

# **Roughing It Study Guide**

## **Roughing It by Mark Twain**

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# Contents

<a href="#">Roughing It Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Prefactory.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Chapter I-IX.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Chapter X-XVIII.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Chapter XIX-XXV.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Chapter XXVI - XXXI.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Chapter XXXII - XXXV.....</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">Chapter XXXVI - XXXIX.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Chapter XL - XLVIII.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">Chapter XLIX - LIV.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Chapter LV - LXII.....</a>	<a href="#">26</a>
<a href="#">Chapter LXIII - LXXVII.....</a>	<a href="#">29</a>
<a href="#">Chapter LXXVIII - LXXIX.....</a>	<a href="#">32</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">33</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">37</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">40</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">43</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">46</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">48</a>

# Plot Summary

"Roughing It" is Mark Twain's second novel. It is a humorous collection of facts and somewhat informal travel journal, in which the narrator goes from St. Louis to San Francisco and on to the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) in the early 1860's. The explosion of the mining business in the Western States of the Union, and more specifically the Territory of Nevada, serve as a backdrop for many of the narrator's adventures. The author examines the economic boom of the area and its consequences on the people, the evolution of English as a diversified language and the transformation of nature by man. The mainly humorous tone of the novel is grounded in the many mishaps, errors of judgments and various mistakes that are constantly preventing the author from attaining his goal - becoming rich with little effort on his part. The book digs in a rich mine of wonderful vocabulary and provides moving descriptive passages. These attributes insure that the novel is just as interesting today as it must have been at the time of its publication, over 130 years ago.

The novel starts as the narrator decides to accompany his brother to Nevada, where the latter will work as Secretary for the Governor of the Territory. Under the pretense of serving as his personal secretary, the narrator intends to use the opportunity to profit from the thriving silver and gold mining business of the West and to quickly make a fortune. The two men travel from St. Louis to St. Joseph by boat, then ride a stagecoach down to Carson, Nevada. During this initial trip, the narrator gets acquainted with the landscape of the western deserts and the men that populate them. He describes the employees of Overland, the mail company that operates the coaches, as well as the Indians and the Mormons of Utah.

Once in Carson, the narrator catches the "Silver fever" and starts looking for opportunities in the mining business. He teams up with several friends, buys mining equipment and moves to Humboldt County. The mining enterprise proves unsuccessful, and the team decides to invest in various claims, a business which proves just as disastrous. The narrator forms another mining party and moves to Esmeralda to work as a trader. Following a series of near-catastrophic adventures, the narrator finds work as a reporter in nearby Virginia. After a few years, the narrator quits his job at the paper and moves to San Francisco.

After losing his job and all his investments, the narrator spends a few months doing "pocket mining" in Tuolumne. After the failure of this last project, he accepts a job and moves to the Sandwich Island, where he spends six months. Upon his return to the continent, he starts a new business as a public speaker, which finally proves successful.



# Prefactory

## Prefactory Summary

"Roughing It" is Mark Twain's second novel. It is a humorous collection of facts and a somewhat informal travel journal, in which the narrator goes from St. Louis to San Francisco and the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) in the early 1860's. The explosion of the mining business in the Western States of the Union, and more specifically the Territory of Nevada, serve as a backdrop for many of the narrator's adventures. The author examines the economic boom of the area and its consequences on the people; the evolution of English as a diversified language, and the transformation of nature by man. The mainly humorous tone of the novel is grounded in the many mishaps, errors of judgments and various mistakes that are constantly preventing the author from attaining his goal - becoming rich with little effort on his part. The book digs in a rich mine of wonderful vocabulary and provides moving descriptive passages. These attributes insure that the novel is just as interesting today as it must have been at the time of its publication, over 130 years ago.

In the preface, the author announces that the book is meant as a simple, unpretentious first-person report of his adventures in the western territories of the United States during the silver mining frenzy of Nevada.

## Prefactory Analysis

The book opens with a preface that foreshadows the humorous tone of the novel.



# Chapter I-IX

## Chapter I-IX Summary

The narrator learns that his brother has been appointed as Secretary of the State of Nevada, a job for which he will be rewarded with 1800 dollars a year. He envies his brother's position and status, but not nearly as much as he envies the social advantages that go with it. He envisions that his brother will strike it rich simply by picking up nuggets of gold and silver alongside the numerous mines that can be found in Nevada. When offered, he readily agrees to accompany his brother as his personal secretary. He packs his belongings and within an hour is ready to leave with him. The narrator and his brother then embark on a steamboat that carries them up the Missouri River from St. Louis to St. Joseph. The boat is in bad shape and travels with great difficulty, reaching its destination six days later.

Once in St. Joseph, the brothers buy seats aboard a mail coach heading for Carson City, Nevada, for a hundred and fifty dollars each. Since they are only allowed 25 pounds of luggage, the fortune seekers are forced to leave behind the fancy clothes they initially packed. The narrator notes that he carries a small 7-shot gun. A third passenger, named George Bemis, carries an Allen revolver, well known for being unreliable. The three men, cramped behind bags of late mail, leave St. Joseph at 8 o'clock. The stagecoach carries: twenty-seven hundred pounds of mail, the three passengers, the driver and the conductor. It is being pulled by six horses, which are switched every 10 miles. Most of the mail is addressed to the Indians. Along the way, they pick up a woman, who does nothing but silently crush the mosquitoes, which she is trying to feed on her blood. However, as soon as the narrator breaks the silence between them, she starts to talk endlessly and for no purpose; silence is restored when they finally reach her destination.

On the following night, the overloaded stagecoach's thoroughbrace breaks. The conductor is forced to abandon several mailbags on the side of the road to be picked up later; he then rearranges the coach in such a way that the passengers cannot sit anymore but must lie down over the mailbags. They enter the state of Nebraska and shoot at some "jackass rabbits." The narrator recalls that while traveling to Syria, he once had his overcoat eaten by a camel that later choked on one of his manuscript.

The three traveling companions rearrange the mailbags to turn them into more comfortable beds. Still, the shaking and tumbling of the stagecoach keeps sending the narrator's dictionary flying around, followed by utensils, tobacco and water. During a morning stop at a station, the driver is treated like a national hero by the station-keeper. The keeper of the mail station lives in a house where the accommodations are very limited. He serves a breakfast, which the travelers are unable to eat - a mixture of hard bread, spoiled bacon and a strange tea he calls "slumgullion." Since nothing else is available, they resort to going back to the stage, which is now pulled by wild Mexican mules. The narrator ironically compares this leg of his journey to the description of a



crossing of the same section of the country aboard a train and its sumptuous accommodations, published a decade later by a New York Times reporter.

Later that day, the stagecoach enters the territory of the prairie-dogs, the antelopes and the coyotes (spelled "cayotes" in the novel). The coyote is a sorry, wolf-like animal that feeds on corpses and runs very quickly. The animal is curious but takes off at the first sign of a threat. It can easily outrun the dogs that go after then. The narrator notes that the coyotes that populate the deserts located on the other side of the Rocky Mountains have a harder time with the local Indians, who compete with them for food. Coyotes often go on for days without food and will travel over a hundred miles just to feed.

The owner of The Division Superintendent is a company agent responsible for overseeing the mail service over a section of 250 miles. Each Superintendent is responsible for two conductors; the conductors always accompany the stagecoaches and their drivers - one for each way. The drivers are responsible for everything in their own, limited driving range. Sometimes conductors are forced to take over the stage for a sick or sleepy driver and drive it for extended periods, without much sleep. The station-keepers sit at the bottom of the company's hierarchy and are often outlaws and fugitives. The company which was contracted by the government to run most of the mail on the western hemisphere of the country and responsible for hundreds of men and thousands of horses and mules, belongs to Ben Holliday, a man that people sometimes compared to the Bible's Moses. After five days of traveling, the companions arrive at Overland City, a frontier town located four hundred and seventy miles from their point of departure.

The travelers spend an hour in busy Overland City after days of seeing nothing but the desert land. The mail and the passengers are then transferred to a mud-wagon, a vehicle less comfortable but better designed to cross the muddy terrain during the crossing of the South Platte. A few hours later, their wagon breaks down. During the repair layover, they are invited to join a buffalo hunt, which turns out to be quite a disaster. The narrator's fellow traveler, Mr. Bemis, comes back and tells an incredible story. According to Bemis, he and his horse ended up chased by a crazed, wounded buffalo. The horse panicked and Bemis had a lot of trouble holding on to his mount. Eventually, he was forced to abandon the horse and to take refuge in a tree, along with the saddle. The enraged buffalo then climbed up the tree after him, but Bemis shot him with his Allen revolver and managed to escape unharmed. The other passengers have a hard time believing the story, yet are unable to prove it false and consequently remain silent.

The pony-rider is a courier working for the Pony Express, who travels light and for extended periods without stopping. He switches mounts at every station and speeds through the deserts between St. Joseph and California twice as fast as a regular stagecoach. The narrator recounts the traveler's encounter with such a pony-rider, who ran by them from the opposite direction as if they didn't even exist. He also tells about his amazement at the sight of a source of alkali water. He compares the joy of this discovery with those who climb dangerous mountains simply because it is a unique feat



to perform. The travelers cross the sand hills, where the great Indian Mail Robbery of 1856, took place and in which the Indians killed all but a single survivor.

On the morning of the seventh day, the travelers reach the Black Hills territory, 676 miles from St. Joseph. The Indians of the area are dangerous and often harass and even fire on the stage drivers. During the following night, the travelers are awakened when the stage comes under attack from men speaking English; the driver ends up dead. The conductor manages to speed away but does not care to explain what happened to the men hiding inside the coach. The details of what happened remain vague; the only explanation includes the name of Slade, a notorious desperado, who also happens to work as a Superintendent for the mail company.

## Chapter I-IX Analysis

In this first set of chapters, Mark Twain establishes a writing style that will allow him to educate, as well as amuse his readership. In the first few chapters, the tone is generally humorous and scarcely informative. It establishes the premises of the storyline as follow: In the hope of getting rich quickly, the narrator leaves the comfortable setting of a Midwestern city to travel to Nevada at the height of the Gold and Silver Rush. He accompanies his brother to work as his assistant, yet he plans to stay only for a few months. However, as he announces from the start, most of the things he planned for will not turn out the way he originally expected. The novel starts as a humorous journal but soon turns into a humorous, journalistic report.

The American West encountered by the narrator is wild, quite literally so. When the city dwellers start their cross-country journey as guests of a mail-delivery stagecoach, they find themselves forced to abandon most of their luxury belongings and to keep only twenty-five pounds of baggage. In contrast with his more mundane fellow travelers, the narrator is limited by the weight of a symbolically "unabridged" dictionary. This symbolic bullet weights him down as it points to his use of a sophisticated language that will continually contrast with the common language of the people he encounters. Throughout the novel, the clash between the culture of the city and the mores of the southern country will be expressed primarily through the language in use.

