

Introduction

‘Huck Finn is drawn from life; Tom Sawyer also, but not from an individual — he is a combination of the characteristics of three boys whom I knew ...’

Mark Twain, Preface to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*

Mark Twain based *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* on his memories of growing up in the 1840s. He did not try to write an autobiography but many of his characters are based on people he knew. Aunt Polly shares many characteristics with his mother. Sid resembles his younger brother, Henry. Huckleberry Finn, the Widow Douglas, and even Injun Joe, also have real-life equivalents, although the ‘real’ Injun Joe was more of a harmless drunk than a murderer.

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer paints a peaceful, beautiful and perfect picture of boyhood life and adventures along the Mississippi River. By writing about life along the Mississippi, Mark Twain made the river famous around the world. The Native Americans that used to live along the banks of the Mississippi River called it ‘Messipi’, which means ‘Big River’. It is also known as the ‘Mee-zee-see-bee’, which means ‘Father of Waters’.

The town of Hannibal, where Twain grew up, would become the model for St Petersburg, the setting of Twain’s two most popular books, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which are available in Level 3 of this series. Another best-selling story by Twain, *The Prince and the Pauper*, is available in Level 2.

About Mark Twain

Mark Twain was born Samuel Langhorne Clemens in Florida, Missouri, USA in 1835. He grew up in nearby Hannibal, a small town on the Mississippi River. He came from a rich family but he was sent out to work at the age of twelve after his father's death. He worked at a printer's for a while but he preferred action and travel. As a young man, he worked as a steamboat pilot. He used his experiences of this time in his stories. He also gained his pen name, Mark Twain, from working on the boats. If the water was two fathoms deep (3.66 metres) according to a mark on a rope, it meant it was deep enough for a steamboat, and the pilot would call out 'mark twain'.

Twain was born when Halley's comet appeared in the sky. He always said that he thought he would go out with the comet, just as he had come in with it. He was right. He died in 1910 when Halley's comet appeared the next time, 75 years later.

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Bad Tom

Tom must be punished

‘Tom,’ shouted Aunt Polly.

There was no answer.

‘Tom,’ she called again, but there was still no reply.

‘Where is that boy? Tom!’ and she shouted louder 5
than before.

She took off her glasses and looked around the room. Then she stood up and went to the open door. She looked out over the garden. No Tom.

‘Y-o-u Tom!’ 10

There was a noise behind her, and she turned round quickly. She was just in time to catch hold of a small boy by the back of his trousers.

‘I had forgotten that cupboard,’ she said. ‘What have you been doing in there?’

‘Nothing.’

‘Nothing? Just look at your hands and mouth. What is that mess?’

‘I don’t know, Aunt.’

‘Well, I know. It’s jam, that’s what it is. You’ve been in that cupboard eating jam. I’ve told you so many times to leave that jam alone. Give me that stick.’

