

MARK TWAIN

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court

Adapted by H.Q. Mitchell



level

2

Introduction

Mark Twain (1835-1910) was born in Florida, Missouri, in a family of seven children. At the age of four, his family moved to Hannibal, a town on the Mississippi River, which later very much influenced his work. Mark Twain's real name was Samuel Langhorne Clemens. He was an enormously popular author who is now considered to be 'the father of American literature.' He wrote numerous books, many of which tell stories of his life on the Mississippi, where he worked as a steamboat pilot. In 1871, Mark Twain went to live in Connecticut with his family. During that time, he wrote his most successful books: *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Life on the Mississippi*, *Roughing It* and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court is an early example of time travel in literature. It is the story of an American from Connecticut, Hank Morgan, who wakes up in Medieval England of AD 528 after an accident. The country is ruled by the legendary King Arthur and Hank has various adventures with knights, monsters and evil magicians before he is transported back to his time. The book is a satire of the ideas of chivalry, the Middle Ages and the novels of Sir Walter Scott, which Twain particularly disliked.

There have been many adaptations of the book for the theatre, cinema and television and it has even been made into a musical. The earliest version was a silent film in 1921. Walt Disney Studios made the film *A Kid in King Arthur's Court* in 1995, and in 1998, the famous actress Whoopi Goldberg starred in *A Knight in Camelot*; both are variations of the original story.

Contents

Chapter 1.....	4
Chapter 2.....	7
Chapter 3.....	10
Chapter 4.....	13
Chapter 5.....	15
Chapter 6.....	18
Chapter 7.....	22
Chapter 8.....	25
Chapter 9.....	28
Chapter 10.....	32

Activity Section

Chapter 1.....	36
Chapter 2.....	38
Chapter 3.....	40
Chapter 4.....	42
Chapter 5.....	44
Chapter 6.....	46
Chapter 7.....	48
Chapter 8.....	50
Chapter 9.....	52
Chapter 10.....	54

CHAPTER 1

HANK MORGAN LIVED IN HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT, IN THE year 1879. He worked in a large factory that made guns, cannons, engines, and other machines. Hank was a hard-working man, but he used to get upset easily and he got into fights quite often. One day, he got into a fight with a big, strong worker named Hercules. Hercules hit him very hard on the head with an iron crowbar, and Hank fainted.

When he woke up, Hank was sitting under an oak tree in a very beautiful forest. A strange man on a horse was standing in front of him. Both the man and the horse were wearing iron armour from head to toe.

‘This must be some sort of strange circus,’ Hank thought.

“Sir, who are you and what are you doing here?” the strange man asked in a funny accent.

“None of your business,” Hank replied. “Now get back to your circus, before I get upset!”

Before Hank had time to do anything, the strange man pulled him onto his horse and rode off.

“Help!” shouted Hank. “Let me go!” But the strange man didn’t stop. They rode through the countryside, and Hank thought, ‘This is not a circus - it must be a dream.’ He saw people dressed in rags working in the fields, and in the distance, a huge castle.

“Is this Hartford, Connecticut?” Hank asked the man.

“No, it is Camelot, the kingdom of King Arthur. Now, be quiet!” the man answered angrily.

When they arrived at the castle, the strange man took Hank to a huge hall full of knights and ladies, all dressed in brightly coloured clothes and hats. The hall had big, colourful tapestries with horses and knights, and there was a huge fireplace in the corner. King Arthur was sitting in the centre of a round table, surrounded by his knights. Musicians were playing music and the nobles were eating and drinking and telling stories for the



King's pleasure.

"Ah, Sir Kay," the King said, when he saw the knight with Hank. "What have you brought us?"

"King Arthur," answered the man, "I have captured this strangely dressed man in a faraway land. He is my prisoner and I want him sentenced to death for speaking to me in a very rude way."

The court and the King decided that they should burn Hank at the stake the next day on June 21st, in the year 528, at exactly 12 o'clock pm. Then, two guards carried him away and a young servant boy named Clarence led him to a dark dungeon. Clarence seemed like a very nice boy.

"Please Clarence," Hank said. "You must help me get out of here! I don't belong here! This is all a mistake!"

"I wish I could help you, sir," Clarence answered. "But it is the will of the King, and I cannot go against his wishes. However, I will come back later to check on you."

'At the stake!' Hank thought. 'What a horrible death! This can't be true! I must find a way to get out of here. But wait... this is the year 528... there will be an eclipse tomorrow at exactly 12 o'clock!' Hank knew all the eclipse dates from school. "I have an idea!" he shouted. "I must talk to Clarence!"





CHAPTER 2

HANK WAITED IN THE DARK DUNGEON FOR HOURS.