The novel can be read as a journal of quickly changing times. Indeed, the author-narrator will usually describe in detail the lack of comfort and amenities available to the travelers of the Wild West during the time of his initial journey. However, as the novel progresses and the months and years go by, the economic situation of the west increases with the exploitation of gold and silver mines. The comfort available to the citizens of this new country thus increases substantially, which leaves to author describe with a lot of humor the difficulties and obstacles that he had to go through. He then compares and contrasts these impediments with the description of the crossing of the same area of the United States by a New York journalist after the completion of the railroad system. The enormous contrasts mentioned between the two journeys underline the quick evolution of the conditions of living in the American West during the decades that followed the 1860's.



The harsh living conditions of the emerging West forced the mail company (Overland, in this case) to hire people of low reputation, such as outlaws, fugitives and other desperados as station-keepers. As stations were established every ten miles over an otherwise deserted area, the low-paid employees were required to keep their station running and ready to assist the flow of stagecoaches. For his purpose, the company would only provide them with minimal remuneration and sub-standard housing and food supplies. The author suggests that given their working conditions, the station-keepers had no choice but to augment their revenues with seemingly illegal activities. It comes as no surprise that only the men with a good grasp of living on the rugged side of society would apply for such jobs. Only tough-skinned individuals with the ability to take advantage of living conditions in which everyone was more or less on their own, would become station-keepers and eventually graduate to a higher position in the hierarchy of the company.

Pony express riders are almost "mythical" people who acted as relatively fast couriers across the desert west of America. They delivered limited amount of light mail at a very fast pace - typically, twice as fast as the regular stagecoaches routes. The author underlines the mythical status of the pony express riders by describing his only encounter with such an individual as a quick glance.





# Chapter X-XVIII

## Chapter X-XVIII Summary

The legend of Slade goes as follow: Slade was born and raised in Illinois but fled the state after he killed a man in a quarrel. He found work as a train-master for a while but soon got in a fight with a driver and shot him. Again, he fled the area and was forced to hide. While in hiding, he earned a reputation as a fierce and fearless fighter by taking on Indians. This reputation eventually earned him a job as an Overland agent at Julesburg. He got involved in a gun fight with the previous agent, a man named Jules; the latter recovered from his wounds but fled the scene to avoid Slade. As an agent, Slade tackled the disciplinary problems of his division with great energy and, in so doing, managed to restore it to a state of peace and order. In the midst of a country filled with outlaws and desperadoes, Slade's violent character was feared and obeyed. He ended up finding his old enemy, Jules, and slowly torturing him before killing him.

The narrator suddenly finds himself having breakfast right beside Slade. As a polite gesture, Slade offers the last cup of coffee to the narrator; the latter fears that the legendary criminal will later avenge this by making him his 27th victim. According to a reliable report published a few years after, Slade later increasingly got in trouble with the law and even threatened a judge and a sheriff while drunk. A group of Vigilantes from Montana eventually caught up with him and brought him to justice. As they prepared to hang him, the outlaw cried and wept for his wife, to no avail. Slade was hung and his widow cried helplessly by his corpse. The narrator notes that violent criminals have a tendency to become much weaker when it is their turn to face death.

The stage passes a 30 wagon-long emigrant train of Mormons followed by their cattle; the narrator notes that everyone is looking quite sad and tired. After breakfast near a sparkling and limpid stream where they bathe, they soon enter the heart of the Rocky Mountains. At Soda Lake, the driver tells the passengers that the Mormons often come to the dry lake all the way from Salt Lake City to collect saleratus. They then load their gathering in wagons and sell it back in the city. The travelers are able to contemplate the marvel of snow-covered mountains, which the narrator considers quite an impressive spectacle given the season. Going through the South Pass, they see a source of water at the top of a mountain that splits into two streams; the driver explains that one of the streams dumps into the Pacific Ocean, while the water of the other travels for a month before joining the Mississippi River and ending its long journey in a tropical ocean.

The stage once again overtakes a train of Mormons, among which the narrator recognizes the leading horseman as an old friend. The two men shake hands and wish each other good luck. That night, the driver loses the road under a heavy rainstorm, but the conductor finds it back. The narrator finally enjoys a great breakfast at Green River. They reach Fort Bridger late that afternoon, where they encounter a group of sixty soldiers, who were just coming from a violent encounter with four-hundred Indians. Near



Salt Lake City, they wonder at the splendor of the setting sun. They dine at the home of a "Mormon Destroying Angel," a rough blackguard living at the station with his many wives.

The voyagers spend the next two days in Salt Lake City. They look inquisitively at the citizens they assume are all Mormons. They are unable to distinguish between the Mormons and the Gentiles - the name given by Mormons to those who are not part of their religion. Bemis gets drunk on "valley tan," the only alcoholic beverage allowed in the Mormon community. They meet with Hebert C. Kimball, an important businessman from Connecticut, who accompanies the voyagers for a visit of many interesting public and holy buildings in the city. On the second day, they meet with Mr. Street.

Mr. Street had been hired to oversee the installation of telegraphic poles along 800 miles of desert land. He had hired Mormon contractors to install the poles, but the contractors figured they were not getting enough profit out of the enterprise. They abandoned the poles in the desert and came back home. Unable to force them to honor their lawful contract, Mr. Street called on Brigham Young, the so-called "King of Utah," to settle the problem and force the contractors to fulfill their duties. According to Mr. Street, the strategy worked, as the state of Utah is more monarchic than republican.

Depending on how you look at it, polygamy can be viewed as an act of pure Christian charity. After listening to some Mormon legends and learning about the number of wives that Brigham Young kept in his hive, they meet with Mr. Johnson. Mr. Johnson is an unreliable, yet highly entertaining, source of information. He reports that Mr. Young's life is actually quite sad because he is a slave to his multiple wives and children. If one of them gets a favor, he is forced to afford the same favor to everyone else in the family - which amounts to over a hundred people overall, not counting the wives and children that live outside his house, scattered around the county. Mr. Young is never able to remember the name of his children and resorts to calling them by number. He apparently takes great offense when a stranger offers one of his children a gift; for instance, when someone once gave one of his girls a tin whistle, he was forced to give the same gift to every other child in the family and thus endure the endless whistling until they all got tired of the toy. Mr. Johnson says that Mr. Young's advice to every man is to keep the family small and the number of wives to a maximum of ten or eleven.

The Mormon Bible can make its reader quite sleepy, and it is a miracle that Joseph Smith, the man who purportedly translated the golden tablets, made it through without falling asleep himself. The book, filled with "scriptural" and useless phrases, is divided into several smaller "books," starting with the book of Nephi, which plagiarizes both the Old and the New Testament. The book of Ether is a document filled with made-up history related to imaginary lands. It recounts a war between two people, which was responsible for millions of death, leaving everyone dead but the two leaders. Even though it is rather stupid, the Mormon Bible promotes an unobjectionable moral code similar to that of the New Testament.

At the end of their two-day stay, the voyagers still have not sated their curiosity about the Mormon people, mainly because all their information came from dubious sources.



Everything in Salt Lake City cost at least a quarter, which is quite expensive when compared to the city's nickel-based prices. The narrator finds that everywhere he goes, he is considered an emigrant, even though he is traveling in his own country. Before leaving, the travelers pack enough bread, ham and eggs to last them though the next 600 miles of their journey.

## Chapter X-XVIII Analysis

The author provides a rather lengthy description of Slade, a legendary character that the travelers first encounter during the stagecoach ride in Chapter IX. Slade exemplifies the ruggedness of the characters that filled the Wild West during this era. This edgy character type is similarly found in many of the individuals that populate the West. This character mirrors the harsh conditions of their environment. Slade is such a tough and dangerous individual that his description borders the caricature. However, at this point, the author of the novel has abandoned his humorous stance and uses a predominantly journalistic approach. The bulk of Chapter XI is, in fact, a copy of a newspaper article describing the last months of Slade's life. As the narrator will turn into a real reporter later in the novel, this new approach foreshadows his future occupation.

The next few chapters are dedicated to the description of the Mormons, their mores and their religion. When the narrator reaches the state of Utah, the author adopts a cynical, yet respectful, approach to his subject. As described, the Mormons live in a world where principles and facts constantly clash with each other. This is underscored by the anecdote of the telegraph poles. In this particular episode, several Mormons are hired to install telegraph poles across an area of the desert. However, these contractors conclude that the enterprise will not be sufficiently profitable so abandon the poles in the desert, refusing to continue the work. The situation is solved by the intervention of Brigham Young, the governor of the Utah Territory, who explains to the workers that they have to respect the terms of their contracts and that they have no right to refuse to work on the assumption that they are not profiting from their labor. This leads the narrator to conclude that Utah is still living under a monarchy, while the rest of the country is republican.

The narrator seems very interested in two essential features of the Mormon way of life, namely polygamy and business. While in Salt Lake City, the narrator finds that everything is very expensive and that many people are rich. This economic situation is seen as necessary to preserve the way of life of the men who need to support families, which includes many wives and children. Yet to the author, polygamy is just a curiosity that has little moral consequence; the topic is simply used as a source of humorous exaggeration. Similarly, the Mormon Bible is analyzed briefly but brings little light to the subject. Indeed, the author concludes that the Mormon philosophy remains very close to the moral code espoused by the Christian religion. Yet the Mormon Bible makes little sense by itself and is a rather boring piece of fantasy.



# Chapter XIX-XXV

## Chapter XIX-XXV Summary

A hundred miles from Salt Lake City, the narrator notes that the anticipated poetry of the alkali desert soon fades out as reality sets in; they find themselves forced to plow and pull their way through the alkali desert, covered in dust and sand. Under the intense heat, the mules tire very quickly and tend to pull the coach in the wrong direction.

On the sixteenth day of the stagecoach ride, they encounter the Goshoot Indians. These Indians are dark skinned and live as nomads, similar to the Australian Bushmen. The narrator recounts that they once cowardly attacked a stagecoach carrying a judge and mortally wounded his driver, forcing the judge to drive the coach and find his way to the station by himself. The Goshoot Indians are a despicable type of human that is hurting the romantic reputation of the Red Men.

On the nineteenth day of the trip, the coach starts its way across the Great American Desert. The desert is a forty-mile graveyard, covered with bones of dead animals, log-chains, wagon tires and other relics of the early emigrants. The desert ends at the Carson Lake, a shallow path of water that is fed by the Carson River and has no known outlet. The narrator recounts a funny anecdote that is repeated by almost everyone he meets. In this story, writer Hank Monk is carried to his destination at high speed in a stagecoach after informing the driver that he was in a hurry. The narrator's coach picks up a poor and dying desert wanderer; the man thanks his saviors and tries to tell the same story but is stopped in his track by the narrator, who had grown tired of hearing the same story over and over. The poor man dies, possibly as a result of having to keep that boring and untrue anecdote to himself.

