

 Prestwick House

Instant Short Story Pack



Each pack contains:

- Objectives
- Full Text of Story
- Student Questions
- Activities and Graphic Organizers
- Teacher Answer Guide

*The Celebrated Jumping Frog
of Calaveras County*

BY MARK TWAIN

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1, 3, 4, 5

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1, 4, 5



Objectives:

After completing the activities in this packet, the student will be able to:

- cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text (RL.9-10.1; 11-12.1),
- analyze how a complex character develops over the course of a text, interacts with other characters, and develops the theme (RL.9-10.3),
- analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (RL.9-10.4; 11-12.4), and
- analyze how an author's choices concerning how to order events within a text and manipulate time create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise (RL.9-10.5; 11-12.5).

Time:

1-3 class periods

Materials:

✓ 1 copy of each handout per student:

- **Handout #1** (4 pages) – Purpose-setting and Motivational Activities
- **Handout #2** (7 pages) – Text of Story
- **Handout #3** (1 page) – Student Questions
- **Handout #4** (6 pages) – Activities and Graphic Organizers

✓ Teacher Answer Guide

Procedure:

1. Reproduce all handouts.
2. Distribute **Handouts #1** and **#2**.
 - Allow students to read the short biography of Twain (approximately 10 minutes).
 - Read and discuss the information about Twain's work and ideas (approximately 20 minutes).
 - Assign the story to be read for homework OR
 - Allow students to read the story in class and perform the two **As you read...** activities.
3. Distribute **Handout #3**.
4. Give students time to read the questions (approximately 5 minutes).
5. Review with students what each question is asking for and what type of information is required for a thorough answer (e.g., references to prior knowledge, quotations from the story, additional reading or research, etc.).
6. Distribute **Handout #4**.
7. Walk the class through Question 1, demonstrating that in order to address a complex issue, it is often helpful to divide it into smaller subtopics. Students can then use the ideas generated by each subtopic to build a complete and thoughtful answer to the full question.
8. Have students answer the questions.

Mark Twain

The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County

“The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” was Mark Twain’s first successful short piece of writing—the first one to win him national attention. It was published in 1865 under the title “Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog.” In 1867, Twain included it in his first short story collection, *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County, and Other Sketches*.

The story was written because a friend of Twain’s asked him to submit something to a book the friend was compiling. Twain struggled so long for an idea and reworked that idea so many times that he missed the deadline for his friend’s book. The friend, however, submitted it to *The New York Saturday Press*. “Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog” appeared in the November 18, 1865, edition.

Like many short stories you’ll study in school, “The Celebrated Jumping Frog” is not packed with “meaning.” There are no philosophical, social, or cultural themes to debate. It is entertainment, pure and simple. You might ask: *then why do we study it?*

One answer is that Mark Twain is one of the most important figures in American literature, and this is the story that made him famous. For that reason alone, it’s worth being familiar with. Another reason is simply that it’s fun. The most important reason, however, is that “Jumping Frog” is an amazingly well-crafted story, and there is a lot you can learn about humor and storytelling by looking at the techniques Twain uses to get the story to you. Many scholars like to examine Twain’s attempts to re-create the sound of his characters’ speech. Some scholars like to focus on the three levels of narration involved in telling this tale.

Make no mistake about it: Jim Smiley’s tale about his frog is pointless. Simon Wheeler’s telling this story about Jim Smiley—who is clearly *not* the man the narrator is trying to find—is pointless. The impatient narrator’s telling Wheeler’s account of Smiley’s story to us is ironically the most pointless act of all.

Why would he repeat—virtually word for word—this tale, which has nothing to do with the task appointed to him by his friend—especially when he himself suspects the search for Leonidas W. Smiley was a prank to begin with?

So, don’t overthink it. If the odd spellings (which are supposed to be phonetic) make the reading more difficult, read the story out loud. Maybe find a recording of someone reading the story—and read along with it.

But mostly, just enjoy the story.

Mark Twain

The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County

Lexile Measure: 1420L

IN COMPLIANCE WITH the request of a friend of mine, who wrote me from the East, I called on good-natured, garrulous old Simon Wheeler, and inquired after my friend's friend, Leonidas W. Smiley, as requested to do, and I hereunto append the result. I have a lurking suspicion that Leonidas W. Smiley is a myth; that my friend never knew such a personage; and that he only conjectured that, if I asked old Wheeler about him, it would remind him of his infamous Jim Smiley, and he would go to work and bore me nearly to death with some infernal reminiscence of him as long and tedious as it should be useless to me. If that was the design, it certainly succeeded.

I found Simon Wheeler dozing comfortably by the bar-room stove of the old, dilapidated tavern in the ancient mining camp of Angel's, and I noticed that he was fat and bald-headed, and had an expression of winning gentleness and simplicity upon his tranquil countenance. He roused up and gave me good-day. I told him a friend of mine had commissioned me to make some inquiries about a cherished companion of his boyhood named Leonidas W. Smiley—Rev. Leonidas W. Smiley a young minister of the Gospel, who he had heard was at one time a resident of Angel's Camp. I added that, if Mr. Wheeler could tell me anything about this Rev. Leonidas W. Smiley, I would feel under many obligations to him.

Simon Wheeler backed me into a corner and blockaded me there with his chair, and then sat me down and reeled off the monotonous narrative which follows this paragraph. He never smiled, he never frowned, he never changed his voice from the gentle-flowing key to which he tuned the initial sentence, he never betrayed the slightest suspicion of enthusiasm; but all

Mark Twain

The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County

STUDENT QUESTIONS:

1. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1; 11-12.1) What can we infer from the first paragraph of the story about the narrator and his reason(s) for being at the Angel mining camp? What information or words and phrases in the first paragraph suggest this inference?
2. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5; 11-12.5) What does Twain's decision to embed the tale of Jim Smiley within the frame story of the narrator and Simon Wheeler contribute to the overall effect of the story? List some possible reasons for Twain's deciding to structure the story this way.
3. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3) Describe Simon Wheeler's character and explain how Twain reveals this character to his readers. How is this character a primary source of comedy?
4. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4; 11-12.4) In what ways does Twain's manipulation of language also contribute to the humorous impact of the story?

ACTIVITIES AND GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS:

Mark Twain, *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*

Question 1: What can we infer from the first paragraph of the story about the narrator and his reason(s) for being at the Angel mining camp? What information or direct words and phrases in the first paragraph suggest this inference?

STEP 1: Even though there isn't much information in the first paragraph, any inferences we want to make about the narrator and his role *must* be based on what is provided. Use the following chart to note and examine the material that could be the basis of a valid inference.

Word/Phrase	Literal Interpretation (If Ambiguous, Concealed, or Not Understood)	Significance in the Text	What's Suggested About the Narrator
"IN COMPLIANCE WITH the request of a friend"		The narrator is fulfilling the request of a friend and is now relaying the result to somebody else.	The narrator must believe the recipient may have an interest in his account, however frivolous it may be to the narrator.
"I hereunto append the result."	The result of the narrator's inquiry concerning Leonidas W. Smiley is within this passage.	Whoever this "report" is being sent to is probably someone who is interested in the narrator's findings concerning tales, or stories of interest.	The formal voice used by the narrator creates a cold and distant tone, which seems to signify professionalism and seriousness in the report, despite what the reader may view as a humorous circumstance.
"infernally reminiscent...useless to me"	The narrator considers Wheeler's recollection of Smiley "useless."		

STEP 2: What clue(s) to the narrator's identity and purpose does the material you examined in STEP 1 lead to? Why?

This is your answer to Question 1.