A Connecticut Yankee In King Arthur's Court Study Guide

A Connecticut Yankee In King Arthur's Court by Mark Twain

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Introduction

Throughout the centuries, people have looked to the legends of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table as the standard for a harmonious society. In the stories that have been passed down, knights were bold and chivalrous, fighting real and supernatural foes for the honor of themselves and the ladies they pledged themselves to. The king wisely watched over his subjects with an eye toward justice. In 1889, Mark Twain published the novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* to debunk the myths. The book has a man of Twain's era magically transported back to Camelot, the court of King Arthur. What he encounters is not a mystical time of dragons and sorcery, but a time of ignorance and suffering, when anyone who claims to have witnessed a supernatural event is believed by all. The King's court is balanced atop an unjust social system that ignores the rights of the working people and confers divine rights upon nobles who, having been born to wealth and power, have no idea of justice. The book's protagonist makes himself more powerful than the legendary magician Merlin by performing tricks that are simple for a man with contemporary knowledge. In addition, the protagonist sets about making wide-reaching social reforms, only to find that enlightenment ultimately does not work with superstitious, naïve people.

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court continues to be as relevant today as it was in Twain's time. As a social satire by one of America's great humor writers, it remains one of the funniest books in our nation's literary history.

Author Biography

Mark Twain (the most well-known pen name of Samuel Langhorne Clemons) was born in Florida, Missouri, on November 30, 1835, and grew up in Hannibal, a Missouri town along the Mississippi river. Hannibal was to play a significant role in some of Twain's most popular books and stories. When Twain was twelve, his father died. Twain then helped support his family by going to work as a printer's apprentice. After several failed business partnerships with his brother Orion, he took off across the American west, selling travel pieces to newspapers.

In 1857, Twain left on a trip to South America, with a contract to write about his adventures. While traveling down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico, Twain struck up a friendship with a riverboat captain named Horace Bixby. Twain abandoned his plan and instead became Bixby's apprentice, earning his own license to pilot steamboats in 1859. It was around this time that he adopted the name Mark Twain.

During the Civil War, Twain served for a short time in the Confederate army and then went out west, first to Nevada and then to San Francisco. In both places, he ran into trouble with the local governments for his sarcastic writings and had to leave each city in a hurry. It was at this time that Twain published his short story "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," which was printed in newspapers across America, making him famous. Twain's humor sketches and travel pieces provided him with a comfortable living. He married Olivia Langdon, who came from a wealthy, established family, and they eventually settled into Hartford, Connecticut, where they lived for the next twenty years.

Twain's first novel, *The Gilded Age*, was co-written with his friend and neighbor Charles Dudley Warner and published in 1873. Soon after that, he wrote the two books for which he is best remembered today: *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* followed in 1889.

Twain was as famous during his lifetime as a lecturer as he was as a writer, traveling extensively across the United States and Europe, telling his humorous anecdotes before crowds of thousands. He received an honorary master's degree from Yale in 1888 and an honorary doctorate from the same institution in 1901. In addition, Twain received honorary doctorates from the University of Missouri in 1904 and from Oxford University in 1907.

In his later years, Twain became increasingly angry with the moral weaknesses of the human race. This anger only solidified after the deaths of his oldest daughter in 1896 and then his wife in 1904. Twain's later writings and lectures were marked by the dark bleakness of his vision of humanity's future. When he died of heart disease on April 21, 1910, Twain was recognized as one of the greatest authors that America had ever produced.

Plot Summary

Preface

In the first chapter of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Twain addresses readers as himself, telling of a trip he made to England when he made the acquaintance of a stranger at Warwick Castle. This stranger tells him that he was in England at the time of King Arthur. That night, the narrator reads a story about Sir Launcelot fighting giants, and the stranger comes to his room.

The stranger, Hank Morgan (his name is never actually revealed until Chapter XXXIX), explains that he was a gunsmith in Hartford, Connecticut, when, during a fight, he was hit on the head with a crowbar. When he came to, he did not recognize his surroundings and was told that he was in Camelot. He gives the narrator a manuscript of his journal from that time, and the rest of the novel is told as if he (Hank) wrote it.

Chapter I—VII

Soon after arriving, Hank meets a young man he calls Clarence, who tells him that the year is 513. Hank is taken prisoner by Sir Kay the Seneschal and taken into the palace, where he observes the familiar characters of legend. However, Hank finds them to be exaggerators, liars, and naively superstitious. Sir Kay tells exaggerated tales about how he conquered giants; Sir Dinadan tells jokes that Hank knows from his own childhood. Merlin tells how King Arthur gained his enchanted sword, Excalibur. Hank explains that he himself is a magician and has been familiar with Merlin, in different guises, over the course of centuries. Because Hank knows that the date of a solar eclipse is eminent, he threatens to block out the sun if not released from custody. Just as Hank is being led to his execution, the eclipse occurs, and everyone marvels at Hank's powerful magic. Hank follows this trick by destroying Merlin's tower, which he manages by inventing gun powder, hiding it in the tower walls, and attaching a lighting rod as a detonator.

Chapter VIII—X

Hank is then accepted as the most powerful magician in the country. He is made an advisor to King Arthur and given a title: "The Boss." Over the next four years, Hank undertakes social reforms, such as starting a school system, reforming the mining system and the currency, and developing a telegraph and telephone system. Hank's employees in these adventures are kept separate from the rest of the population.