On the twentieth day, the coach finally reaches Carson City, a desert city surrounded by a wall of snow-covered mountains. The passengers, covered with grey alkali dust, anticipate a dull life in a city where there is no vegetation except for patches of sage-bush and greasewood. The city is host to two-thousand souls and a collection of stores and offices, framed in wood and covered with the same grey dust. The newcomers meet a few citizens; at two-o'clock, the daily "Washoe Zephyr" - a dense, dusty wind that blows daily for twelve hours straight during the summer - came and engulfed everything. The Secretary and his personal secretary establish their quarters in Mrs. O'Flannigan's ranch. The ranch already hosts fourteen faithful followers of the Governor of Nevada. In order to keep the so-called "Irish Brigade" occupied, the Governor decides to send these followers eastward to survey the area. The fourteen work at this purposeless task for a while and bring back specimens of tarantulas enclosed in glass jars as souvenirs. They soon abandon their survey but keep the tarantulas. One night, a heavy wind shakes the ranch and the tarantulas are accidentally let loose. Nobody is hurt in the process, and the tarantulas disappear.



Getting slowly used to his new life, the unemployed secretary of the Secretary decides to delay his return to "The States" and to spend time surveying the area. Taking along a young man on vacation, he goes out on foot to explore the nearby mountain in search of Lake Tahoe. After a few days, they discover a camp previously established by the surveyors, in a beautiful setting by Lake Tahoe. The narrator insists that there is nothing quite as reinvigorating as nature. They two men camp out on the shore and decide to clear a tract of land and secure a title on the cleared area. For this purpose, they start to build a very limited and unusable shelter out of branches surrounded with tree trunks as fences.

For the next couple weeks, the two men lived a very happy life, away from civilization, riding the lake on their boat and enjoying the scenery. The lake's water is crystal-clear, allowing them to see the smallest detail of the underwater life even where the lake is at its deepest. Fishing was not very successful, as the fish could clearly see the lure of the fishermen. The narrator decides to start a fire and cook dinner soon after dark. However, he is inexperienced and accidentally sets the nearby pine forest ablaze. The ensuing fire destroys their lot and all their remaining provisions. On the following morning, they set out for the initial camp but are forced to settle in the wild after encountering a powerful storm. They eat all the remaining provisions from the Brigade's camp and walk back to Carson.

The narrator decides to buy a horse on his own, though he knew nothing about horses. Following the advice of a complete stranger - who is later found to be the auctioneer's brother - he buys a "Mexican Plug" from a local auctioneer. The narrator immediately tries to ride the animal but is kicked around so hard that he resolves never to try this feat again. A knowledgeable citizen tells him that the horse is a "good buckner" and convinces the narrator that his mount isn't good for anything else. He then loans the horse to a brave citizen, who can barely manage to stay on the horse as he is carried across town at great speed. The narrator attempts to sell the mount but is unable to find a buyer. Meanwhile, the expenses related to keeping the horse accumulate, and the owner finally gives it to an unsuspecting emigrant from Arkansas.

Nevada was originally known as Carson County and was mainly colonized by Mormons. The first silver lodes were discovered in this area in 1858, which led to a rapid increase in population. Congress appointed a man named Roop as Nevada's first governor. The narrator's brother was hired as the Governor's secretary. The new territorial government was still perceived as distant from the central government of the country. Consequently, the State Secretary of Nevada often had problems getting money from the United States for honest and necessary purposes. However, as his secretary, the narrator found ways to circumvent these limitations by changing the requests to different, somewhat inflated terms and by having them signed by drunks as witnesses.

## Chapter XIX-XXV Analysis

In keeping with the dominant ideas of his time, the author makes no effort to disguise his low opinion of individuals with dark skin. The chapter about the Goshute Indians of



Utah, perhaps more than any other passage in Mark Twain's entire body of work, comes dangerously close to a racist exercise of description. He describes this particular tribe of natives as sub-humans, as if they did nothing that was worthy of human dignity. He introduces the "Goshoot" as "the wretchedest type of mankind" and rarely strays from that opinion through his description.

Entering the Great American Desert, the voyagers are left with nothing interesting to say or do except plow and push the stage. The landscape is pretty depressing as it reminds the narrator of an open cemetery. The author underscores this monotony by recalling an anecdote used as a joke, that was repeated over and over by what appears to be the entire population of the region. To make matters worse, this anecdote about a writer being carried away in a stage is neither funny nor true. The author associates the boring and repetitive humor as the same as the boring, repetitive environment.

The author is quickly bored by the absence of challenge, which happens to be few in Carson. His job as secretary to a secretary is quite limited and provides little if any challenge, both intellectually and physically. Although the narrator is admittedly not particularly gifted for the physical tasks required by the life in the wild - something which will become even more apparent as the storyline develops - he would rather escape the life in the city and try his luck in the neighboring forests. As usual, he overestimates his own physical abilities and gets caught in multiple adventures. It allows him to describe in great detail the stunning scenery of the rich forest and mountains that surround the desert area.



# Chapter XXVI - XXXI

## Chapter XXVI - XXXI Summary

Convinced by a press, which typically glorifies the profits of the mining industry in Nevada, the narrator catches the rising "Silver fever." Many articles from various newspapers give incredible reports about the fortunes that can be accumulated simply by securing a few feet of property. The Nevada Mountains are apparently rich with silver. The anticipation is such that the narrator decides to take three of his friends along on journey to Humboldt County, an area that is reputed for its richness.

Thus in December, a party consisting of a sixty-year-old blacksmith, two young lawyers and the narrator, depart for Humboldt County. The team of silver prospectors buys a wagon and two old horses and hurries down toward Humboldt County with eighteen hundred pounds of equipment and provision. They travel for fifteen days over two hundred miles across the desert. The road is difficult and the potential miners take turns at pushing the wagon in order to help the weak horses at their task.

After fifteen days, the mining party arrives in Unionville in the middle of a snow-storm. Unionville is a small agglomeration of wood cabins built around a canyon. The miners quickly build a cabin of their own and start prospecting. Expecting to find rich nuggets easily, the narrator spends a few days prospecting around the river. After a while, he finds some glittering rocks and fills his pockets. The narrator is convinced that he found a treasure, but Mr. Ballou reveals that that the rocks are simply common granite and mica. The narrator concludes that all that glitters is not gold.

The party decides to start prospecting seriously and climbs the mountain side. They soon discover a ledge and claim it by writing down an official notice of ownership. They then spend a few weeks digging a shaft through the rocks, then toward their mine but find the task too difficult. They then start digging a tunnel but find that this is also progressing very slowly. As Unionville fills up with poor but hopeful miners, the narrator's party accumulates claims to mining areas with fantastic names. These would-be millionaires soon end up with piles of worthless rocks and no money.

Convinced that the real secret of their eventual success lies in selling the claimed ledges, the narrator and his mining team decides to abandon digging the tunnel. The narrator, accompanied by Mr. Ballou and Mr. Ollendorff, leave for the town of Esmeralda to assess their new business. After a few days of traveling on horseback, they lodge at an Inn called the Honey Lake Smith's. They are warned by fleeing local Indians that the rising river will soon flood the area but seeing no sign of danger, they ignore their advice. During the night, the flood fills the desert with water, and the party remains stranded at the Inn for the next eight days.

During their forced stay at the Honey Lake Smith, a bully by the name of Arkansas keeps terrorizing the residents. Arkansas eventually started a gunfight with the landlord



but is stopped by the furious wife of the latter, as she threatens him with a pair of scissors. The party of three decides to cross the river by canoe. They make it to the opposite shore of the Carson River safely, but not without difficulty, with their horses on trail. The party later gets lost in a snow-covered terrain and keep going in circles while following their own tracks.

## Chapter XXVI - XXXI Analysis

In this section, the narrator begins to experience the life of the miners first hand. First, he catches the general fever generated by the discovery of multiple sources of silver in the surrounding mountains. Convinced that this will allow him to strike it rich, he forms a party of like-minded friends that will seek fortune in neighboring Humboldt County. Inexperienced and overloaded with equipment and provisions, the party travels for fifteen days before reaching a small town where they set up their new business.

The author shows that the press is an extremely powerful instrument that is used to spread information, whether true or not. Indeed, the newspaper articles published at the time were overly enthusiastic about the mining business. Articles such as the ones quoted by the author helped spread a "silver fever" that infected the public like a virus. The articles, of course, grossly exaggerate the facts and the numbers involved. The effect of this inflation of reality by the written press is an uncontrolled rise of public expectation. However, as the author shows, these expectations were almost never realized.





## Chapter XXXII - XXXV

### Chapter XXXII - XXXV Summary

Having lost all trace of the road, the members of the party concludes they are completely lost in the snow storm and decide to camp out for the night. They try to start a fire by shooting at a pile of sage bush, but only succeed in scaring their horses away. They then burn their last four matches. It appears as though their death is imminent, and they all start crying. They hug each other and forgive their respective vices. They go to sleep convinced that this will be their last rest.

The unconscious narrator is awakened by Mr. Ballou, who says that they had fallen asleep just a few steps from a stage station, where their horses were waiting for them. Turning their back on their previous repentance, the men succumb to the vices that they had given up a few hours earlier. They later reach Carson City where they rest for a week in preparation for their trip to Esmeralda.

During his week-long stay in Carson City, the narrator is witness to the trial of Hyde vs. Morgan. A major landslide had moved the house, ranch, cattle and barn of Morgan on top of Dick Hyde's ranch. The latter's ranch was now buried under 38 feet of dirt - and Morgan's property. Morgan was claiming that since he was in his own house, on his own land, he had all the rights to his property and would not move. Hyde hired General Buncombe to defend him in the court of referee Roop, the ex-Governor of the Nevada Territory. Against all logical arguments, Roop decides against Hyde.

Capt. John Nye joins the narrator's party and, with the help of his superior gift for social interaction, he is able to help them find shelter and food for their horses. The party reaches Esmeralda. They conclude that the claims for which they were paying assessment rights were actually worthless and choose to go in the claim business themselves. However, this new enterprise soon proves as disastrous as the previous ones, and the narrator ends up without any money. He is forced to accept work in a Quartz mill for a weekly salary of ten dollars.

The narrator works for about a week at the quartz mill. He describes the process of amalgamation and extraction of the precious metal from the quartz. He also describes the job of the assayers, who evaluate the content of the mines from specimens of rocks brought by the miners. At the end of week, he meets his superior and asks for a ridiculously high salary raise (\$400,000 monthly). He immediately finds himself without a job.

### Chapter XXXII - XXXV Analysis

In *Roughing It*, the narrator is also the central character of the entire novel. As such, the entire storyline revolves around him. However, he is neither a hero nor a victim - and if he is a victim of anything, it is not of external factors or characters but rather one of



situations of his own making. As a character, he has no special abilities - except for writing, of course. He performs no extraordinary physical or intellectual feat and is not intent on saving the world or any of its inhabitants. He is quite simply a man, who, like most of the readers of this novel, is a prisoner of his own time and who is trying his best to better his own situation, most often with limited positive results. The Silver Rush is but a shortcut to financial success, a "get rich quick" scheme that never really works. Shortcuts to a better life are not intended to be used by everyone; under the best of circumstances, only a lucky few will be able to profit from such shortcuts.

