



A MAN OF MANY TALENTS: ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF MARK TWAIN

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“Nothing so needs reforming as other people’s habits.”

On November 30th, 185 years ago, Mark Twain, whose real name was Samuel Langhorne Clemens, was born in a tiny village of Florida, Missouri. He was not only a celebrated writer, adventurer, humorist, and shrewd social critic, but also a riverboat pilot, journalist, lecturer, an entrepreneur, and an inventor. He truly was a man of many talents! He caught the world’s attention with his stories of boyhood escapades along with his hilarious and sometimes-bitter take on man’s flaws and the etymology of humans’ behavior.

Twain lived through both slavery and the Civil War (1861-65), when Northern and South forces’ conflict rose because of slavery and secession. Interestingly enough, during summer, Mark Twain liked to spend time with his uncle’s enslaved people, listening to tall tales and spirituals. His life was not all rainbows and sunshine since he lost his father at just eleven years old and had to drop out of school to find a job. He worked as a printer’s apprentice for several local newspapers where he had access to world’s news and even wrote some articles. Twain faced misfortune and heartbreak since he also lost his brother and three of his children. Yet, that did not stop him from becoming one of the most celebrated authors and humorists in American literature.

Twain’s journey began with writing short stories under the pen name Mark Twain, a term used on the steamboats. His stories were captivating, hilarious, and full of adventure. Celebrated *Jumping Frog of Calaveras County* was his first hit story and big break. Among his stories, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and his memoir *Life on The Mississippi* (1883) addressed the fundamental issues that encompassed racism, evolving landscapes, class division, access to education and many more at that time



in America. These narratives were written clearly, authentically, and to the point on society as everyone knew it. In fact, his works are still relevant today.

Called by many, “the father of American Literature”, one of his notorious classics of American culture and travel narratives was *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884); a “river novel” that got him the most attention and gave him more credibility as a timeless author and cultural icon. In this novel, Huck Finn taught many young Americans to differentiate between what’s wrong and what’s right and to value the importance of country and friendship. It’s fascinating how he could do that through a narrative which questioned the ideals of the nineteenth century American South. His audacious, adventurous, and risky approach is what made him and his work unique, raw and brilliant. The way he explored and exposed people of his era revealed how great of an idealist and moralist he is. Any kind of work he’d produce would examine and challenge parts of America’s identity, the unreachable American Dream, the cold hearted negligence of the country side, and most importantly, the hypocrisy behind a country that “preached liberty but practiced slavery”. These contradictions in the country are still omnipresent, and the America today, supposedly “the land of the free”, seems to be imprisoned by history and human’s behaviors. Today we celebrate a literary icon along with his eminent contribution and discovery that leads to new connections, new inferences and molded perceptions, as he once said, “supposing is good, but finding out is better.”

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SUGGESTED CITATION: Chadli, Ichraq. 2020. “A Man of Many Talents: Anniversary of the Birth Of Mark Twain.” *PopMeC Research Blog*. Published November 30th.