Chapter XI—XXVI

A woman, Demoiselle Alisande la Carteloise, comes to Camelot and tells the tale of forty-four maidens being held prisoner for twenty-six years by three one-eyed, four-

armed brothers. Hank is skeptical, but King Arthur believes her tale and sends Hank out in armor with the girl to rescue her friends.

Traveling the countryside with Demoiselle Alisande la Carteloise, whom Hank nicknames Sandy, Hank sees the political situation as it really is. He finds that free men are not free at all because they have to pay large portions of their crops to the king and the church. Hank stops at the castle of Morgan Le Fey, Arthur's sister, and sees how a really cruel despot treats her subjects. He tours Le Fey's dungeons and meets a man imprisoned on the testimony of a masked, anonymous stranger: the man accepts cruel punishment because his wife would lose all that she owns if he were to confess. Hank sends the man and his wife to the Man Factory, a brain trust of the smartest and bravest citizens. Hank finds dozens of prisoners in the castle's dungeons who were put there so long ago that no one knows what they were convicted of. Hank frees them.

When Hank and Sandy eventually reach the castle that Sandy has described, it turns out to be a common pigsty, and the maidens that she said were being held prisoner are the pigs. She tells Hank that it just seems that way to him because of a magic spell, and he admits that it might be his view and not hers that is wrong.

On the way home, they join a group of pilgrims going to the Valley of Holiness, where they find that the sacred spring has stopped flowing. Hank examines it and finds a way to fix the well that feeds the spring. This act increases Hank's reputation.

Chapter XXVII—XXXIX

After returning to Camelot and establishing more improvements in law and journalism, Hank decides to travel the country disguised as a peasant. King Arthur decides to join him. They run across all sorts of social injustices while traveling, such as the fate of a family unable to maintain their farm because the adult sons are in prison for a crime they did not commit.

Presenting themselves as a farmer and his bailiff, Hank and King Arthur lunch in one town with the local tradesmen and argue about politics. Offended, one of the men manages to have King Arthur and Hank arrested and put into slavery. In London, Hank eventually manages to escape and goes to a shop that has one of the telephones on the network he has devised. Hank calls Clarence to send help from Camelot. Just as Hank and King Arthur are on the gallows ready to be hanged, Sir Launcelot and five hundred knights, riding bicycles, arrive and save them.

Back in Camelot, Hank is forced to face up to a challenge to duel that was made years earlier by Sir Sagramor, who has been off seeking the Holy Grail. Hank, without wearing armor and without carrying a lance, faces Sir Sagramor. Hank wears Sir Sagramor down with deft horse riding and then pulls him off his mount with a lasso. Other knights rise to challenge Hank. He uses the lasso seven more times before Merlin steals it. Hank then starts shooting the other knights with his pistol before the knights give up.

Chapter XL—Afterword

Three years pass. Hank is married to Sandy, and they have a daughter. When the baby becomes sick, Sandy and the baby go to France for a warmer climate. Hank returns to England to find the country practically deserted. Clarence informs him that King Arthur found out about the romance between Guenever and Sir Launcelot and ordered her burned at the stake. Clarence also tells Hank that Launcelot, in trying to rescue Guenever, killed several knights, leading to a massive Civil War. When all of the knights were dead, including King Arthur, the Catholic Church invaded the country.

Hank and Clarence organize fifty-two young men at Merlin's Cave to defend the free political system that has grown over recent years; however, the people side with the church. Practically the entire country rises against Hank and his men. A clever system of explosives and electrical fences traps the invaders, killing around 25,000 soldiers. Once their bodies start decomposing, the air becomes thick with pestilence. Clarence writes the last chapter of the journal, explaining how Merlin came to them in the cave and put a spell on the injured Hank to sleep for 1,300 years.

In the final chapter of the book, Mark Twain describes finishing the manuscript and going to the room of the stranger who gave it to him. The man is in the room, muttering to Sandy (his long ago wife), and then he dies.

Characters

King Arthur

Hank's general impression of King Arthur is that he is too sure of himself and too unaware of the realities of his country. From this assessment, Hank feels that King Arthur is therefore destined to rule poorly. While traveling on his quest to free the damsels, Hank becomes outraged at the inequities of the English economic system and disgusted at the way that peasants are refused any say in their fate. When King Arthur offers to go traveling with Hank (with the king and Hank traveling in disguise), Hank sees his opportunity to show the king what life is like for the large segment of the population. Hank finds King Arthur's regal bearing pitiful because he knows that the king understands only one set of behaviors. Hank also finds the king's actions annoying because he (King Arthur) expresses his own thoughts when he should be listening. Ultimately, King Arthur's behavior proves dangerous because his proclamations while dressed in common clothes are taken to be signs that he is insane, which makes it easy for Dowley to arrange to have Arthur and Hank sold into slavery.

While traveling together, however, Hank sees the admirable side of King Arthur. Entering a house infected with smallpox, King Arthur does not hesitate or think of his own health when bringing an infected child to his mother, who is too weak to stand. King Arthur's belief in the rights of royalty extends to his power over illness, which Hank finds ridiculous when peasants line up to have the king's hands laid on them. But, Hank is impressed that King Arthur thinks nothing of facing death to bring mother and child together.

While Hank thinks King Arthur is a fool for believing that he has powers beyond those of ordinary men, the rest of the population admires him, except in one thing: everyone in the kingdom except King Arthur knows of the affair between King Arthur's wife, Guenever, and Sir Launcelot. For that, the king is silently laughed at by his subjects.