In this section, the narrator and his friends are convinced by circumstances that they have reached the end of the road. Imagining that they are about to die, they start confessing their respective petty sins to each other. They swear they will never give in to their bad habits again, and in order to prove it, they throw away the objects associated with their little defects of character. Last minute repentance is without a doubt the easiest kind. The characters swear to change their life, knowing that they have little life of which to speak. While no one mentions religion as part of their argument and ultimately their decision to repent, this episode is nonetheless an obvious satire of a certain religious attitude towards life. It comes as no surprise that as soon as the conditions change and the situation is nowhere near as desperate as it seemed before, all these promises are instantly forgotten, and the sinful habits are embraced once again.

The author often refers to the legal system of the United States as a form of justice doomed to repeat those same errors of judgment that it was initially intended to correct. The case of Hyde vs. Morgan is based on a fictive situation, whereas during a landslide, the ranch of the latter ends up buried almost 40 feet under the property of the former. Hyde claims that the land previously occupied by Morgan is now his, so the two land owners end up in court. Though the evidence presented and the moral and legal arguments overwhelmingly support Morgan, the judge decides that the landslide is an act of God that cannot be challenged. Therefore, Hyde now has all the rights to the land. He decides that given the circumstances, Morgan's only legal right is that of digging up his property. This ridiculous situation allows the author to mock the counterintuitive logic of religion as applied to common situations.



## Chapter XXXVI - XXXIX

### Chapter XXXVI - XXXIX Summary

The Whiteman Cement Mine is a legendary and elusive mine with extraordinary gold content. According to the legend, the mine was discovered accidentally twelve years ago by three German brothers wandering in the desert. After drawing a crude plan of the area, the Germans headed to California, their pockets loaded with the rich content. Two of the Germans died along the way and the third one lost his mind before reaching California. He gave his plan to Mr. Whiteman, who has since been searching all around for the elusive mine. Since then, the simple sight of Mr. Whiteman is enough to send half the population of a town on his tail, hoping to profit from the mysterious man's potential findings. Mr. Higbie, who can recognize Mr. Whiteman on sight, joins the narrator's party. Following the advice of Mr. Van Dorn, the latter party agrees to leave secretly at night and to go after Mr. Whiteman near Mono Lake. The cargo carried by the narrator's horse falls during their nightly adventure. The noise alerts the rest of the population of their enterprise, and they all end up following them to their destination.

Mono Lake is an alkaline lake in California. Though nothing lives in this overly-salty water except millions of worms, the region is a breeding ground for many species of birds, who feed on the flies that feed on the worms. The narrator's dog jumps overboard to escape flies but is greatly hurt by the alkaline water.

Higbie and the narrator decide to take a boat and row the twelve miles that separate them from the islands of Mono Lake. The visitors discover that the islands are nothing but piles of ashes at the center of which a single pine tree grows. The party resolves to go back to shore but is caught in an overwhelming storm. The two adventurers manage to get back to shore, but in their hurry the boat capsizes, and the men suffer from the alkaline water. Later that week, the party joins a fishing excursion in the Sierras. The narrator flirts with death when a tub filled with gun powder suddenly explodes near him.

### Chapter XXXVI - XXXIX Analysis

In these few chapters, the storyline develops around a ghostly character, which never actually appears in the novel. Mr. Whiteman (also known as Mr. W.) is an elusive man who has been, for over a decade, in pursuit of a legendary treasure that constantly eludes him. The legend says that he possesses a map, which is the only clue to an incredibly rich mining location. However, he is unable to find the exact location of the rich cement, so he spent the last decade looking for it. As the legend grew, people started following him around wherever he moved, just in case he would be so lucky as to locate the treasure. This situation is a caricature of the kind of beliefs that develops as what we call today, urban legends. Even though the legend is not grounded in facts - i.e., no one beside Mr. W. has ever seen the map which provides the clues to the location of the mine - everyone follows Mr. W. around.



While in pursuit of this ghostly character (which the narrator never actually physically encounters), the narrator is led to Mono Lake. The author gives a full description of the area as well as of the characteristics of the alkaline lake itself. This description serves as a scientific observation of an environment, which is quite unique to the United States landscape and as the setting for a humorous situation. The lake itself has a high alkaline content and proves very dangerous for anything living, except for the worms that populate it. The author describes the lake as being at the bottom of a long food chain. The lake is the exclusive habitat of worms, which are preyed upon by flies. These flies serve as food for the birds, which in turn feed the coyotes, the Indians and the other predators of the area.

The two partners decide to visit the islands located in the middle of the Mono lake. However, these islands turn out to be of little interest. While on the island, they almost lose their boat and once they finally get around to rowing back to shore, they are caught in a storm that nearly throws them overboard. Because the water is so salty, a swim in the lake would mean certain (and horrible) death for anyone swimming in it for any extended period. They are finally thrown overboard just as they reach the opposite shore.



# Chapter XL - XLVIII

## Chapter XL - XLVIII Summary

The Wide West is a mining company that owns rich mines in the area. However, Mr. Higbie concludes that some rich ore found nearby does not belong to the company and enters secretly down a shaft. He discovers a very rich ledge called a "blind lead" that the party immediately appropriates by setting a claim. The members of the mining party, including the narrator, imagine themselves suddenly incredibly rich and they start making plans for their wealthy future. Later that afternoon, the narrator learns that Capt. John Nye is very sick and in need of some friendly nursing. After leaving a note at Higbie's cabin to take care of their mining property, the narrator leaves town to pay a visit to his friend.

The narrator takes care of Captain Nye's spasmodic rheumatism for nine consecutive days. He then decides to return to Esmeralda to take care of his rich mining property. After being delayed for another day, the narrator walks back on foot all the way to Esmeralda, only to learn that their so-called "blind lead" had been relocated because the owners did not perform any work on it within ten days of the claim. As it happened, Higbie had left on the same day in pursuit of the elusive Mr. Whiteman after leaving a note at the narrator's cabin. They missed each other and the men's dreams evaporate for having failed to work a single day on their mining property.

The narrator wonders what he will do next. Reflecting on the obstacles that he had to confront over the last few months, he once again tries his hand at mining but concludes that he is not fitted for the business. The narrator accepts an offer as an editor for the Enterprise, a newspaper published in Virginia. The job pays twenty-five dollars a week, and the narrator concludes that this might very well be his real vocation. However, after canvassing the city, he finds very little that is exciting to report on in a town filled with hay wagons. He writes two columns with a widely improved story about an Indian attack on a particular wagon.

In order to straighten up his reporting and to save time finding stories to report on, the narrator befriends a few reporters from competing papers, exchanging leads and regular sources of news in the process. Boggs, a reporter for the Union, tricks the narrator into waiting in a mine shaft for Boggs to return with a report about school matters. Boggs never returns and leaves the narrator to return to the surface with the help of the miners. Six months later, Virginia becomes a rich town in the midst of the improving mining business and the resulting West's "flush times." News sources were easier to find as fortunes were made, and crime substantially rose.

The narrator's pay increases to forty dollars a week, but he rarely needed to cash his paycheck as sources for revenues were many during flush times. Everyone was rich and "feet" of mining property could be easily sold back for huge profits. The reporter was often given parts of such properties as gifts, simply for talking to the individual.



Fortunes were made simply by "salting" a worthless mining area with rich ore bought from elsewhere, thus driving the stock value of the estate up by a few notches. A popular tragedian, McKean Buchanan, was indeed tricked into spending his money on a salted mine, which ended up worthless.

Wealth was so abundant during the flush times that men had trouble finding a way to spend their money. For instance, a request for contributions to a Sanitary Commission Fund generated a frenzy of supporting donations that saw towns competing with each other in the process. A simple sack of flour, carried from one town to the other, was sold and resold at different auctions. It generated a total of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in donation for the Sanitary Fund.

Fortunes were created in a flash for many citizens of Virginia, sometimes in the most surprising ways. Even illiterate individuals could become instantly rich from a few feet of mining property. The narrator recounts a few interesting stories of "nabobs" who went from poor to incredibly rich in a matter of days.

Buck Fanshaw was a reputed citizen, who did a lot of good before he died. Even though it was obvious that he had died from his own hand, the jury at his inquest ruled that it was an act of God. His funeral was grandiose by any standard. Scotty Briggs, a committee man who spoke the indecipherable slang of the West, meets with the local priest and tries to convince him of the importance of the funeral at which he is about to officiate. However, the priest is unable to follow Briggs' verbal arguments. After the funeral, Scotty Briggs became a Christian convert and taught Sunday School in the same slang he used to talk to the priest.

In Virginia, the value of a man was based on his social position and on his history of killing other men. Bar owners had more influence than anyone else in the city. The more blood an individual had on his hands, the more he was respected by his peers. The individual who had not "killed his man" was condemned to the bottom of the hierarchy. The jury system is paralyzed because it excludes intelligent and honest people from participation and rewards perjury and stupidity. Non-guilty verdicts were often rendered for obviously guilty criminals for that very reason. The worst and scariest desperadoes enjoyed a reputation that surpassed that of governors and successful businessmen.

## Chapter XL - XLVIII Analysis

This section points to the value and the necessity of performing work as part of an investment. As it turned out, the narrator's empathy toward an old friend (Captain Nye) and Higbie's greed emptied the virtual fortunes of both men. They are both inexperienced investors and their little effort in locating a "blind lead" effectively led them nowhere. This episode is, of course, a satire of the individuals who waste time trying to acquire fortunes without putting in the required work and efforts. It also points to the human nature of the narrator. Like most human beings, the narrator naturally cared more about his friends than about his own personal fortune. Higbie, on the other hand,



is greedy and apparently never satisfied with the money he has (or as the case may be, could have).

The narrator then changes his mind and accepts a job doing the only thing that he is really good at—writing. He moves to Virginia and starts writing for the *Enterprise* as an editor. The job does not pay well, but at least it promises to provide a flow of money sufficient for survival. Once in Virginia, the reporter looks around and finds nothing remotely interesting on which to report. Short of a better solution, he decides to embellish a simple story about a hay wagon. Finding that this imaginative reporting style is a little too risky for its own good, he does what most journalists do—he uses a network of journalists to find and report on more substantial news items.

The "flush times" described by the narrator are an economical upturn that literally made everyone in Virginia instantly rich. The author notes that there was not a single poor person in Virginia at the time. The city is sitting on a huge network of mining tunnels. The novel then goes on to describe the numerous ways in which fortunes were acquired and spent. The author notes that the biggest trouble for the citizens of Virginia was not to acquire money, but rather to find ways to spend it. Money was pumped out of the underground tunnels and was finding its way in the pockets of the citizens of Virginia faster than it could be spent.

