Mark Twain: Importance For American Literature

Mark Twain’s stories and novels are famous for their humor, vivid details, and memorable characters. Twain witnessed many different types of crime during his childhood. Twain witnessed a slave die from a white overseer striking the slave with a piece of iron. He also witnessed a local man murdering a cattle rancher. During Twain’s childhood, he saw many illegal crimes that influenced his writing and writing style. Twain is famous from the novel “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.” Many scholars consider this the greatest American novel written because it deals with the humanity of African-Americans. Mark Twain is considered the father of American Literature because his works challenged fundamental issues in America such as racism, evolving landscapes, class barriers, access to education, and more.

Mark Twain was born in Hannibal, Missouri. Ever since he was a child he had a keen power of observation and sharp memory. Hannibal inspired several of Twain's fictional novels, including 'St. Petersburg' in Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. These imaginary river towns were described as beautiful, but also like a “vipers' nests of cruelty, poverty, drunkenness, loneliness and soul-crushing boredom (Moss).” Twain challenged the parts of America’s identity; an inaccessible American Dream, the disregard for countryside and hypocrisy behind a country that preached liberty yet practiced slavery (Moss). From 1891 until 1900, Twain and his family traveled throughout the world. In 1897, he wrote “Following the Equator,” which showed the weakness in the European government, which he witnessed during his travels. Many of Twain’s influences came from his family, childhood, and what he witnessed in everyday society.

Samuel Clemens, who was known as Mark Twain, was a riverboat pilot. When the Civil War broke out the steamboat trafficking came to a halt. Twain being jobless, he joined the Confederate. The militia was known as the Marion Rangers. After two weeks Twain quit because he was ignorant of the politics behind the war. (“Samuel Clemens Goes to War, Kind Of”). Twain quoted in “Samuel Clemens Goes to War, Kind Of” “Thousands entered the war, got just a taste of it, and then stepped out again permanently.” Twain wrote this trying to imply that war was not cut out for everyone. Mark Twain started to write his novels after the Civil War. In the 1870s, when Mark Twain started writing, America was recovering from the Civil War. The time period affected Mark Twain’s writing because he saw how racist society was at the time. Twain started to analyze how people acted in America at the time and this influenced his writing.

Realist authors depicted everyday activities and experiences, instead of an unrealistic presentation. Authors attempted to describe life without idealization or romantic subjectivity (Quirk). Twain was known for his faithful reproduction of the dialect and his writing style. Twain’s works were extremely unique and controversial. Twain focused more on the middle and lower class for his characters (Quirk). Twain's written works faced issues in America of his time; racism, evolving landscapes, class barriers, access to education and more. He included his own real life experiences into his novels. Twain’s writing style was Southwestern humor. This writing style used an “earthly language, at times crude humor and doses of cruelty as well as stock characters and situations in which the trickster triumphs (Naillon).” An example of Mark Twain’s Southwest humor is in his novel, “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,” 'Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot (Twain).” Twain

wants people to think his novel is void of motives, morales, or even a plot. “Well, it's a blame ridicklous way, en I doan' want to hear no mo' 'bout it. Dey ain' no sense in it.' 'Looky here, Jim; does a cat talk like we do (Twain)?” Twain focused on making fun of how the black people would talk since they never had education before. Twain differed from other authors because his word choice was so well written it opened the eyes to what was really happening in the world.

Twain wrote about three main things: freedom, nature, and individual conscience. In “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,” Huck wants freedom to be his own person, and Jim wants freedom that allows him to return to his wife and children. Huck decides to move away from his abusive father to live with Widow Douglas, he believes he will experience freedom. Huck finds out his life is anything but free. The next theme that Mark Twain brings up is nature. Huck loves nature. Huck feels safe when he is in the natural world instead of when he’s in civilization. Huck feels like he is free in nature. Huck Finn follows his conscience instead of the law. Throughout the book, Huck’s conscience tells him to make certain decisions by listening to his gut. Mark Twain talks about our society in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Twain said, “Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect.” Twain sees our society at a hypocritical view, which can be seen through his great American classic. Mark Twain was such an influential writer because he used certain words and humor to deal with controversial issues that other people were afraid to confront.

Some of Mark Twain’s most famous works are “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” and “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.” “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” symbolized freedom. Twain wanted to confront that people wanted freedom from society and freedom of slavery. When Huck and Jim were floating down the river on their raft, they truly felt happy and free. In Mark Twain’s novel, “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,” Twain wanted the meaning of this to be to enjoy the adventures of your childhood. He wanted to tell children that the world is full of wonders and are free of responsibilities of adulthood. Twain related this novel to his own childhood in Hannibal, Missouri.

Mark Twain influenced realism by putting his own beliefs into his stories. Twain spoke out against top issues at the time such as racism, slavery, and religion. He also impacted writers such as Ernest Hemingway and inspired them to put themselves into their work. Twain is known for his repetition of the use of satire and his use of dialogue, as well as his carefree writing style, imagery, and use of child heroes in some of his famous novels. Ernest Hemingway said, “All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called 'Huckleberry Finn.’ It's the best book we've had. All American writing comes from that. There was nothing before.”