The Boss

See Hank Morgan

Clarence

Clarence is a nickname that Hank gives to a young page that talks to him when he first arrives in the sixth century. At first, Clarence seems as slow-witted as all of the peasants around Camelot, but Hank sees potential in him. Clarence turns out to be a useful surrogate for Hank as the he travels around the country. Hank sends people in need to Clarence, and he telephones Clarence to give him instructions. Hank teaches Clarence how to be a good newspaper reporter, which he says is necessary in molding a civilized country. During the final war, when Hank returns to England, Clarence tells him all that

he has missed while traveling with his wife and child, and Clarence writes the final chapter of the ancient manuscript, describing how Hank was injured and then put under a spell by Merlin, which enabled him to live until his own time.

Sir Dinadan

Sir Dinadan is the Round Table's humorist. Sir Dinadan is more amused by his jokes than anyone else in the court. Sir Dinadan writes the very first book, which is a collection of jokes. Sir Dinadan includes a joke about a lecturer that Hank hates, and so Hank has Sir Dinadan hanged.

Dowley

Dowley is the blacksmith in a small village the king and Hank stop in while traveling. Dowley has a big mouth and is unintelligent. He cannot understand that the wages in his town buy less than the wages where his guests come from, and so his wages are valued less overall. Hank humiliates Dowley with a stunning argument, and as a result, Dowley has the two strangers arrested and put into slavery.

Puss Flanagan

Puss is Hank Morgan's girlfriend back in his own time. She lives in East Hartford, Connecticut, and is only mentioned once in the novel when Hank is considering how improper it would be for him to go traveling unchaperoned with Demoiselle Alisande la Carteloise.

Guenever

Guenever is the wife of King Arthur and the lover of Sir Launcelot. In most sources, her name is given as "Guinevere," but Twain gives it as "Guenever."

Hercules

Hercules is a strong man who works at the blacksmith shop with Hank in the nineteenth century. Hank explains that, during a fight, Hercules hit him on the head with a crowbar, which is what causes him to go back to the sixth century.

Hugo

Hugo is the man Hank finds imprisoned in Morgan Le Fey's castle. Hugo is charged with killing a deer. Hugo is tortured, but he will not confess to the crime. Hugo eventually tells

Hank that he did kill the deer but does not dare confess because his wife will lose all that she owns. Hank has Hugo and his wife sent to join his Man Factory.

Sir Kay

Sir Kay is the knight who takes Hank into captivity soon after he arrives in the sixth century and brings him to Camelot, telling the knights there is a fantastic story about how he conquered Hank. Sir Kay refers to Hank with exaggerations like "giant," even though his listeners are standing right in front of him and can see that Hank is an ordinary man.

Demoiselle Alisande la Carteloise

See Sandy

Sir Launcelot

In the legend that Hank reads in the book's introduction, Sir Launcelot presents prisoners to the ladies of the court on behalf of Sir Kay. Later, Sir Launcelot leads the army of five hundred knights who storm London by bicycle to save Hank and the king from being hanged. As in the traditional stories, Sir Launcelot is in love with King Arthur's wife, Guenever, and she is in love with him.

The book explains that it is Sir Launcelot's affair with Guenever that destroys the kingdom. Sir Launcelot makes a shrewd investment that financially ruins King Arthur's nephew, Mordred, who, in retaliation, tells King Arthur about the affair. The war that ensues between Sir Launcelot's knights and King Arthur's knights decimates the social order, making it easy for the church to come in and take control.

Morgan Le Fey

Morgan Le Fey is King Arthur's sister and a familiar villain from the Arthurian legends. Hank Morgan stops at her castle while he is on his quest with Demoiselle Alisande la Carteloise. Le Fey is a cruel dictator, but she gives in to Hank when she realizes that he is the sorcerer that everyone has heard about. She grudgingly allows him to free prisoners in her dungeon and to show mercy to the mother of a page whom she (Le Fey) killed.

Amyas le Poulet

See Clarence

Marco

Marco is a charcoal manufacturer. When the king and Hank are traveling incognito as a farmer and his bailiff, Marco and his wife, Phyllis, have them over for dinner. Marco worries when Hank invites a number of other tradesmen, thinking that he cannot afford such a party, but Hank pays for a sumptuous meal and furnishings to accommodate all.

Merlin

Unlike the way Merlin the magician is presented in legends, the Merlin here is a braggart and a fool. His reputation is based on the way that he takes tales of ordinary events and adds details that make it look as if his supernatural powers were involved. When, in the third chapter, Merlin tells the story of how Arthur came to be king (with Merlin's help), Hank Morgan is charmed, but everyone in court, who has heard the story numerous times before, falls asleep. Merlin soon gets on Hank's bad side by insisting that he (Hank) be executed. When Hank has a chance to impress people with his own brand of sorcery, he does it by first bettering Merlin and then destroying his tower. Later, when Hank is facing one knight after another in a duel and besting them with his lasso, Merlin steals it from him and then tells King Arthur a lie about the lasso being good for only a set number of uses before it would vanish back to where it came from.

At the end of the book, Merlin proves to be a true magician and a wise politician. When Hank and Clarence and their supporters are fighting to establish a republic, Merlin is present, disguised as an old woman. When Hank is injured, Merlin puts a spell on him so that he will sleep for thirteen centuries, waking up in the time that he came from, thereby sparing him defeat in the war. Merlin dies laughing.

Hank Morgan

Most of the novel is presented as Hank's journal about his time in the sixth century, which he presents to Twain in the nineteenth century. In it, he tells of how he was transported by a blow to the head back to the court of King Arthur and the changes that he (Hank) made to their backward time. Hank brings them technological advances, such as railroads, telephones, telegraphs, sewing machines, and firearms. Hank promotes political reform, convincing King Arthur to abolish slavery and equalize the tax system so that it does not unfairly burden the poor.