The narrator is highly critical of the American justice system. Through anecdotes and cases that the narrator worked on as a reporter, he provides numerous examples of a system that is more likely to condemn the innocent and to leave justice in the hands of idiots.



# Chapter XLIX - LIV

## Chapter XLIX - LIV Summary

Murders were a regular occurrence in Nevada. The narrator recounts the story of Jack Williams. The man was known for being all at once a Deputy Marshall, a burglar and a desperado. Newspapers gave regular reports of his adventures. Williams ended up being killed while playing poker by a shot fired from outside. One of Williams' friend was assassinated by another man during a gunfight, but his assassin ended up dead after being shot while sitting at a bar table, just like Williams.

A man named Bill Nookes once climbed aboard Captain Ned Blakely's boat to prove that he was better than the latter. He ended up being thrown overboard with his face beaten. He tried again on the following day with the same result. Nookes then killed the Captain's black servant in a public place. Blakely later picks him up from his hiding place and sets up a quick trial. After threatening the jury to shoot them all if they don't find Nookes guilty, he reads four chapters of Genesis and hangs him. He later regretted not having burned the body.

As proof that these were really prosperous times, a literary paper called "The Weekly Occidental" appeared in Virginia. Published weekly, the Occidental ran a new chapter of a novel written by a different author every week. The storyline kept taking a different turn according to the style of the author of the week. Before the narrator was to write his own chapter, the paper commissioned a stranger in town to write his part. The stranger was a drunk who wrote and rewrote the chapter in such an extravagant style and with such crazy twists in the storyline that it was rejected by the editorial board of the paper. The Occidental was forced to go to print without a chapter and died before the next issue could be put together. Having written a poem called "The Aged Pilot Man" specifically for that issue, the narrator's work was never published.

The silver ore extracted in the Nevada mines was melted into bricks and then shipped to California. Millions of dollars worth of silver bullion were moved each month from Nevada to San Francisco through stages. There were many mines operating in and around Virginia. The mines were actually a city of roads, caves and tunnels located under the city. The narrator gives an example of a report that he wrote for the Enterprise where he describes the damage caused by an earthquake. For the purpose of the article, the author spent an hour inside the mine, examining every drift and shaft and avoiding the areas where the walls and ceiling were threatening to cave in. After stating that Nevada has shipped over 20 million dollars worth of silver during the year 1865, he concludes with the description of an anticipated enterprise that will automate the mining of miles of underground tunnels.

The narrator was made aware of the extraordinary story of Jim Blaine and his grandfather's ram, which could only be told by Blaine himself while he was sufficiently drunk. The narrator finally manages to sit through the story, only to discover that the





drunken storyteller only mentioned the ram in the first sentence. The storyline itself keeps wandering from one unfinished story to the next, without ever concluding at any point. In the end, Jim Blaine falls asleep and nothing is ever revealed about the ram or Blaine's grandfather.

The Chinese population of the Pacific Coast is estimated at somewhere between seventy and one hundred thousand. A thousand of those live in Virginia. They are a polite and relatively gentle people. They recycle everything and usually make the best of what they have. Despite the efforts of the government of the States to slow down Asian immigration, the Chinese population continues to grow from the constant flow of new arrivals in the port of California. Chinamen are often busy making up lottery schemes for their peers. Some of them are also fond of opium smoking, a complicated task that the narrator described in some detail in an article written for the Enterprise. The narrator further notes that Chinese people are a peaceful and well-meaning race and that Californians refrain from oppressing the Chinese the way those in the eastern part of the States do.

## Chapter XLIX - LIV Analysis

The narrator regularly brings up examples of local individuals who have attained near-myth status. During these apparent digressions from the main storyline, the author has an opportunity to emphasize the attributes of the type of men that were populating the American West at the time of the Silver and Gold Rush. For instance, much of a man's importance depended upon his notoriety. While securing the respect of others was for many the only type of life insurance a man could have, criminals were pushing the limit of "respect" further than the definition of the word allowed. In this section, the narrator gives the example of Jack Williams, who was simultaneously an officer and a desperado. His death was avenged by his friends several months after the event, when one of his assassins was killed in the same setting; he was surprised by a bullet in the middle of a drinking establishment. The threat of retaliation is one sure way to insure that a man will be respected, beyond his grave if need be. As a matter of fact, even otherwise law-abiding citizens sometimes cross the line in order to be respected by their peers. The case of Captain Ned Blakely - who supervised the summary hanging of a criminal who had previously provoked him by killing his black servant - is a prime example of this type of attitude. Blakely was not a criminal, but he needed to guarantee that he would be respected by everyone around him.



# Chapter LV - LXII

## Chapter LV - LXII Summary

The narrator borrows 46 dollars from the bank to give to a friend who was in a bad situation. He is then appointed as chief editor at the paper. He resigns after a week, unable to produce the daily editorial needed to maintain his post. A friend of the narrator suggests that he could arrange for him to go to New York and help a few of his friends sell some rich Nevada mining property to easterners. Seizing on the opportunity for a change, the narrator buys a seat on a departing coach, takes a last look at Mt. Davidson and the American flag that floats over it before heading for California.

The narrator arrives in San Francisco and describes the landscape and temperature. Despite San Francisco's reputation, the houses in the city are old fashioned. The temperature remains evenly mild and varies little from one season to the next. There is no rainfall for eight months straight, after which the rain starts falling seemingly non-stop for the remainder of the year. San Francisco is built on a sand hill and is surrounded by luxuriant vegetation.

A hundred miles south of San Francisco lay the Sacramento Valley, one of the hottest places in the world. Like everywhere else around California, the visitor can see remnants of cities that were flourishing during the Gold Rush but have now disappeared completely. Twenty years earlier, these towns were filled with young men looking for fortune. In the absence of any feminine counterparts, they would pay a fortune just to see a woman. Some people say that men would pay up to one hundred and fifty dollars just for the privilege of kissing a child. The narrator recounts that he himself had waited in line with other miners to take a look at a real woman while he was in Star City, in the Humboldt Mountains.

For a few months, the narrator enjoys the freedom that his financial situation affords him. He eats at the best restaurants and lives at the nicest places in San Francisco. But soon after a political move that turned Nevada into another state of the Union, the value of mining stocks rose very high only to quickly fall to near nothing. The narrator finds himself without revenues and is forced to move to a more private board and to accept a reporter job. A few weeks later, he experiences his first earthquake. The incident shakes every building in the city, opens a huge crack in the middle of a road, sends walls down and interrupts business and sends everyone outside in a state of panic. The narrator later reads in the Enterprise that the venture opportunity he missed one month earlier was worth millions to the other partners.

The narrator loses his job as a writer and is left without a penny; he avoids everyone he knows for two months. He befriends a penniless man named Blucher, who happened to have a very similar life story. He recounts that Blucher once found a silver dime and ended up using most of it to feed another hungry man in need with a sumptuous meal, leaving him with just enough money to afford a simple meal.



The narrator moves out of San Francisco to live with an old miner friend in a cabin located in Tuolumne, California. They practice "pocket mining." Pocket miners look for small pockets of gold ore located on the surface of the terrain. Such pockets are rare but can enrich one quite quickly. The narrator gives a few examples of individuals who successfully increased their income through pocket mining.

A miner named Dick Baker tells the story of a now deceased cat that he used to bring along in his mining excursions. The cat named "Tom Quartz" was an extraordinary animal which knew mining better than he knew about chasing mice. One day he got caught in an explosion and returned home in a very bad state. After two months of work, the miners of Tuolumne still had not located a pocket of ore suitable for mining.

After three months, the narrator returns to San Francisco and works as a correspondent for the Enterprise. He finds a new job as a writer for the Sacramento Union and embarks on a propeller boat called the Ajax, bound for the Sandwich Islands. Among the thirty passengers was an Admiral, who, while otherwise calm, kept getting in loud political arguments. His arguments were usually based on fictional history. However, the Admiral finally met his counterpart, a passenger named Williams, who countered his arguments with his own made-up historical facts. Beaten at his own game, the Admiral soon stopped arguing the other passenger.

## Chapter LV - LXII Analysis

In this section, the narrator leaves Nevada for San Francisco. He was looking for an opportunity to move to a different environment in the hope of breaking the spell of misfortune that seemed to be hovering like a cloud over his head. However, in each case he managed to be at least partly responsible for his own misfortunes. His inexperience, as well as his desire to avoid real work, doomed each of his enterprises. Finding that the job of chief editor requires a lot more work than he is willing to do, he quits the paper altogether. While the narrator is not lazy - as he keeps working as a reporter for years - he is also attracted to "easy money." This "easy money" is a fortune that can be built and maintained with minimal effort and requires little or no work to make happen. As his experience shows, there is nothing "easy" about that kind of money.

The West Coast of the United States is described as a magnificent place to live. Indeed, while living in San Francisco, the narrator enjoys a few months of bliss as he is living off his investment under a climate that is near perfect all year long. The only event that comes shaking this great landscape from time to time is an earthquake. Despite the bubbling market and the political changes instituted by the American Congress regarding Nevada, the narrator decides to keep his titles. This was a bad choice because once the bubble bursts and the investments fall flat, the value of all his titles are down to zero. Ruined and ashamed, the narrator hides and avoids everyone for two months.



The narrator goes back to mining, this time in Tuolumne, California. Despite all his previous ventures in the domain of mining having failed quite miserably, he still somehow believed he could strike it rich in that business. This time, he tries his luck at a particular type of mining called "pocket mining." It requires a lesser amount of physical effort and general investment, but the chances of hitting a rich pocket are even more remote than other times of mining. It is interesting to note that as in the previous sections, the author gives enough technical background to provide a logical justification for his new enterprise. In this case, he starts by defining "pocket mining" and its requirements. He follows by documenting successful cases of such ventures, emphasizing the examples where an individual has struck it rich with pocket mining, most often by a combination of luck and efforts. As always, the adventure delivers none of the expected result, and the narrator returns to San Francisco empty handed.



# Chapter LXIII - LXXVII

## Chapter LXIII - LXXVII Summary

The boat arrives in Honolulu, where about twelve thousand people live. The narrator describes the colorful dress and habits of the inhabitants of the Sandwich Islands. He falls in love with the city and greatly enjoys the wonders of nature on the island. While visiting, he gets bitten by a scorpion, an incident which puts a damper on his enjoyment of the area. He describes the vegetation of the island, which is abundant and filled with exotic fruits such as pineapples, cherimoyas, mangoes and guavas.

The narrator takes part in an excursion to Diamond Head and the King Coconut Groove with a party of other visitors to the island. He rides a rebellious horse, which he mounts with a simple saddle. The party visits the ruins of an ancient temple and a field which looks like an old battleground of a forgotten war, filled with human bones of all kinds. Finding a good horse in Honolulu is a very complicated task because the few animals that live on the island are badly taken care of by the natives and are exceptionally difficult to ride.

