

MARK TWAIN

Born: Samuel Langhorne Clemens, November 30, 1835 (Florida, Missouri, USA); died April 21, 1910 (Redding, Connecticut, USA).

Style and genre: Twain's writing features a folksy, mischievous authorial persona; skepticism toward religion; roguish, innocent heroes; and sharp social satire.

White suit, moustache, cigar: Mark Twain's sartorial trademarks are as well-known as his best-loved characters, Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. As the most prominent man of letters in America's first great commercial age, Twain understood that how he presented himself in public was as important to his audience as the quality of his writing. A hugely prolific writer, he published more than thirty books as well as numerous essays and hundreds of short stories. An icon in his own

Signature titles

Novels

- The Gilded Age*, 1873 (with C. D. Warner)
- The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, 1876
- The Prince and the Pauper*, 1882
- The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 1884
- A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, 1889
- The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*, 1894
- No. 44, *The Mysterious Stranger*, 1965

Nonfiction

- The Innocents Abroad*, 1869
- Roughing It*, 1872
- Life on the Mississippi*, 1883
- Is Shakespeare Dead?*, 1910
- Mark Twain's Autobiography*, 1924

Short Stories

- The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County and other Sketches*, 1867
- Extracts from Adam's Diary*, 1893
- "*The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg*," 1899
- Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven*, 1909

ABOVE: A studio portrait photograph of Mark Twain taken at the height of his fame.

RIGHT: An illustration from Twain's most famous work, *Huckleberry Finn*.



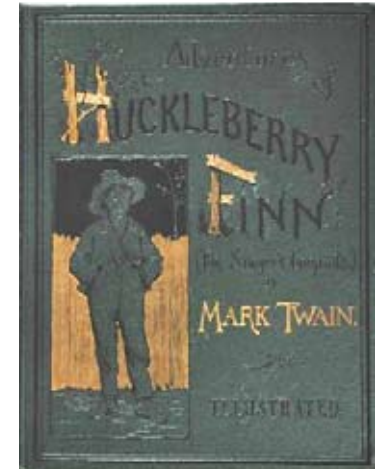
lifetime, Mark Twain still stands at the center of the American literary tradition—his social satires, compassion and biting wit remaining an inspiration for writers today.

Twain was born Samuel Clemens in Florida, Missouri, although his formative years were spent in the town of Hannibal, on the banks of the Mississippi. Although he moved away in 1853, a few months shy of his eighteenth birthday, the frontier spirit of the Midwest and the life of the river would always infuse his work. He adopted his famous pseudonym ten years later, while working as a journalist amid the silver mines of Virginia City, Nevada. Although he didn't strike it rich in Nevada, Twain amassed a considerable fortune through the course of the literary career that began there. His first two books, *The Innocents Abroad* and *Roughing It*, were tremendous commercial successes, the first describing his travels in Europe, the second his time on the Nevada frontier.

Creating Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn

While Twain's fame as a humorist and journalist spread ever wider, reaching even the shores of Europe, his career as a novelist would begin with a return to the Hannibal of his youth. Intended as a book for boys, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* proved to have a much broader appeal, standing alongside its sequel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, as his most popular and critically acclaimed work. Although both books are brimming with nostalgia, they showcase Twain's sharp, skeptical tongue as much as his keen eye for provincial color and detail.

If he retained the manner of a bluff Missourian on the make, Twain's political values sat more comfortably with the liberal New England where he spent much of his later life. His works showcase his own political views, thinly veiled in fiction, as well as his observations about contemporary society. His views on the racial problems that faced America were particularly progressive. Twain was no naive idealist, however; despite his egalitarian beliefs, his best work is shot through with a healthy contempt for the gross stupidity and venality of humanity. **CT**



ABOVE: With *Huckleberry Finn* Twain wanted to create debate about racial prejudice.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

Famously described by Hemingway as the book "all modern American literature comes from," *Huckleberry Finn* is still the quintessential American coming-of-age story. The moment when Huck realizes that he would rather go to hell for breaking the law than shop his friend Jim the fugitive slave to the authorities retains all of its startling power. Twain uses Huck's innocent perspective to expose the hypocrisies and petty vanities of Southern society. The raft on the Mississippi proves to be the only place where white and black can approach each other as equals.