Hank's one personal flaw is that he does not suffer fools well. When dining with Marco and the other tradesmen, for instance, Hank explains that he should not argue with Dowley to the point of humiliating the man, but he cannot help himself. The end result is that Hank and the king are perceived as a threat and sold into slavery. Hank makes a big show of pointing out the fraudulence of Merlin and the rival magician from the East who claims to know things that others are doing far away. Given that most of his attempts to bring nineteenth-century technology to the sixth century are kept in private, it is counter-productive for Hank to take such pride in unmasking the phoniness of the

established world. While traveling with King Arthur, Hank actively struggles to suppress his opinion that the king is no better than any other man, knowing that no good can come of insulting the king.

After the kingdom has been torn apart by internal war and then taken over by the Catholic church's interdiction, Hank is the leader of a band of young men who try to keep the country free. When the battle is lost, Merlin, whose power Hank has previously unmasked as fraudulent, places a spell on him so that he will sleep for thirteen hundred years. This explains why, having been transported to the past at the beginning of the narrative, he is able to interact with Mark Twain in the nineteenth century.

Sir Sagramor

Early in the novel, Hank Morgan offends Sir Sagramor when he comments unfavorably about the stale jokes of Sir Dinadan. Sir Sagramor thinks Hank is talking about him. A duel is arranged, but Sir Sagramor has to leave almost immediately on the quest for the Holy Grail, so the duel is postponed. Years later, after Hank returns from slavery, the duel is called on again. Sir Sagramor, dressed in heavy armor, is unable to maneuver himself. Hank beats Sir Sagramor by throwing a cowboy lasso over him and pulling him to the ground.

Sandy

Sandy is the nickname Hank gives Demoiselle Alisande la Carteloise. She comes to the court in chapter XI with a story about a castle where maidens are being held prisoner by four-armed, one-eyed giants. When Hank is sent out to free the maidens, Sandy travels the countryside with him, boring him with long-winded discussions about her backward views. At the end of the quest, the maidens turn out to be a herd of pigs and the castle they are held in is a sty, which Sandy says just looks that way to Hank because of a magical spell. Their travels end with Hank leaving Sandy at a convent to rest.

Much later, Sandy is reintroduced into the book as Hank's wife. They have a very loving relationship and have a daughter together. When Hank has to leave Sandy and the child, he writes to her every day. Hank's final words on his death bed, hundreds of years later, are to her.

Themes

Science and Technology

With his modern technological knowledge, Hank Morgan is able to quickly make himself one of the most powerful personages in King Arthur's realm. Hank commands respect by appealing to the superstitions that the common people usually follow. Hank presents himself as a sorcerer more powerful than Merlin, who Hank sees as holding great political influence simply because he knows how to make himself sound important in his stories. When Hank displays knowledge of astronomy in predicting the solar eclipse and knowledge of pyrotechnics by blowing up Merlin's castle, he is doing things on a large and conspicuous scale so that the common people can marvel at what they perceive to be his powers.

Having earned the sobriquet "The Boss" by fairly simple applications of scientific principles, Hank develops more complex technological advances in private, so that the superstitious population will not revolt in fear. He has telephone and electrical lines run, but close to the ground or underground. When railroad lines are run and newspapers are sold on the street corners, Hank takes care to introduce them gradually so as to not overwhelm the population. The result of this gradualism is that he relies on a secret network of intellectuals to understand his concepts, develop them, and maintain them. When war ravages the country, the forces of ignorance rise up, and all of the scientific and technological advances that he brought from the future are destroyed before they can be misused by the wrong people.

Divine Right

By putting Hank into the royal court, Twain directly addresses the question of the rights and responsibilities of King Arthur. Hank Morgan is quite outspoken about his opinions of royalty. He calls it a delusion, a comfortable myth that the people believed in because it had been taught to them all their lives and had been taught to their parents and grandparents, too. At one point, Hank says that the concept of the divine rights of royalty was developed by the church in order to keep the masses meek and self-sacrificing.

In the book, King Arthur's abuses of his royal power are presented as a result of his being kept separate from the main population and being ignorant about the realities of their lives. After King Arthur has traveled among the common people and been sold into slavery, he abolishes the practice of slavery. King Arthur is shown to be an overall noble person who does the best that can be done with the monarchical tradition. The malicious abuse of the concept of divine right is presented through Twain's characterization of Morgan Le Fey, who thinks nothing of taking the lives and property of peasants on a whim. She is so careless about the lives of her subjects that, when she does not understand what the narrator means when he says that he would like to

"photograph" the peasants, she is prepared to casually take a sword and kill them, rather than admit that she does not understand the meaning of the word.

Religion

In just one of the many places in the novel where he rails against the Roman Catholic Church's corrosive influence on society, Twain's narrator notes that, "In two or three little centuries it had converted a nation of men to a nation of worms. Before the day of the Church's supremacy in the world, men were men, and held their heads up, and had a man's pride and spirit and independence." Twain's rage is not confined to just the Catholic Church but also applies to any established church, which he sees as an instrument for suppressing the rights of people by taking their inherent power away from them, making them slaves to the whims of the powerful people who claim to speak for God.