On the following day, the narrator visits a market. He describes the fine-looking native women and their dresses, the crowds that gravitate around the market and the "poi" merchants that squat behind their products waiting for clients. The narrator blames the white Christian missionaries for the absence of festivities on Saturday nights. The government of the Sandwich Islands is a composite of a few white men and a party of natives. Most of the native customs have been abandoned by the Christianization of the Islands by the missionaries.

During his stay in Honolulu, the narrator witnesses the funerals of Princess Victoria, the King's sister. He compares the modern customs of the natives to those described in an old document describing similar funerals at the beginning of the century. He concludes that many of these customs have changed for the better, at least as far as human dignity is concerned. Most notably, there is no more human sacrifice of an innocent victim involved in the process.

The narrator embarks on a small and dirty schooner named Boomerang. The boat is heading toward the big island of Hawaii, one hundred and fifty miles away from Honolulu. He travels for two days, along with animals and various provisions. Landing on the shores of Kailua, he travels the countryside on horseback and visits a farmhouse and several sugar plantations.

While resting at one of those sugar plantations, the narrator's party meets a middle-aged preacher from Michigan named Erickson, who is residing temporarily in Hawaii for health reason. However, the man is obviously crazy and tells a strange and nonsensical story about a grievance he had with a certain Greely. They leave later that evening once the man has fallen to sleep. They ride down the hills and visit Kealakekua Bay and the



monument dedicated to Captain Cook, the legendary discoverer of the Sandwich Islands.

On the following day, the party rents a Kanaka (a native canoe) in order to visit the ancient ruins of Honaunau. They visit the City of Refuge, a collection of three temples surrounded by a thick wall. The sacred location used to be a sanctuary for criminals who wanted to be spared by the religious elite. The party then visits the Kilauea volcano. They ascend to the top of the crater and gaze at the wonders of this magnificent geological formation. The floor of the volcano's crater is illuminated by rivers of fire flowing in valleys trapped between rocks. A cloud of dark smoke give the entire area an eerie and fascinating atmosphere.

The party returns to the volcano on the following day and descend along the crater walls. The narrator accompanies another brave man, and they find their way across the crater floor. They manage to avoid the dangers of the volcano but lose their ways several times. They finally get back to the city.

During his stay on Hawaii, the narrator takes a week-long trip on horseback along the road that criss-crosses the island. The horses, rented from the natives, keep stopping at every house, which makes the journey even longer. Later the narrator visits the dead volcano of Holeakala, an immense mountain of petrified lava, which offers an amazing spectacle of nature. The narrator stays on the Sandwich Islands for six months, enjoying the company of the natives and the other inhabitants of the area, as well as the wonders of this unique natural environment. He becomes quite annoyed by an anonymous character that constantly intervenes in his conversations and brags about his superior accomplishments in matters totally unrelated to the subject at hand.

## Chapter LXIII - LXXVII Analysis

This section provides little in terms of new adventures for the narrator. The narrator has given up on the mining industry and all his other failed commercial ventures. Instead the author uses these few chapters to give a detailed report on the state and history of the Hawaiian Islands. His goal is now to share his enjoyment of the scenery and to provide the historical and mythological background necessary to understand this remote and isolated part of the world.

Mark Twain's particular writing style, which is both rich and energetic, allows the reader to appreciate the landscape and the living conditions provided by the islands from an informed visitor's point of view. He pays particular attention to the the natives' character and culture. As always, Mark Twain does not strive for political correctness - which was not a known literary attitude in the 1870's. On the other hand, in spite of all the satire, he remains relatively respectful of the Hawaiian natives' culture. He blames many of their modern cultural quirks to the Christianization of the islands by the missionaries that occurred earlier in the nineteenth century.



The depth of the author's mastery of the English language allows him to present historical information in a particularly concise manner. The following passage illustrates his use of a rich vocabulary combined with an imaginative syntax to convey information quickly:

"In an angry moment he slew his wife, a goddess named Kaikilani Aiii. Remorse of conscience drove him mad, and tradition presents us the singular spectacle of a god traveling 'on the shoulder;' for in his gnawing grief he wandered about from place to place boxing and wrestling with all whom he met. Of course this pastime soon lost its novelty, inasmuch as it must necessarily have been the case that when so powerful a deity sent a frail human opponent 'to grass' he never came back any more." (Chapter LXXII, p. 393)

## Chapter LXXVIII - LXXIX

### Chapter LXXVIII - LXXIX Summary

After six months, the narrator returns to San Francisco. The boat slowly drifts back to the West Coast for a few weeks, which feels like an extended Sunday to the travelers. In San Francisco, the narrator is once again penniless and jobless. He decides to start giving public lectures. He borrows enough money to rent a new opera-house for three consecutive days and to produce advertisement. Riddled with doubts, he gives his first lecture to a packed house and the enterprise turns out to be a complete success.

After establishing his new business as a public speaker, the narrator hires an agent and starts giving lectures in various cities in and around the West Coast. On a cold night following a lecture in Virginia, he encounters a band of highway bandits that try to steal his money but are too stupid to understand that he turns the joke on them and leaves them freezing in the cold weather for no reason. He decides to go back home, thus ending a journey that lasted seven years instead of the intended three months. The author concludes that there is a lot to gain in traveling for anyone with no firm anchor in life.

### Chapter LXXVIII - LXXIX Analysis

Upon returning to San Francisco, the narrator finally finds his true calling in life. He decides to use his experience to give humorous public lectures. He combines his talent for satire and humor with his gift for manipulating language and puts it to work in a context that is more likely to turn out profits. This is a happy conclusion, considering that the success of the narrator comes at the end of a long series of failed commercial experiments. The narrator of the novel becomes a live narrator on the scene. His sense of humor serves at once to inform and amuse his public, just as "Roughing It" does to its readers.





# Characters

## Mark Twain (the narrator)

Throughout the novel, the narrator of "Roughing It" recounts his adventures as he seeks fortune in the western territories of the United States in the early 1860's. He accompanies his brother, who has been hired as Secretary to the Governor of Nevada, and travels on a boat from St-Louis to St. Joseph. The two men then travel to Carson City aboard a stagecoach operated by the Overland Company. After several adventures, the narrator catches the "Silver fever," joins the frenzy of silver mining and gets involved in several ventures related to the mining business. He repeatedly fails at securing any profit from his projects and eventually moves to Virginia, a small mining town in Nevada, where he starts working as an editor for a local paper. He works as a reporter during the years of the economic boom that blessed the region. After a few years, he gets bored by this environment, and after he gets fired by the paper, he moves to California.

He lives lavishly from his investment revenues in San Francisco until Nevada Territory becomes a state of the Union and the mining market crashes, at which time he ends up broke. He travels to the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii), where he spends three months working on a contract for a national paper. After that period, he returns to San Francisco and starts a series of public lectures. He tours California and Nevada along with his agent for a while. After seven years of traveling, he finally returns home a changed man, convinced that traveling is beneficial to any individual with no responsibility in life.

While the narrator's name is not mentioned in the novel, the context makes it clear that the narrator is the author, Mark Twain. The entire novel is written in the first person. This allows the reader to readily identify with the narrator as he goes through his adventures. This identification is made easier because the narrator keeps a low profile all through the story. The speaking "I" is not a hero but an "ordinary" man, who takes every event and adventure with a great sense of humor. In keeping with the overall tone of the novel, he never takes himself too seriously.

## Mr. Higbie

Mr. Higbie is a friend of the narrator. He plays a key role in the story starting from chapter 38 to chapter 42. The novel introduces Higbie as one of the narrator's associates as a friend who is able to recognize Mr. W. on sight. Higbie's main attributes are his physical size and strength. Using the night as a cover, he leads the narrator and the rest of their party in an unsuccessful pursuit of the legendary Mr W. Later; the two men end up by Mono Lake. They use a boat to visit the isolated island of ashes. While on the island, they nearly lose the boat to the currents but Higbie's strength allows him to catch the boat before it drifts away saving the boat and probably their lives. A rising



storm complicates their journey back and just as they reach the opposite shore, the boat capsizes and throws the narrator and the exhausted Higbie overboard.

Higbie goes on exploring in a hidden area of a mine and discovers a "blind lead." This allows the men to lay a claim on a very rich mining area and turn them into millionaires. Higbie and the narrator spends the evening following the discovery of the blind lead and making plans for a future filled with rich possessions. However, while the narrator is away helping an old friend to recover from an illness, Higbie goes in pursuit of Mr. W. Because they were both away for the following ten days, they fail to perform any work on their claim, thus losing their right to the lead. Their virtual fortune disappears in a flash.

The narrator associates with Higbie once last time as they try to find new veins of precious metal in the mountains. The narrator quickly discovers that he does not have the abilities to match Higbie in digging through the rocks, so the narrator leaves Higbie behind to move on to other adventures. The narrator mentions that ten years later, his old friend Higbie wrote to let him know that he was finally able to use some of his money to start a modest fruit business.

## **Irish Brigade**

The Irish Brigade is a group of fourteen men that followed Governor Nye as volunteers. Except for a few of them, they were neither Irish nor members of an army brigade. They settled on Mrs. O'Flannigan's ranch, where the narrator and his brother lived. The Governor considered the Irish Brigade a nuisance and could not find any useful occupation for them. He sent them to survey the area east of Carson City, but the enterprise was cut short as soon as the men found that there was nothing to survey anymore. They nearly caused a disaster when the jars that contained their collection of tarantulas broke one night, setting the arachnoids loose in the middle of their common bedroom. During their survey, the brigade established a camp near Lake Tahoe; the camp was later used by the narrator when he first visited the area. The narrator set a pine forest ablaze by accident and with the blaze, the camp was also destroyed.

## **Mr. Whiteman (W.)**

Mr. Whiteman is a character that traverses Nevada like a ghost. He never appears in the novel as a real person nor does the narrator ever meet or see him. As the legend goes, Mr. Whiteman was given the rough drawing of a map to the location of a rich gold mine. According to the legend, a rich mine was discovered by three Germans, who were crossing the desert by foot. They stumbled on the rich mine by accident, took samples of the ore with them and hid the location after drawing the map. Two of these individuals died on their way to town and the remaining man gave the plan to Mr. W. As soon as Mr. W is rumored to appear in a town, people start following his tracks, just to profit from his discovery if he was to finally stumble on the treasure he is seeking.



## Slade

Slade is the name of a character that plays an important role in establishing the role model for the type of men that oversaw the mail routes of the Wild West. He is both feared and respected by the employees of Overland, as well as by the general population. After getting involved in a fight where he ended up killing a man in his native Illinois, he fled and found work with the railroad company. However, he was again involved in a quarrel and forced to flee. He lived in the wild country of the Western United States for a while and built a reputation as a fierce fighter. He was then employed by the Overland Company as a supervisor to re-establish order in an area where disciplinary problems abounded. He accomplished the required tasks quickly and was appreciated by his employer. He was both feared and respected, living a double life as a company man and as a criminal. He is responsible for many crimes, including over 25 murders. Slade is captured in Montana by a team of volunteers, quickly judged and sentenced to death by hanging. He weeps, cries and pleads for his wife under the gallows, all to no avail.