Suddenly, he heard footsteps and saw a man with a torch.

It was Clarence!

“Hello, my strange friend,” said Clarence. “I came to see how you are doing and brought you something to eat.”

“Ah, Clarence, I’m so happy you are here! Now, listen, you must help me - you must go and tell the King this: he must let me go at once, or I will blot out the sun in the entire kingdom!” said Hank.

Clarence was shaking with fear, but he agreed to deliver the message and ran quickly out of the dark dungeon.

The next morning, some soldiers came and grabbed

Hank out of his cell.

"The stake is ready," they said. "Follow us."

Hank walked out into the courtyard and saw that it was full of people. King Arthur and his wife, Guinevere, were sitting in the centre. The soldiers brought Hank to the centre of the courtyard and tied him to the stake. As they were preparing to light the fire, Hank thought, 'Please let this be the day and time of the eclipse! I don't want to die!' He turned to the king and said, "You are making a mistake, your Majesty. You must let me go, or I will make the sun disappear."

Everyone looked up at the sky. It was getting dark, and the sun was slowly disappearing.

"Stop at once!" the King shouted to the soldiers. "Do not light the fire! Fair sir, I did not believe the message I heard yesterday. But it is true! You must be a very powerful magician. Please, please bring back the sun, and I will give you anything you want!"

The sky was completely dark. Everyone was scared and begging Hank to save them. Hank could not believe it. 'I'm actually in the year 528! I was right about the eclipse! I must take advantage of the situation,' he thought. He waited a few seconds, and then answered.

"I will bring back the sun, good King, but you must do something for me. You must let me work for you. I can help this kingdom in many ways. That is all that I ask," Hank said.

"Set him free at once!" the King shouted. "He is now second, only to me! Dress him and treat him like a prince!"

Hank was free at last. He looked up at the sky and saw that the eclipse was nearly over.

"Thank you fair King," he said. "Now, let this spell pass and let the sun shine again!" Hank shouted as he lifted up his hands towards the sky.

The sun slowly came out again, and everyone started clapping and cheering. Only one man was silent. He was Merlin, King Arthur's magician. Merlin did not like Hank, but Hank did not notice this. He was too busy feeling proud and very, very powerful.



CHAPTER 1

Comprehension

1 Choose a, b or c to answer the following questions.

1. Hank Morgan was a man who
 - a. was very lazy.
 - b. never got upset.
 - c. got into a fight with Hercules.
2. When Hercules hit Hank on the head with a crowbar, Hank woke up
 - a. in a circus.
 - b. in Camelot, the kingdom of King Arthur.
 - c. in Hartford, Connecticut.
3. Sir Kay was
 - a. a knight who found Hank under the oak tree.
 - b. the King of Camelot.
 - c. a musician entertaining the King.
4. The King decided that Hank
 - a. would go back to Hartford, Connecticut.
 - b. would die the next day.
 - c. would be free.

2 Read the sentences. Write T for True and F for False in the boxes.

1. Hank worked in a large factory that made guns and other machines.
2. Hank was forced to go to the circus by Sir Kay.
3. When Hank woke up he wasn't in Connecticut, but in Camelot.
4. The musicians were entertaining the nobles.
5. Clarence seemed like a horrible, unkind boy.

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Vocabulary

3 Match the words 1-5 with their meanings a-e.

- | | |
|------------|---|
| 1. rags | a. the home of a King and Queen |
| 2. castle | b. a dark prison in the Middle Ages |
| 3. knight | c. when the moon covers the sun |
| 4. dungeon | d. a soldier in the Middle Ages who usually wore metal armour |
| 5. eclipse | e. old and usually dirty clothes |

4 Complete the following sentences using the prepositions in the box.

with for at from of

1. Tomorrow the party will begin _____ noon.
2. Martin and Lucy got in trouble _____ talking during class.
3. Martin couldn't understand a word _____ what Ian was telling him.
4. Sally is sick and cannot take care _____ herself.
5. Dina will move to London and live _____ her sister.

Follow-up activities

5 Discuss.

1. Hank gets upset easily and often fights with people. Do you get upset easily? What is the best way to handle your anger?
2. When Hank saw the knight and horse standing before him, he thought he was in a circus. Why do you think Hank thought that? Have you ever been to a circus?
3. Hank asked the young servant boy, Clarence, for help; if you were the boy would you help Hank and why?
4. Hank was sentenced to death. What do you think will happen in the next chapter?

6 Imagine that you are Hank Morgan. You have woken up in a strange place, have been sentenced to death and are locked away in a dungeon. Write a note asking for help. Describe how you are feeling and what you fear will happen next. (40-60 words)