Though Hank mentions the church frequently throughout the course of the novel, it does not play a very prominent role in the plot. In part, this is by design. Hank explains that he designs his political reforms specifically so that they will not attract the attention of the church and bring out its opposition. At the end, when Guenever's infidelity is pointed out to King Arthur, the battle between the Knights of the Round Table creates such an obvious rend in the social fabric that it would be impossible for the church to not notice it. As a result, they send troops to take over the country. All of the technological and social advances that Hank brought from the nineteenth century are destroyed, and English culture is reverted back to the primitive, enslaving mindset that it had when he arrived. The church is held responsible for opposing progress, and, therefore, for causing widespread suffering.

Style

Loose Structure

Twain has been faulted for the structure, or lack of structure, of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. In the broadest term, the story has a clear structure, beginning and ending with the speaker, Twain, visiting England, then introducing the character of the Yankee, and then settling into the story that the Yankee has written out, which takes up most of the book. The book returns to Twain at the end, at which point the Yankee dies.

Within the Yankee's story, however, there is little consistency. Plot elements begin and end haphazardly, characters enter and leave with little notice, and long episodes conveniently arise just as others end. The most egregious of these inconsistencies is the way that the character of Sandy disappears from the story some time around the Restoration of the Fountain, and then reappears, surprisingly, more than a hundred pages later, as Hank Morgan's wife and the mother of his child.

The plot's inconsistencies, and its segmented format, are attributed to the fact that Twain wrote this novel in sections, over the course of three years. Instead of having an organic unity that it would have if it were edited after the final section was written, the story was put together one piece at a time. The final product reflects a growing understanding of the implications of what started out as a light fantasy.

Setting

In some novels, setting is unimportant, but the setting is the whole reason for this book's existence. As an examination of Middle Age customs through modern sensibilities, it seems at first to be an indictment of the naïve notions that people had in the past. Because Twain is a careful and humane writer, though, the people of that time prove to be worthy of sympathy, despite their strange notions. King Arthur turns out to be a truly kind and stately person, and Merlin turns out to have supernatural power after all. Twain uses the bare outline of Arthurian legends, which often wax nostalgic for the loss of such chivalric customs as loyalty to the court, bravery among knights, and devotion to one's lady, and he infuses them with real-life problems, such as the court existing by exploiting peasant labor. Cutting through the haze of sentimentality that has surrounded these stories throughout the years allows Twain to create a setting that is at once familiar and new.

Historical Context

The Gilded Age

During the last one-third of the nineteenth century, after the end of the Civil War, America experienced a boom in manufacturing that catapulted it into position as one of the world's economic leaders. From 1870 to 1900, the country's consumption of bituminous coal, which was the leading source of energy of the time, multiplied tenfold; production of rolled steel was twelve times greater; and, the overall economy grew to approximately six times its former size. The number of people employed in manufacturing tripled during the same time, to 7.6 million.

At that time of expansion, fortunes were made. The railroads, which were stretched across the continent, and the telephone, invented in 1876, made the growth of nation-wide corporations possible. With these distribution and communication networks, corporations were able to reach markets anywhere in the land. Millions were made in such areas as steel, shipping, retail stores with catalog sales, and oil. The luxurious lifestyles of society's upper crust caused the era to be termed the Gilded Age, an expression coined by Mark Twain himself in the title of an 1871 book.

Unfortunately, only a small portion of the population was enjoying such wealth. Much of society was suffering in poverty during the Gilded Age. A flood of immigrants drove wages down, and rural Americans flocked to the cities, which could not provide jobs for all. With the boom in manufacturing, tenements arose, and with them the unsanitary conditions that spread diseases. Taking advantage of the largess of the wealthy and the ignorance of the masses of new voters, politicians earned a reputation for corruption that would last until reforms of the early twentieth century. It was out of this period in which the abuse of cheap, expendable labor enabled only a few individuals to become unbelievably wealthy that America's labor movement arose.

Arthurian Legend

There is much debate about whether the King Arthur as mentioned in the legends ever truly existed. Most scholars agree that there was an Arthur who lived in the sixth century and ruled Britain, but records from the time are incomplete, so there is no conclusive evidence to show whether this Arthur and the King Arthur of the stories are one and the same.

The first legends of King Arthur have been traced to Welsh sources in the seventh century. These sources linked King Arthur to Celtic mythology, which explains the story's legendary, supernatural elements, such as Arthur earning his throne when the Lady in the Lake gives him the enchanted sword Excalibur. For hundreds of years after that, the stories about the king and his court expanded, and the characters and locations that are currently associated with the story, including Camelot, the Round Table, Sir Lancelot,

Guinevere, Merlin, and the rest, were added. At the same time, a romantic tradition grew up around the characters in the legends, particularly in the French versions of the stories. Like modern soap operas, these stories concentrated on the loves and betrayals and moral decisions that the knights and ladies faced.

The first person to write a continuous narrative of the accounts of King Arthur and his knights was Geoffrey of Monmouth, a Welsh writer who told the story that is most familiar today. This narrative was called the *History of Kings of Britain* (1137). After that, there are frequent references to the story. The first major literary treatment of the tales in English was Sir Thomas Malory's *L'Morte d'Arthur* (or, *The Death of Arthur*), published in 1485. Twain refers to Malory's work in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. For instance, the end of Twain's story is almost directly taken from Malory, with some modifications: Arthur finds out about Launcelot and Guenevere, orders her burned at the stake, Launcelot rescues her, and there is a fight for the kingdom between King Arthur's men and Launcelot's. Through the ages, each generation has taken Malory's story and expanded on it, reflecting the morals of contemporary society.

