

## ***Twain & Stowe: Effecting Social Change***

(for the history or language arts classroom)

"Yes, you are right--I am a moralist in disguise; it gets me into heaps of trouble when I go thrashing around in political questions."

- *Mark Twain letter to Helene Picard, Feb. 22, 1902*

"I wrote what I did because as a woman, as a mother, I was oppressed and broken-hearted with the sorrows and injustice I saw, because as a Christian I felt the dishonor to Christianity—because as a lover of my country, I trembled at the coming day of wrath. It is no merit in the sorrowful that they weep, or to the oppressed and smothering that they grasp and struggle, nor to me, that I must speak for the oppressed—who cannot speak for themselves."

- *Harriet Beecher Stowe letter to Thomas Denman (the first Baron Denman and from 1832-1850 lord-chief justice of England), Jan. 20, 1853*

### **Background Information:**

This lesson can be done before or after a visit to The Mark Twain House and Harriet Beecher Stowe House, but the discussion questions may be more beneficial after students have visited and learned more in-depth information about Stowe and Twain.

Either before or after your visit, your students should read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. We have provided a timeline of important events in Stowe and Twain's lives to help give students a perspective on how their lives overlapped. We have also provided a handout on Reconstruction and Abolition. You may find these useful as a tool while teaching the novel or as a resource before arriving at the museum.

Both terms will be discussed during your visit, but students will benefit from having some background information before arriving.

The lesson plan is brief, as this is intended to be a one day lesson to prepare for, or discuss your visit to the museums. The goal is to use the discussion questions to get students engaged and thinking about their role in society.

**Materials:**

- *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
- *Adventures in Huckleberry Finn*
- The Handouts Provided (Time line, Discussion Questions, Reconstruction Notes, Abolition Notes)

**Duration:**

Most of this lesson provides handouts to help you prepare students. You can use them as they fit into your preparation of the novels or your preparation for the visit to the museums. The discussion question can be assigned for homework and discussed in class, or written and discussed in class. The former could take 45 minutes (fill one period); the latter could fill a block schedule.

**Objectives:**

Students will begin to recognize the significance of the two novels in history, which will help them to understand why we continue to read these books. They will also use the novels as a starting point on a discussion of our current social injustices. A Venn diagram is provided to incorporate compare and contract thinking and brainstorming skills.

**Lesson:**

- Before Assigning the novels provide students with background history about the Civil War and Reconstruction Era. (Use the timeline handout as a guide and to inform students where Stowe and Twain fit into this part of history.)
- After completing the novels use the Reconstruction and Abolition handouts to help focus students understanding about both topics.
- This would be the ideal time for a field trip to both houses.
- Use the discussion questions provided to help students begin thinking about what role each students plays in their community/society.
- The question can then be used to create a more focused essay question of your choice or to help students decide where they might conduct community service hours as part of the service learning program that many Connecticut towns have enacted.