cotton. The suit, like his somewhat unruly hair, is all white. He has bushy eyebrows and a thick but classic mustache—all of which are white. He holds a serious and steady gaze. Who is this man? He is Mark Twain, one of America's favorite and most famous writers.

It's hard to imagine the man in white as a redheaded, curly-haired boy running barefoot and wild. In the 1840s, the young Twain caused mischief and mayhem on the banks of the Mississippi River. Much like his beloved characters Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer, Twain's childhood was spent in a river city in Missouri. While much fun was had, Twain also witnessed slavery, racism, and violent crimes. His nineteenth century American upbringing shaped his literary career, while his wit, humor, and imagination made Mark Twain a household name. By stepping into his world, we can see how his surroundings and experiences influenced Twain's tales of life and adventure.

## The Truth Behind the Suit

Twain's trademark white suit made him stand out in a crowd. But the truth is that Mark Twain did not start wearing this signature style until he was in his seventies. He only wore the all-white suits occasionally, but today many people remember Twain as "the man in white."

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### Cigars and Cats

Two of Twain's favorite things were cigars and cats. He smoked more than 22 cigars a day. And it was not uncommon to see him carrying a cat around on his shoulders. He loved cats and would often tell his children bedtime stories about his furry feline friends.

# The Great Storyteller

Halley's Comet appears about every 76 years. The bright streak of gas and dust was visible in the night sky the day Samuel Langhorne Clemens was born. That is Twain's real name. He came into the world two months early, on November 30, 1835, in the tiny town of Florida, Missouri. Twain's mother was worried that her **premature** baby wouldn't survive. Perhaps the comet brought him luck because Twain not only survived but lived a long, eventful life.

## Twain Trivia

There is an attraction at Disneyland in Anaheim, California, called the Mark Twain Riverboat. If you ride the boat, you can hear a recording say, "Mark twain!" as you pull away from the dock. The island the river surrounds was originally called Tom Sawyer's Island and was based on Twain's book.

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## Pen Name

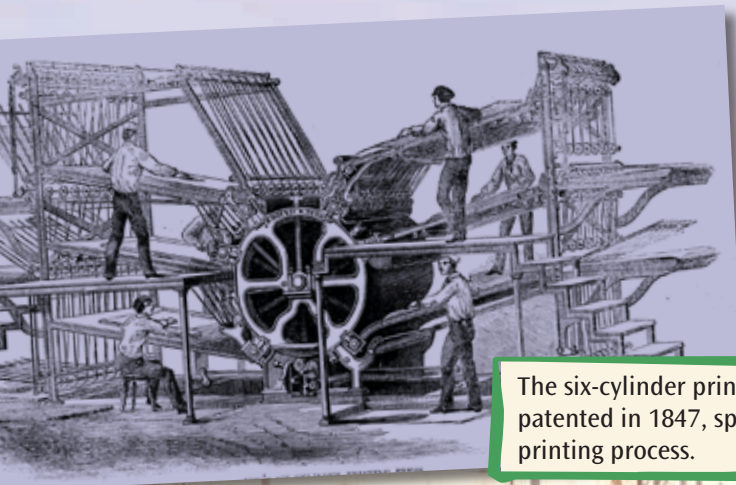
Samuel Clemens's pen name has its origins in the Mississippi River. Twelve feet, or two fathoms, was the ideal and safe depth for steamboats. When that depth was reached, a man onboard could be heard calling to the pilot, "Mark twain!" *Mark* means "to make note" and *twain* means "two."

## Younger Years

Twain was a spirited, rambunctious young boy. He moved with his family to Hannibal, Missouri, in 1839. Twain described Hannibal as a "boy's paradise" with caves, islands, and woods for exploring. As a young boy, he would regularly skip school to play and go on adventures with his friends. Sometimes, they would fish or swim in the Mississippi River. Twain recalls almost drowning in the rough river on multiple occasions. One of Twain's favorite things to do was watch steamboats work their way down the watery path. The three-story powerful boats with their mighty smokestacks and giant paddlewheels called to Twain. He knew that one day he would pilot one of those majestic vessels.

## A Printer's Apprentice

In 1847, Twain's father died, leaving the family financially strained. Twain quit school and became a printer's apprentice. He didn't earn money as an apprentice. Payment came in the form of learning new skills. However, Twain used these skills to get a job working for his older brother, Orion, who owned a local newspaper. But by the age of 17, Twain was tired of life in Hannibal and wanted to experience new adventures. He began to travel from city to city, picking up printing jobs where he could. He visited St. Louis, New York, and Chicago, among other places.



The six-cylinder printing press, patented in 1847, sped up the printing process.

## A Nation Divided

From 1861 to 1865, the United States fought the violent and bloody Civil War. The issue at the core of the war was slavery, which the South relied on to keep its large **plantations** running. The decision of 11 southern states to **secede** from the **Union** and form the Confederacy prompted a civil war between the North and the South. The North won the war, slavery was abolished, and the Union was preserved.

# Piloting the Mississippi

In 1857, Twain grew weary and restless again. He wanted new challenges and new adventures. He thought about the steamboats he loved as a child and decided to get a pilot's certificate. Horace Bixby, a celebrated steamboat pilot, let Twain be his apprentice. Twain had to learn how the boats worked as well as all the ins and outs of the long and winding Mississippi River. In 1859, Twain received his certificate. He worked as a pilot on the river until the Civil War broke out in 1861, which brought a stop to all commercial river traffic.





# Reader's Guide

For teachers' inspection ONLY

1. In what ways did Mark Twain's childhood in Missouri influence his writing?
2. What role did the Mississippi River play in Twain's life?
3. What similarities exist between your world and Twain's world?
4. What is it about Twain's writing that appeals to readers?