Critical Overview

Twain is considered to be one of the most significant novelists in American history, but *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* is generally thought of as an unstable effort. In his lifetime, Twain was greatly admired and immensely popular as a humorist, and he was widely read in newspapers. This popularity dwindled in his later years, from about the turn of the century until his death in 1910, when his writing became increasingly dark and his vision of humanity bleak. After his death, Twain received the attention that had been waning in his later years. Typical of this attention was the great journalist H. L. Mencken's observation (quoted in *A Mencken Chrestomathy*) in 1919: "The older I grow the more I am convinced that Mark was, by long odds, the largest figure that ever reared itself out of the flat, damp prairie of American literature." Perhaps the greatest single boost to Twain's reputation came when Ernest Hemingway, himself a deeply respected novelist and an eventual Nobel Prize winner, is said to have declared Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to be the source of all modern American fiction.

One of the things that has always maintained the reputation of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* is its appeal to many different political perspectives, even gathering together those who do not agree with one another. Some, particularly those of Twain's own time, have seen the book as a "celebration of modern values," as Robert Keith Miller put it in his book *Mark Twain* in 1983. Others, Miller points out, have considered it a condemnation of all optimism. One good example of this flexibility is the way Charles L. Sanford, in an article originally published in *American Quarterly* (reprinted in *Readings on Mark Twain*) called "A Classic of Reform Literature," calls the novel Twain's "symbolic attempt to persuade himself that all was right in the American garden after all." Although Sanford says that this statement "takes into account both those critics who interpret *The Connecticut Yankee* as a veiled attack upon American business practices and those who take his praise of modern times at face value," there are very few critics who would agree in characterizing Mark Twain as wishing to be self-deluded.

While Twain has always had a reputation as a master satirist, critics have had trouble identifying just what is being satirized in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. John C. Gerber, writing in his book *Mark Twain*, refers to the novel's problem as "literary schizophrenia," noting that "[o]n the surface it is a tall tale that lampoons chivalric romances, while underneath it is a compendium of Mark Twain's increasingly gloomy thoughts about human behavior in both the past and the present." Because of its inherent contrasts, Robert Keith Miller tells his readers, "Clearly, this is a work that deserves to be read closely."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Kelly is an instructor of literature and creative writing at two schools in Illinois. In this essay, Kelly examines how the character of Hank Morgan makes Twain's story difficult for modern readers.

Reading and becoming informed about the past is part of a well-rounded education. Still, it is not always easy. An especially difficult task for modern readers is to determine the proper approach to a work that was not only written decades prior, but whose setting is centuries in the past. Published in the late 1880s, the book is about history; at the same time, for the contemporary reader, it *is* history. Twain wrote about the Middle Ages, setting his novel in the year 587. His central idea concerns explaining the changes that had come over the world over the course of thirteen centuries. There is nothing in the novel to explain the changes of the past hundred and fifteen years .

Contemporary readers are presented with the world Twain was writing about and also the world that he assumed his readers would know. That is a lot of information to synthesize. To make matters worse, a good case can be made that in the twentieth century the rate of social change accelerated at a pace quicker than it did in many of the pre-technological centuries that separated Twain from his subject. The book focuses on the developments that occurred between King Arthur's time and Twain's, such as the locomotive, the telephone, the newspaper, and the gun; these are all significant advances, but they do not really hold up in magnitude to the automobile, airplane, television, laser, DNA mapping, and thousands of other achievements that have occurred. The time that has passed since Twain lived might easily be characterized as the age of the nuclear bomb and the computer. Both destruction and knowledge have become global, not provincial, realities.

It is common to blame contemporary American students for their lack of historical perspective; studies regularly quote students saying that they do not see how incidents in the distant past matter to their lives, and tests show that they cannot identify the dates for milestones in world history like the French Revolution, the Renaissance, or even the First World War. In the case of a novel like *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, it would be easy to sympathize with their sense of alienation. Readers of this book are not only required to look backward through history, but also have to line up two separate historical points and determine their relationship to each other. Students might approach the book armed with a dictionary, but an astrolabe might be more appropriate.

Students will commonly express their frustration with fiction that was written long ago or about ancient times and their inability to relate to the strange settings and surroundings depicted in both. The standard response is that good readers will look beyond the cultural differences and concentrate on the work's characters. Literature is about the human condition. Regardless of where a story takes place or what happens in it, the characters should still, at heart, be human. No one says that a reader has to be a student of the sixth century or of the nineteenth century in order to appreciate *A*

Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court. The behavior of Hank Morgan, the Yankee of the title, is all that one really has to relate to. In some regards, Twain makes it easy for readers of any generation to join Hank in his adventure, but in other regards, Twain complicates things by making Hank more complex than people expect to find in an adventure yarn or satire.

This type of story should be familiar to anyone who has ever read a book, seen a movie, or watched TV. It is a standard stranger-in-a-strange-land myth, a variation on the old fish-out-of-water formula, which throws its protagonist into an unfamiliar environment and studies how he reacts to what he finds there and how the people there react to him.

In *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Twain continually refines this formula. When Hank becomes a familiar figure around Camelot, he leaves it to travel across the country on several extended journeys. While Hank is out on his travels, a war breaks out in King Arthur's realm. Hank returns to find a devastated landscape where almost all of the people he has come to know over the years are dead and the social order he personally constructed no longer exists. Rather than seeing him act throughout the downfall of Arthur's court, readers see him plunged into another unfamiliar situation, learning about what kind of man Hank Morgan is by watching how he reacts.

