

## GRADE LEVEL EXPECTATION: 6-7

### SHORT STORY LESSON PLAN: "TAMING THE BICYCLE"

#### CONTENT AREA: READING, WRITING AND COMMUNICATING

**LESSON TIME:**

3 class periods (1 to read/discuss the story, 1 to work on writing and editing, 1 for presentations)

**MATERIALS:**

None

**TAKE HOME:**

NONE

**OBJECTIVE:** To review Mark Twain's experience learning to ride a bicycle and write and present student's own 'how to' project. This lesson is adapted from a Short Story Lesson Plan: "Taming the Bicycle" by Marcia Fohey (<http://www.marktwainmuseum.org/media/Taming%20the%20Bicycle%20Lesson%20Plan.pdf>)

**BACKGROUND:** In May of 1884, Sam Clemens (Mark Twain) and his good friend, Joe Twichell, tried to learn how to ride a bicycle. The bicycle was a new invention, and it became more difficult a task for Clemens than riding a horse, which he didn't like either. According to Clemens, it was a painful and short-lived experience. This essay was 3,400 words long, and he was not happy with it, so it was not published until after his death.

**6TH GRADE STANDARDS:**

1. Oral Expression and listening
  1. Successful group discussions require planning and participation by all
2. Reading for All Purposes
  1. Understanding the meaning within different types of literature depends on properly analysing literary components
  3. Word meanings are determined by how they are designed and they are used in context
3. Writing and Composition
  1. Writing literary genres for intended audiences and purposes requires ideas, organization, and voice
  3. Specific editing for grammar, usage, mechanics, and clarity gives writing its precision and legitimacy.

**7TH GRADE STANDARD:**

2. Reading for All Purposes
  1. Literary elements, characteristics, and ideas are interrelated and guide the comprehension of literary and fictional texts.

**WEB RESOURCE:**

<http://www.bicyclinglife.com/HowTo/TamingTheBicycle.htm>

**INTRODUCTION:**

What is the hardest thing you have learned how to do? Facilitate discussion about what is hard for some people may be easy for others, etc.

Explain background of the story. Discuss how the bicycle was a new invention and that Twain was always very interested in anything new. Show pictures of Twain and Twichell, early bicycles, etc. Discuss how early bicycles were not as easy to ride as today's. Ask students if they remember learning how to ride a bike. Ask students what they have tried to master (e.g., X-Box, iPod, etc.). Ask if they would be able to write instructions for

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one of these inventions so that someone else could learn successfully.

Read the story aloud. Students can follow along with their own copy or simply listen. Invite them to sketch an image of an event from the story as they listen.

#### QUESTION/DISCUSSION:

- What is the point of view?
- What are the behaviors and motives of characters in the story?
- How did Twain compare the German language to riding a bicycle? (Teachers: Here would be a good place to discuss the challenges Twain often described in learning a foreign language.)
- What is Pond's Extract? What was its use in the story?
- How does the bicycle today differ from the bicycle of Twain's day?
- What does the author mean when he says that what was required was "against nature?"
- Why does Twain feel that you cannot learn to ride without a teacher?
- Do you prefer having someone teach you a new skill or would you rather figure it out for yourself?
- Have you ever had someone make fun of you because you could not learn something right away? How did you feel?
- Was this story funny or serious? Could it be both? Why or why not?
- How does this story resemble Twain's lifelong struggles? (Teachers: You may need to provide more background here.)
- Was the "Expert" really an expert on bicycles?
- How does the main character feel throughout the story? Give three evidences.
- Where was the author being ironic?

#### LISTEN AND RESPOND

- Did you identify with any of the characters? Which one, and why?
- Have you ever tried to teach someone a skill and they just couldn't "get it?" How did you feel?

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- How is the word "taming" used in the title? Have you ever "tamed" anything besides an animal?
- How did you feel about the ending?

Read the following quote from Helen Hayes, First Lady of American Theater. She was asked prior to her death at age 92 if she had any regrets. Her answer was, "I regret that I never rode a bicycle. I wish I had. That's all." Ask students if there is one thing they would most like to learn at some point in their lives. If there is time, ask them how they feel about learning to drive a car, which will occur in their near future.

Review photos of Twain, Twichell, and an old bicycle. Compare to photos of Lance Armstrong, motorcycles, etc.

CLOSURE: Have students do a quick summarization of the story. Discuss content objectives and assessment options. Assign homework (students will select an option from the list below, write a draft, and bring it in the next day for peer review and editing).

#### OPTIONS FOR STUDENT ESSAYS:

- Write an essay or story describing the hardest (or funniest) thing you ever learned.
- Rewrite Twain's essay from another character's perspective (the dog's, for instance).
- Rewrite Twain's essay from the bicycle's perspective.
- Create a cartoon/comic strip depicting Mark Twain and his bicycle experience.
- Write an essay or story describing how hard it is to teach someone something.
- Create a visual story (e.g., PowerPoint, poster, Sunday-style comic, etc.) that depicts the humorous challenges of learning something new.
- Create a news-broadcast about an unlikely character learning an unlikely skill (e.g., Rosalyn Carter learning to ride a Harley-Davidson, Arnold Schwarzenegger learning ballet, etc.).
- Compile a scrapbook (include captions) depicting the hardest or funniest thing you ever learned.
- Write a song or rap describing the hardest (or funniest) thing you ever

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learned.

- Students can suggest an appropriate project.  
Other related activities:
- Create a scrapbook of bicycle advertisements from the past as well as today.
- Take a virtual tour of the Bicycle Museum at <http://www.bicyclemuseum.com> or do a Google search for other bicycle museums.
- Write a "how to" paper on a topic and include criteria.
- Research the history of the bicycle.
- Research the history of motorcycles.
- Research other inventions that were introduced during Twain's life (e.g., telephone, linotype, etc.).
- Field trip to related sites (e.g., Twain exhibits, bicycle manufacturer, etc.).
- Organize a class bike ride to support a worthy cause (e.g., Lance Armstrong "Live Strong" program, make bracelets, etc.).
- Locate and read other stories involving bicycles.
- Examine Leonardo da Vinci's bicycle sketches.