

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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# Mark Twain

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. b'

Mark Twain was born Samuel Langhorne Clemens in 1835 in Missouri. Growing up along the Mississippi River he dreamed of one day becoming a steamboat pilot. When his father died in 1847, he left school to work as a printer's apprentice at a local newspaper. This line of work took him to New York City and Philadelphia, where he gained his earliest writing experience. In 1857, he returned home to follow his dream, becoming a steamboat pilot apprentice before earning his license in 1859. But the outbreak of the Civil War cut his career short. After enlisting in the Confederate Army and quitting within two weeks, Clemens went to Nevada to try his hand at silver mining. He didn't strike it rich, but he did rekindle his interest in writing, becoming a journalist for a local paper and adopting the pen name Mark Twain.

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2. b'

Twain moved to San Francisco in 1864 and earned his first big break in 1865 when his short story "Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog" was published in newspapers across the country. He was eventually hired to travel to and report on the Sandwich Islands (present-day Hawaii). His articles were so well received that when he returned he went on a lecture tour to share stories of his time there. His success as a travel correspondent landed him on a steamboat tour of Europe and the Middle East. His humorous observations and travel tales became so popular that they were later turned into his first book, *The Innocents Abroad*. It was on this trip that he met his future brother-in-law, Charles Langdon. Through Charles, he met his wife Olivia Langdon, whom he married in 1870. In 1871, Twain and his family moved to Hartford, CT, where he turned his focus to writing novels.

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3. b'

Twain's early work was full of social criticism. He called out government corruption and attacked industrial greed in his novel *The Gilded Age* a term he coined. He also revolutionized the way American authors wrote by using common dialects in his work. Writing how people actually spoke gave books like *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* an air of authenticity. His knack for capturing American life was coupled with a biting sense of humor he used to satirize American culture and norms. His novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* aimed to expose American hypocrisy when it came to racism, slavery, and the failures of Reconstruction. Throughout his life Twain was an abolitionist and civil rights advocate. Still, his frequent use of racial slurs in his writing has drawn criticism and reconsideration in modern times.

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Despite Twain's success, bad investments left him bankrupt, forcing him to spend his later years on worldwide lecture tours to pay off his debts. His writing turned darker as his criticism of America grew harsher leading up to his death in 1910. Mark Twain was one of the best known Americans of the late 19th century, and his public persona, humor, and discerning worldview were massively influential in both American literature and life.

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