It would be easier for readers to float through this book, experiencing new worlds with Hank Morgan, if Hank were the ordinary man that he is often assumed to be. Twain does not give much background about his life before being transported back in time. Readers are told only that he was a foreman in the Colt firearms factory; that his father was a blacksmith and his uncle a horse doctor, and he has practiced both trades; that he had a girl in his time that he was "practically engaged to," although she seldom passes through his thoughts; and that he considers himself "a practical Connecticut man." From these details, one can assume a penchant for problem-solving and a high degree of impatience with sentimentality and romance. What one does not assume is the fact that Hank Morgan is not a very nice man.

Hank tells the story and, therefore, readers tend to identify with him. When he looks at the barbaric practices of Camelot, from the inequity of ownership to the government-supported cruelty of nobles to the people's ignorance of the physical world, his directness is admirable. When Hank sees problems, he sets about fixing them, which is a huge improvement over the people who are accustomed to accepting their troubles because of tradition or fear. And, in fact, one sees a few benefits when Arthurian society begins to run the Hank Morgan way. Slavery is abolished, prisoners are freed, and despots learn that they are accountable for the suffering of their subjects.

What is not as openly pronounced in the novel is the weakness of Hank's reforms. Readers hear about railroads, gold currency, a stock market, newspapers, etc., but, really, what effect do these have? The ones that are shown to have any value have value to Morgan, for securing his claims of being a great sorcerer, like his fixing of the pump at the Holy Fountain or his synthesis of gunpowder specifically to destroy Merlin's castle. Some reforms, like his miller-gun for dispensing currency, seem to have been forced on the Middle Age peasants because Hank, a gunsmith, thought to invent them.

Hank does not comprehend that his reforms might never be appropriate for these particular people. His faith is in technology and machines, not in the democratic spirit that he so often evokes.

The idea of understanding a strange social setting by relating to the protagonist of the book is much more difficult in this book than it is in other novels because the protagonist has been written to be ignorant of his own flaws. Hank is aware of the shortcomings of Camelot and, like any good mechanic, he can suggest means to fix particular problems, but he cannot see beyond the repairs he suggests. He does not think about the problems that he might create when his programs fall into place. Hank is not a social planner. Twain himself was unimpressed with Hank. Edmund Reiss (in his afterward to *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*) quotes Twain as having said "this Yankee of mine has neither the refinement nor weakness of a college education; he is a perfect ignoramus; he is boss of a machine shop; he can build a locomotive or a Colt's revolver, he can put up and run a telegraph line, but he's an ignoramus, nevertheless." Readers who find it difficult to understand King Arthur's society and who are unfamiliar with the way people thought in the eighteen hundreds will find Hank Morgan himself no less perplexing. He thinks that he knows more than he does so readers who take him at his word are bound to misinterpret the book's overall significance.

In Twain's time, it would be easy to judge Morgan as a meddler who has gone and interfered in another culture, finding them to be too lacking in modern conveniences, forcing his own social standards on them. Modern readers, though, see two historic cultures at work, each one with its positives and negatives, but neither one our own. Contemporary readers therefore tend to miss out on the story's careful moral balance.

The story of the stranger finding himself suddenly catapulted into an unfamiliar culture has been told time and time again. Usually, writers focus their attention on the clash of the cultures, and so they make their protagonist either benign, so as to not draw too much attention away from the cultural issues, or wise, so that the author can use the story to show how the world ought to work. In *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Twain takes the more difficult path by having two cultures converge in the life of one complex character. This gives modern readers a lot to analyze, and they understandably might fail to notice just how much Twain expects of them.

Source: David Kelly, Critical Essay on *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, in *Novels for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Adaptations

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court was adapted as a light-hearted musical in 1949, starring Bing Crosby, Rhonda Fleming, Cedric Hardwicke, and William Bendix. The music is by Jimmy Van Heusen and Johnny Burke. It was released by Universal on VHS in 1993.

Iconic American humorist Will Rogers had the starring role in the 1931 adaptation of Twain's story, called simply *A Connecticut Yankee*. Directed by David Butler, it was released by Twentieth Century Fox and is available on VHS.

In 2001, comedian Martin Lawrence starred in *Black Knight*, a movie that was an adaptation of Twain's basic premise. In this version, Lawrence plays a contemporary amusement park operator who is transported back to medieval times. It is available on DVD from Twentieth Century Fox Home Video.

A two CD recording of an abridged version of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* is available from Naxos, published in 2001. It is read by Kenneth Jay.

Comedian Carl Reiner recorded an abridged version of the novel for Dove Audio's Ultimate Classics series in 1993. It is available on three CDs.

Blackstone Audio has an 8-cassette version of the book that is unabridged. It is read by Chris Walker and was released in 1999.

The entire text of this novel is available on the Internet at http://www.literature.org/authors/twain-mark/connecticut/index.html in a searchable format.

Almost anything that a student would want to find out about Arthurian legend is cross-referenced at the University of Rochester's web page at *The Camelot Project: Arthurian Texts, Images, Bibliographies and Basic Information*. This web page can be found at http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/cphome.stm

Topics for Further Study

Think of a period in history that you would like to visit. Write a short story detailing what it would be like if you went there and how you would influence the citizenry with your twenty-first century knowledge.

The late nineteenth century was a time of great industrial progress; the late twentieth century was considered the Information Age. Research what people think the coming trends are and write an essay about what you guess will be the important social movement of the twenty-second century.

The year that most of this novel takes place, 528 a.d., is also the year that the roots of Buddhism were established, when Siddhartha Gautama, who was to be called the Buddha, found enlightenment. Explain what would have happened if Twain's protagonist, Hank Morgan, had ended up in the presence of the Buddha instead of in the presence of King Arthur.

