

Answer on these sheets. Write notes or sentences as directed by your teacher.

Chapter 1

1. List three activities that Tom enjoys doing.
2. How do you learn about each of these activities?
3. Tell how Tom's scuffle with the new boy ends.

Chapter 2

4. Identify the following people. Tell how they relate to Tom. Also, give at least two adjectives to describe each person.

Sid:

Old Missis:

5. Why is Tom assigned the chore of whitewashing the fence?
6. Tell how Tom makes Ben *want* to whitewash the fence.
7. List some of the things Tom receives in return for letting boys paint the fence.

Chapter 3

8. Tom imagines Aunt Polly's reaction if he were dead. What has caused these thoughts?
9. As Tom sits on the raft and again thinks about drowning, what else does he think about?
10. Why does Tom arrive home in wet clothes?
11. From these first three chapters, which would you say Tom Sawyer is: untrustworthy? a show-off? a bully? Answer and give your reasons.

Application

You have just moved into town. You meet Tom Sawyer. All you know about him is what you learn in Chapters 1-3. Do you want Tom to be your friend? State and explain your answer in a paragraph.

Enrichment

Make an acrostic or a word search puzzle for your classmates to do. Include in the puzzle the things Tom likes to do or that he collects; also, include the people and places in the novel.

•TEACHER'S GUIDE

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Samuel Langhorne Clemens (Mark Twain) was born in Florida, Missouri, and lived most of his childhood in the river town of Hannibal, which he would make famous in *Tom Sawyer* and other works. Because of his father's unsuccessful financial dealings, Samuel had to begin work when he was twelve, after his father's death. After several small jobs as a printer and a newspaper correspondent, he became a steamboat pilot on the Mississippi, there finding his famous pseudonym in the cries that told the pilot the water's depth. Leaving the river during the Civil War, he spent the next few years as a Confederate soldier, prospector, reporter, and editor, and finally leapt to success in 1865 with the short story "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County." He traveled to Europe, married, and moved to Connecticut, while turning to the writing of novels and humorous travel books. Ensuing years brought great success as a writer but also disastrous business failures and personal tragedy, as well, including the deaths of his wife and two of his daughters. These events led to a growing pessimism in his later works. Despite these setbacks, when Twain died in 1910, he was the most popular and honored American writer of his day.

MAJOR WORKS

In addition to *Tom Sawyer*, Twain published two other books about the Mississippi of his youth:

- *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1895). Tom's friend Huck flees Hannibal to escape his brutal father, joining forces with the runaway slave Jim on an odyssey downriver.
- *Life on the Mississippi* (1883). A more factual book, this volume describes Twain's personal experience of river piloting in the 1850's.

Among his other important works are

- *The Prince and the Pauper* (1882). A switch of identities leads the young King Edward VI of England to see the corruption and injustice of sixteenth-century England.
- *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889). In this early-time travel story, Yankee ingenuity and nineteenth century science triumph over superstition and brutality.
- *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894). A bitter satire on racism and ignorance, this novel is also a predecessor of the detective story.

CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS

On the simplest level, Mark Twain is a humorist and storyteller, a writer with the skill to make us laugh at both the familiar and the wildly improbable. In his own lifetime he achieved as much fame as a lecturer and public reader as he did through the publication of his works. One of his contemporaries had this to say of him, "He amuses us — he makes us laugh. There is enough sorrow in the world," said a lady to me lately. Possibly that is the secret of Mark Twain's immense popularity."

Yet there is more to Twain's work than simple entertainment. In *Tom Sawyer* and his other Mississippi River books, Twain captures both a time of life and a time in history as no one else has done. His boys are real boys, not idealized creatures. They enjoy themselves, they make mistakes, and they represent what childhood was actually like for many readers. At the same time these books give us a unique picture of the age when the Mississippi was a great commercial river on the edge of the American frontier. Oddly, Twain mixed a strong belief in progress and the march of science and reason with a great nostalgia for what was lost through that progress.

Finally, Twain's hatred of injustice and his ability to satirize folly and expose vice make him a writer with a message beneath the humor, a message all the more effective because it is stated in plain, commonsense language rather than in somber, preaching tones. His depictions of racism's absurdity, for example, were probably more effective deflators of prejudice than the critiques of many serious writers.

RELATED READING

- *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee (Popular Library). Scout Finch grows up in a twentieth century southern town; her life and world have much in common with Tom's.
- Robert Newton Peck's *A Day No Pigs Would Die* (Dell). On a Vermont farm a young boy learns that growing up means learning about both life and death.
- *Old Glory*, by Jonathan Raban (Simon & Schuster). This is a story of a trip down the Mississippi in an aluminum boat; the author, a British writer who had admired Twain since his childhood, made the journey in 1978.