Over the course of two chapters, Slade is described as a living legend. He is notably vengeful and will not spare anyone that confronts him. The narrator recounts his encounter the character during a breakfast where he reluctantly accepts a cup of coffee from the desperado, uncertain whether this simple gesture will lead to his premature death at the hands of this overly-vengeful character. Slade is also described as a very weak individual when he is finally confronted with his own death.

## Clagett

Clagett is the name of one of the two a young lawyers who accompanied the narrator during his first trip to the Humboldt mines in December. He later was elected as a member of the United States Congress.

## Oliphant

Oliphant is the name of a young lawyer who accompanied the narrator during his first trip to the Humboldt mines in December.

## Mr. Ballou

Mr. Ballou is the name of the sixty-year-old blacksmith who accompanied the narrator during his first trip to the Humboldt mines in December.

## Ollendorff

Ollendorff is a Prussian who accompanies the narrator and Mr. Ballou to Esmeralda.



## **Arkansas**

Arkansas is the name of an individual who was stranded at the Inn, along with the other residents during the flash flood. He was a bully who kept trying to get into fight for no valid reason. When he started a gunfight with the landlord, he was stopped in his track by his victim's wife, who threatened him with a pair of scissors. He stopped terrorizing the other residents afterward.

## **Captain John Nye**

Capt. John Nye is the name of the brother of the Governor of Nevada. Nye augments the party of the narrator, Ballou and Ollendorff during their travel from Carson to Esmeralda. The captain has great powers of persuasion and is quickly able to gather help and provision the traveling team. Captain John Nye's sickness forces the narrator to abandon his rich claim on a "blind lead."

## **Mr. George Bemis**

Mr. George Bemis is the name of a fellow traveler of the narrator during the initial coach ride between St. Joseph and Carson City, Nevada.

## **Governor Nye**

Governor Nye is the name of the Governor of the State of Nevada. He was sent by President Lincoln to replace Governor Roop, a self-appointed magistrate who worked as Governor for Nevada after it broke away from Utah to form its own government. Governor Nye is the brother of Captain Nye.



## Objects/Places

### Allen revolver

The Allen revolver is the name of the inept and somewhat dangerous six-shooter carried by George Bemis during the initial stagecoach ride from St. Joseph to Carson City, Nevada. Also known as a "pepper box", the gun is described in Chapter II.

### Carson City, Nevada

Carson City is the name of the initial destination of the coach that takes the narrator from St.-Joseph to the State of Nevada. Carson City is the capital of Nevada.

### Sage-brush

The sage-brush is a two-foot high plant common in the deserts of the western United States. The plant's green foliage serves as food for cattle and horses. Their trunk is also used to light camp fires.

### Stage coach

The stage coach is a horse-drawn carriage used to carry mail and passengers from stations to stations.

### Overland Mail Company

Overland Mail was a stagecoach route in Western United States. It delivered mail and passengers through stagecoaches from the late 1850s to the early 1860s. The company was under governmental contract to deliver the mail between St. Louis, Missouri and San Francisco, California.

### Salt Lake City

Salt Lake City is a city located in Utah and is home of the Mormons.

### Unabridged Dictionary

The unabridged dictionary is a huge book carried around by the narrator. The inanimate object appears in many chapters and plays several roles in the novel.



## **Nevada**

Nevada is the name of one of the territory of the United States. It was originally part of neighboring Utah and called 'Carson County.' It officially became a state during the voyage of the narrator.

## **Virginia**

Virginia is the name of a town in Nevada. Virginia is located on a hill over a mine called 'Comstock lode.' The narrator worked as an editor for a newspaper called the Territorial Enterprise for a few years while he was living in Virginia.

## **Monarch of the Mountains**

Monarch of the Mountains is the name of the first mining area claimed by the narrator and his friends in Humboldt.

## **Mono Lake**

Mono Lake is an alkaline lake located in California. The narrator's party reaches Mono Lake after following the trail of the elusive Mr. Whiteman.

## **Sandwich Islands**

The Sandwich Islands are the group of islands in the Pacific (now globally known as Hawaii). The narrator visits the Sandwich Islands as part of an assignment as a reporter for the Sacramento Union.

## **San Francisco**

San Francisco is an important city located on the Pacific coast of the American continent. The narrator spends a few months living in San Francisco. The climate of the city is ideal an it is sometimes shaken by threatening earthquakes.

## **Cayote**

The cayote (or coyote) is an dog-like animal that lives in the desert of the western United States. The narrator describes the coyote as a resilient individual that is perfectly adapted to the desert landscape.



## **Kilauea Volcano**

The Kilauea Volcano is a shield volcano located on the island of Hawaii. The narrator of "Roughing It" visit the crater of the Kilauea and marvels at the beauty of the area.

## **Honolulu**

Honolulu is a city located on the island of Oahu. The narrator stays in Honolulu during the first part of his visit to the Sandwich Islands.

## **Hawaii**

Hawaii is the name of one of the Sandwich Islands visited by the narrator.



# Themes

## Language

Mark Twain's "Roughing It" is a novel about the American language as much as it is a travel journal about the author's adventures in the Western United States. The journey itself takes the narrator to the mining districts of Nevada, as well as to San Francisco and Hawaii. While recounting his adventures, Mark Twain dedicates an important part of his journey to an informal study of the English language. He constantly quotes the people he encounters by using a written form of English that imitates the phonetics and expressions of the speaker. The following quote illustrates his linguistic method quite clearly:

"Seth Green was prob'ly the pick of the flock; he married a Wilkerson —Sarah Wilkerson—good cretur, she was—one of the likeliest heifers that was ever raised in old Stoddard, everybody said that knowed her. She could heft a bar'l of flour as easy as I can flirt a flapjack. And spin? Don't mention it! Independent? Humph!" (Chapter LIII, p. 290)

Indeed, the reader will find that entire chapters of the novel are but a collection of monologues and dialogues illustrating the various forms of slang and patois used by the individuals he meets. The first sign of the importance of language is found in the narrator's insistence on carrying a copy of an "unabridged" dictionary during his initial stagecoach ride from St. Joseph to Carson City—in spite of the fact this heavy book imposes severe limits on his ability to carry other important items. The huge dictionary also serves as a warning to the reader that the book's content will be put to good use throughout the novel. Indeed, the author uses a large number of uncommon English words.

By constantly confronting the various forms of spoken English to their literary (written) counterparts, Mark Twain uses "Roughing It" as a way to confront the efficiency of both the usages of English and to underline the differences that exist between the usages. In a way, the author was an American linguist before such a profession even existed.

The clash between idioms sometimes scrambles the communication between members of the same community. The following exchange, between Scotty and a priest, illustrates the difference between the slang and the expressions of the miners' community of Nevada and the more common form of English - in this case, the language of the priest:

"Well, you've ruther got the bulge on me. Or maybe we've both got the bulge, somehow. You don't smoke me and I don't smoke you. You see, one of the boys has passed in his checks and we want to give him a good send-off, and so the thing I'm on now is to roust out somebody to jerk a little chin-music for us and waltz him through handsome."





'My friend, I seem to grow more and more bewildered. Your observations are wholly incomprehensible to me. Cannot you simplify them in some way? At first I thought perhaps I understood you, but I grope now. [...]' (Chapter XLVII, p. 247)

As a linguist and a novelist, the author is able to examine the syntax, semantics and expressions linked to a particular culture and lifestyle. For instance, while the individual words are recognizable, the meaning of these words is obscured simply because of the syntactic context. Twain clearly respects the different forms of slang that he encounters and does nothing to diminish them, quite the opposite. While he sometimes tweaks the spelling of common words in order to reflect their spoken usage, he makes sure that their original forms remain decipherable to the reader. From this point of view, Twain's recollection of his adventures in America's West during the first part of the 1860's serves as an important historical document of the early development of the English language in the United States.

## Traveling, Nature and the American Landscape

The landscape of the Western United States serves not only as the ever-present background to the many anecdotes of *Roughing It*, but it also plays an active role in the development of the main storyline. Every character, starting with the narrator himself, is constantly struggling against the land. The sheer size of the American landscape imposes severe restrictions on the actions of the individuals. For instance, moving is time consuming as it requires days, sometimes weeks to complete. Transporting goods or the mail from one point to the other is also central to the survival of the communities. For this reason, the activities related to transport tend to occupy the biggest part of activity around the mining camps. Some of the funniest anecdotes in the novel are directly related to transport. The episode of the Mexican plug, a rebel horse bought by the narrator in the hope of securing an easier method of transport, ends up a complete disaster and the original acquisition is but a waste of money.

The author of this journal of recollections is a city dweller who decides to leave behind his precious belongings and his luxurious habits, initially expecting much of the same to be available everywhere else in the country. However, he soon realizes that even though he has not left his own country, things and people are behaving differently and often unexpectedly. There is no doubt that the landscape of the American West shapes its occupants and is partly responsible for their habits and attitudes. For instance, according to the author, the coyote is an animal which often has to travel over a hundred miles in a desert landscape simply to find food, thus the coyote is perfectly adapted to his environment. The miners and traders who occupy the same landscape must imitate the coyote to survive. The animal thus serves as an early metaphor for the settlers of Nevada.

"*Roughing It*" is also a novel about changing times. Industrial technologies such as the railroad and the telegraph are looming on the horizon and are about to change the lifestyle of everyone involved. The expansion of the railroads to the west will take the "rough" aspects out of traveling through great distances on land - as underlined early on



by Twain, when he quotes an article from the New York Times (Chapter IV) detailing the same journey with the added luxury of traveling on a train. Telegraph lines are also going to eliminate the need for the stagecoach and the pony express rider as a way of transporting mail. Mark Twain wrote the novel well over a decade after the events he is describing. By that time, men had already, for all practical purposes, conquered the American landscape and vanquished Nature and all the obstacles that it imposes on the American lifestyle.

## Humor and Money

Most of the humor in Twain's "Roughing It" occurs quite literally at the expense of the author. Though little is revealed about the general attributes of the narrator, the main storyline follows the author in his pursuit of financial success. In a typically American fashion, the narrator is intent on finding a way to enhance his financial status through different ventures. However, he also makes it clear from the very start that however promising his enterprises first appear to be, things never seem to work out the way he intended. The cascading reversal of fortunes that mark the beginning of the narrator's adventures aboard the propeller boat that takes him to St. Joseph foreshadow the multiple failures that he will have to face later on in the story. He warns the reader from the start that he will not accomplish any of the economic goals he has set for himself.