In one chapter of this novel, Twain explains that there were actually two "Reigns of Terror." Research the French Revolution and explain what he means by this. Also, explain whether you think the French Revolution was more important to the world's history than the American Revolution. Provide facts from your research to support your claim.

Twain explains newspapers as being essential to any civilized society. In what ways is he right? Are newspapers still important now that we have the Internet, or has their day come and gone? Pick a position and try to defend it an essay or debate this topic with another classmate.

Compare and Contrast

528: The vast majority of the population is uneducated. Only a few men associated with the church are educated in the ancient languages of Greek and Latin.

1889: The King James Bible, an English edition that was finished in 1611, is in many homes and is a primary text for teaching children to read. School is not mandatory and is only attended regularly by a minority of children.

Today: School attendance has been required in the United States for nearly a century, up to the age of 16 in most states.

528: During the Middle Ages, little machinery exists, which means that all physical work has to be done by hand.

1889: The past hundred years have brought an industrial revolution, with machines making it possible to create things on a grander scale than was ever imaginable before.

Today: America is in a post-industrial age: most jobs that require physical labor are consigned to poorer countries, leaving the country with a service economy.

528: Peasants followed the aristocracy unquestioningly, having been assured by the church that blind obedience is what the church required.

1889: American political discourse thrives on diversity, to such an extent that a war has actually separated different factions of the nation.

Today: America is solidly but informally a two-party political system, with power control held at any given time by either the Democrats or the Republicans.

528: There are no news media: news travels by word-of-mouth, making it difficult to verify the truth.

1889: The only real news source is the newspapers, leaving the truth at the mercy of the newspaper owners.

Today: Although the ownership of newspapers, television, and radio is falling into fewer and fewer hands through corporate consolidation, the Internet has made it possible for individuals to tell their stories directly to strangers.

528: Medical treatment is mostly unheard of. Magic is considered as effective as science.

1889: When faced with a sick relative, as Hank is when his daughter comes down with the croup, a smart individual knows what steps to take.

Today: Science has identified the cellular and molecular causes of many diseases, and there are high-tech medicines and treatment centers that were unimaginable just a few decades ago.

What Do I Read Next?

At about the same time that Twain was writing his version of the Arthurian legend in America, Great Britain's poet laureate, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, was working on his masterful poem about the same subject, *Idylls of the King* (begun in 1859, completed in 1885). Tennyson's version of the story is beautifully lush, dreamy, and considerably more reverent than Twain's version.

The version of the story of Camelot that Twain used as a basis for his novel was Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485). In 2003, Cassel published a complete version of Malory's work called *Le Morte D'Arthur: Complete, Unabridged, Illustrated Edition*, which is edited by John Matthews and lushly illustrated by Anna Marie Ferguson.

Journalist T. H. White retold the story of King Arthur in his book *The Once and Future King* (1958), which made the tales accessible for modern readers. White's version became a bestseller and is considered by many critics to be a masterpiece of fantasy literature.

Twain's own masterpiece is considered to be *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). Similar in episodic plot and political indignation to *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, this work is considered by many to be the elusive "great American novel."

Twain was a well-known personality of his day and has become almost as recognizable to readers of American literature as any of the characters he created. *The Autobiography of Mark Twain* (1959), edited by Charles Neider, gives Twain's story directly. This book was assembled from various autobiographical writings and is available in paperback from Harper Perennial.

Of the many biographies of Twain that are available, one of the most user-friendly is *Mark Twain* (2001), by Geoffrey C. Ward and Dayton Duncan. This book was produced to be the companion piece to Ken Burns's documentary miniseries about Twain and reflects the most current (at the time) research on his life.

Further Study

Cox, James M., "The Ironic Stranger," in *Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor*, Princeton University Press, 1966, pp. 222—46.

Cox considers this novel's place in Twain's long career and finds it to be the point at which he started entering the final, worst stage of his writing life.

Davis, Sara de Saussure, and Philip D. Beidler, eds, *The Mythologizing of Mark Twain*, University of Alabama Press, 1984.

This book is a compilation of essays by and about Twain, charting the growth of his reputation.

Michelson, Bruce, "The Quarrel with Romance," in *Mark Twain on the Loose: A Comic Writer and the American Self*, University of Massachusetts Press, 1995, pp. 95—171.

This long chapter from Michelson's excellent examination of Twain's career looks at the American Romantic tradition and Twain's relationship to it.

Robinson, Douglas, "Revising the American Dream: *A Connecticut Yankee*," in *Mark Twain*, edited by Harold Bloom, Modern Critical Views series, Chelsea House Publishers, 1986, pp. 183—206.

Robinson's analysis of the book is steeped with philosophy and complex literary theory.

Snyder, Christopher, *The World of King Arthur*, Thames and Hudson, 2000.

Snyder has assembled a richly-illustrated book filled with thousands of details about the time that Twayne was exploring.

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Gerber, John, *Mark Twain*, Twayne's United States Authors Series, No. 535, G. K. Hall, 1988, p. 115.

Mencken, H. L., "The Man Within," in *A Mencken Chrestomathy*, Knopf, 1967, pp. 485—89.

Miller, Robert Keith, *Mark Twain*, Frederick Ungar, 1983, p. 113.

Reiss, Edmund, "Afterward," in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Signet Classic, 1990, p. 320.

Sanford, Charles L., "A Classic of Reform Literature," in *Readings on Mark Twain*, Greenhaven Press, 1996, p. 170.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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