

Samuel Clemens – “Mark Twain”

Samuel Clemens was one of America’s most renowned authors. The colorful life he led was the basis for his writing. Although his formal education ended when he was 12 years old with the death of his father, his varied career interests provided an informal education, not unlike many others of his generation. Clemens brings these rich experiences to life in his writing.

Sam Clemens was recognized for his fiction as well as for his humor. It has been said that “. . . next to sunshine and fresh air Mark Twain’s humor has done more for the welfare of mankind than any other agency” (Railton, “Your Mark Twain,” 2003). By cleverly weaving fiction and humor, he developed many literary masterpieces. Some say his greatest masterpiece was “Mark Twain,” a pen name (pseudonym) Clemens first used in the Nevada Territory in 1863. This fictitious person became a kind of mythic hero to the American public (Railton, “Sam Clemens as Mark Twain,” 2003).

Mark Twain was brought to national prominence when his first book, *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County and other Sketches*, was published in 1867. The book was comprised of 27 sketches, some of which had previously been published in newspapers. Some of his masterpieces that are among his most widely read books are *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and *The Prince and the Pauper*.

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer was first published in 1876. Such characters as Tom Sawyer, Aunt Polly, Becky Thatcher, and Huck Finn have captured the attention of readers for generations. Boys and girls, young and old, enjoy Tom Sawyer’s mischievousness. Who can forget how Tom shared the privilege of whitewashing Aunt Polly’s fence? What child isn’t fascinated by the episode of Tom and Becky lost in the cave?

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, the story about a boy who runs away from home and lives in the wild, has appealed to young and old alike since it was first published in 1885. Many of the characters included in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* surface again in *Huckleberry Finn*. The widow Douglas and the widow’s sister, Miss Watson, provide formidable foes for Huckleberry despite their good intentions.

Children are able to live vicariously through Huck. What child hasn’t dreamed of sneaking out of the house at night and running away to live a lifestyle of their own making?

Perhaps the greatest testimony to this book was given by Ernest Hemingway when he said, "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry Finn There was nothing before. There had been nothing as good since" (Waisman, "About Mark Twain," 2003).

References

Railton, Stephen. "Your Mark Twain." http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/railton/sc_as_mt/yourmt13.html (accessed October 23, 2007).

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Waisman, Michael. "About Mark Twain." <http://www.geocities.com/swaisman/huckfinn.htm> (accessed October 18, 2007).