Economic upturns are always followed by drastic downturns, which annihilate for the narrator the prospects of becoming rich quickly. For instance, the rich "blind lead" claimed by his mining team in chapter XL would instantly turn him and his partner Higbie into virtual millionaires. Yet the two men are unable to secure the fortune that they sought. After making memorable and lavish plans about how they would spend their money, a few days later they find themselves just as poor as ever, as soon as the deadline passes. Their failure to realize their dream is linked to their inability to concentrate on the task at hand. Another example of such a downturn happens during the so-called "flush times." While he is working in Virginia, Nevada, the author has more than enough money, yet, like most of his peers, he finds that he is unable to find a satisfying way to spend it. During his stay in San Francisco, the narrator even manages to lose the value of all the property titles that were given him. Once the bubbling Nevada mining market crashes, he is left with nothing more than that with which he started.

"Roughing it" is a novel about the American dream, which can be read as an economic fable. Indeed, besides writing for different papers, the narrator rarely works in the physical sense. Much like the caricature of an aristocrat, he consistently gives up working before anything of value is accomplished. It comes as no surprise, then, that not much profit comes from his enterprises. His failure to secure money in the mining business, or in any of his other economic ventures for that matter, is simply the result of his lack of work on his investment.



# Style

## Point of View

"*Roughing It*" is a loosely autobiographical novel about a writer who leaves his mid-western city to pursue fortune in the Nevada Territory during the Silver mining fever of the early 1860's. The author narrates a journey, which starts with the pretext of helping his brother serve his duty as Secretary for the Governor of the Nevada Territory. The narrator's real intent, however, is to profit from the thriving mining business in Nevada and California. The novel is presented as an informal journal built from personal recollections written over a decade after the facts reported. As such, the novel is entirely written in the first person. The use of the first person point of view allows the author to present the events as a collage of multiple personal anecdotes and impressions of the events and the scenery and the people he encountered during his journey. The author uses the first person to emphasize the subjectivity of his report. Whenever he is not personally involved in the reported anecdote, the narrator takes care of reminding the reader that the statements are not verifiable because they were transmitted orally by sometimes utterly unreliable sources.

In the novel, the emphasis is placed on humor and satire, which are better served by a subjective approach in this case. The author uses a type of humor that is representative of a type of American satire, where the narrator is the subject of his own humorous statements. In spite of his mild aristocratic attitude towards the people and events, the author never takes himself seriously and considers every new adventure as an individual challenge. These adventures lead him to flirt with disaster and most often end up as economical misfortunes.

The use of the first person makes it easier for the reader to identify with a narrator. The latter poses as an ordinary man, whose general character is that of the average citizen of the United States. Despite being the victim of a combination of circumstances and of his own inexperience, he is a law-abiding citizen that never shows animosity towards his peers. He generally ends up blaming only himself for the poor outcome of his actions. He is typically friendly with everyone and behaves with relative passivity when confronted with a situation that threatens him. This is the kind of behavior that instantly binds with the characteristics of a "normal" reader.

## Setting

"*Roughing It*" is a novel written in the shape of a travel journal that takes place the early 1860's. The narrator travels from a Midwestern city of the United States to the West Coast territories, including Nevada, California and Hawaii.

Political developments, such as the creation of the State of Nevada and the various political decisions of the Congress of the United States, provide a backdrop to the



storyline. The author describes the "flush times," a period of economic boom during which the value of everything and everyone rose to unprecedented levels. This economic boom of Nevada was directly related to the value generated by a thriving mining industry and the discovery of immense resources of precious metal buried in the desert and its surrounding mountains. The bulk of the novel happens around the area of Lake Tahoe - i.e., Carson City, Humboldt, and Virginia. This unique setting provides the author with a generous source of landscape and natural wonders. Because this area was mainly underdeveloped at the time of the writing, the author uses it to provide the reader with ample descriptions of the natural wonders that he encountered during his journey.

Mark Twain visited areas where dramatic climatic variations existed, such as mountains covered with snow located in the middle of a hot desert. If only for their historical value, Mark Twain's rich descriptions of this and other encounters with spectacular landscapes are undoubtedly worthy of the most apt biologist.

## Language and Meaning

Language plays an important role in "Roughing It." In fact, the novel can be viewed in part as a study in social linguistics - even though no science by that name existed when the book was written. Besides its obvious humorous point of view, the author aims at giving a fair representation of the state of the English language and its particular usage in the communities of Nevada miners in the 1860's. Several chapters are dedicated to translating in standard written English the slang used by the miners and the other inhabitants of the western states of America. The author succeeds at the task of conveying the sounds and accents that define the native idioms of the western states. His pseudo-phonetic translations of the individual accents are both amusing and quite accurate given the context. This successful use of the written language to translate the slang is partly due to Mark Twain's own mastery of the written language and his particular twist on literary usage. The author uses an extended vocabulary and a somewhat sophisticated style to underline the aristocratic stance of the narrator. This combination serves perfectly the goal of brightening the contrasts between the two types of languages involved - i.e., spoken and written.

The novel also examines the use of language as a tool to develop narratives. While the whole journal is filled with humorous and sarcastic twists, many chapters are dedicated to retelling anecdotes in which the narrator was not involved other than as a third person. In "The Story of the Old Ram" (Chapter LIII), for instance, the narrator goes on to mock his own narrative style by making fun of a storyteller who, much like the author himself, loses the intended point of his story by digressing constantly. He also mocks his own tendency to embellish the stories with his own imagination by providing a few examples of the articles and literary pieces that he managed to publish while working for the different papers and magazines.



## Structure

"*Roughing It*" extends over 79 relatively short chapters. Each chapter either depicts a new adventure in the life of the narrator, encapsulates a description of the country and its environment or recounts a few anecdotes, which are loosely related to the ongoing development in the storyline. The chapters are numbered in Roman numerals and rarely exceed a dozen paragraphs (about 6-8 pages in length). The core of the novel is extended by three appendixes, which add historical context to elements of the story. For example, the first two appendixes deliver a substantial overview of the history of the Mormons, which provide substantial background to the encounters between the Mormons and the narrator.

The novel starts with a preface that explains the premise of the adventures. The preface also serves as a warning that the tone will be both sarcastic and light. It advertises from the start that as far as the narrator is concerned, nothing ever turns out the way it was originally planned. The text of the journal itself does not provide a precise time line for the events depicted, as no date is ever mentioned. Yet the storyline is strictly linear and the multiple events depicted serve as sufficient reference points.

From a narrative point of view, "*Roughing It*" is structured to appear as an informal series of recollections about a voyage made over a decade prior to its writing. While surprising at first, this lack of a clear and rigid structure supports the generally "relaxed" attitude of the narrator. One of the latter's preeminent character traits is that no matter what happens to him, he takes everything with a grain of salt and with a great sense of humor.



## Quotes

"He dropped his ears, set up his tail, and left for San Francisco at a speed which can only be described as a flash and a vanish! Long after he was out of sight we could hear him whiz." (Chapter III, p. 26)

"In other days I had considered it a good, a very good, anecdote, but there was a dismal plausibility about it, here, that took all the humor out of it." (Chapter IV, p. 34)

"The cayote is a long, slim, sick and sorry-looking skeleton, with a gray wolf-skin stretched over it, a tolerably bushy tail that forever sags down with a despairing expression of forsakenness and misery, a furtive and evil eye, and a long, sharp face, with slightly lifted lip and exposed teeth. He has a general slinking expression all over. The cayote is a living, breathing allegory of Want." (Chapter V, p.38)

"During the preceding night an ambushed savage had sent a bullet through the pony-rider's jacket, but he had ridden on, just the same, because pony-riders were not allowed to stop and inquire into such things except when killed." (Chapter IX, p. 56)

"The hotel-keeper, the postmaster, the blacksmith, the mayor, the constable, the city marshal and the principal citizen and property holder, all came out and greeted us cheerily, and we gave him good day." (Chapter XII, p. 74)

"A lot of slatternly women flitted hither and thither in a hurry, with coffee-pots, plates of bread, and other appurtenances to supper, and these were said to be the wives of the Angel—or some of them, at least." (Chapter XIII, p. 81 )

"Nothing helps scenery like ham and eggs. Ham and eggs, and after these a pipe—an old, rank, delicious pipe—ham and eggs and scenery, a "down grade," a flying coach, a fragrant pipe and a contented heart—these make happiness. It is what all the ages have struggled for." (Chapter XVII, p. 106 )

"Take my word for it, ten or eleven wives is all you need—never go over it." (Chapter XV, p. 93)

"With encouragement like that, I felt that I could take my pen and murder all the immigrants on the plains if need be and the interests of the paper demanded it."" (Chapter XLII, p. 221)

"Now—let us remark in parenthesis—as all the peoples of the earth had representative adventurers in the Silverland, and as each adventurer had brought the slang of his



nation or his locality with him, the combination made the slang of Nevada the richest and the most infinitely varied and copious that had ever existed anywhere in the world, perhaps, except in the mines of California in the 'early days.'" (Chapter XLVII, p. 245)

"The jury system puts a ban upon intelligence and honesty, and a premium upon ignorance, stupidity and perjury. It is a shame that we must continue to use a worthless system because it was good a thousand years ago." (Chapter XLVIII, p. 257)

"Trial by jury is the palladium of our liberties. I do not know what a palladium is, having never seen a palladium, but it is a good thing no doubt at any rate." (Chapter L, p. 264 )

"I only know that while New Yorkers are burdened with banks and drifts of snow, Californians are burdened with banks and drifts of flowers, if they only keep their hands off and let them grow." (Chapter LVI, p. 310)



## Topics for Discussion

Twain's treatment of the "Goshoot" Indians in "Roughing It" counts as his most deliberately xenophobic text. Does political correctness play a role in the level of humor in a literary text? Is the description of the Goshoot even funny at all? Explain why or why not. Do you think that it is possible to poke fun at the differences of culture or physical characteristics of a people while remaining politically correct?

List the grievance that Twain addresses to the American judicial system. Discuss whether these points can still be made, almost 140 year later, against the modern judicial system.

The democratic regime of America managed to get rid of the influence of the aristocratic regimes of Europe in American politics. What is an aristocrat? . Do you think Mark Twain was an intellectual aristocrat?

The narrator of "Roughing It" practices a severe and often sarcastic brand of satire, seemingly towards everyone and everything. Is satire a popular form of humor? What is acceptable and what is not in such humor? Discuss the alternatives to satire and sarcasm.

Twain uses his novel to analyze different aspects of society. Discuss the difference between pure fiction and a semi-autobiographical novel such as Twain's "Roughing It." Can fiction be taken seriously?

Make a list of possible modern equivalents of the "Silver fever" that overtook the narrator of "Roughing It." Does the press play a role in spreading inflated information around? Are the modern reports by the media any more (or less) inflated version of reality as they were in Twain's time?

Twain ends his novel by suggesting that those who do not have responsibilities, move out, travel and learn. Is this a good advice for everyone? What kind of talent or ability would be required for a man or woman to travel effectively? Is money the only thing that matters in every enterprise? Discuss both sides of the arguments.