

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

The Prince and the Pauper

by Mark Twain

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Chapter I – The Birth of the Prince and the Pauper

1. Tom Canty and Edward Tudor are born on the same day. Canty is not wanted by his family, but Edward's birth is celebrated throughout England. Most parents tell their children stories about when each child was born. Relate a family story surrounding your own birth.

Chapter II – Tom's Early Life

2. Twain is well known as a great American humorist who often uses satire to poke fun at society. One way he accomplishes this is to be sarcastic. In this chapter, Twain describes Tom's childhood. He writes,

“One summer's day he [Tom] saw poor Anne Askew and three men burned at the stake in Smithfield, and heard an ex-Bishop preach a sermon to them which did not interest him. Yes, Tom's life was varied and pleasant enough, on the whole.”

Twain is being sarcastic when he says Tom's life was pleasant enough. It cannot have been pleasant for Tom to watch four people be burned at the stake. Twain is also satirizing the ineffectiveness of the church to reach the people, and he is satirizing the brutality of the laws which dictate this type of harsh punishment.

As Tom, write a diary entry describing the aspects of your early life that are “varied and pleasant enough.” Use sarcasm, like the sarcastic comment above, at least two times in the diary entry.

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3. Father Andrew secretly teaches Tom to read. However, Tom's two sisters do not learn because they are "afraid of the jeers of their friends, who could not have endured such a queer accomplishment in them."

Why do you suppose the friends behave in this way? In your experience, do friends sometimes, through ridicule, prevent others from succeeding in school?

Write a letter to Tom's two sisters letting them know that you understand why they do not want to learn to read and write. In the letter give them some advice on how to handle the situation.

4. Tom begins to read and dream about princes and castles. He also begins to act like a prince among his friends. Word spreads in the neighborhood of Offal Court that Tom is a special boy with special talents. The people of the community begin to seek out Tom's advice for their problems. Due to his lessons with Father Andrews, Tom's mind is well developed, so he is able to give them good advice. Twain writes,

"In fact he was become a hero to all who knew him except his own family – these, only, saw nothing in him."

Most young people in their teens begin to have a life separate from that of their family. They have friendships and experiences in life that their immediate family does not always share. As this separation progresses, the family may see the teen as one person, but the teen's friends see the teen as a completely different person. Can you understand this idea? Does your family view you differently than the way you are perceived by your peers?

In one or two paragraphs, write a letter to your parent or guardian explaining this idea and how it might apply to your life.

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5. At the end of Chapter 5, Tom has a dream that he was a princeling. When he awakens, and finds that it was just a dream, Tom is especially disappointed by his terrible home. Twain writes,

And when he awoke in the morning and looked upon the wretchedness about him, his dream had had its usual effect – it had intensified the sordidness of his surroundings a thousand fold. Then came bitterness, and heartbreak, and tears.

Write a dialogue between two students debating the following idea:

People who have unrealistic dreams and expectations are doomed to be disappointed in life.

Student One agrees with this statement, but Student Two disagrees. Use incidents from the story to support the points of each debater. The debate might begin as follows:

Student One: Tom's dream about one day becoming a prince is stupid. He knows that his father is a thief and his mother is still alive. Princes must be born into royal families. He can never be a prince, so his dream is silly.

Student Two: Dreams are never silly. Dreams are...

Chapter III – Tom’s Meeting with the Prince

6. Tom and Prince Edward discuss Tom’s family. Edward is curious about Tom’s life, but he has trouble relating to it. Edward does not understand that Tom’s sisters do not have servants. He also does not understand why Tom is beaten.

Rewrite this conversation between Edward and Tom. Instead of Tom’s responses, write how you would respond to the same questions. The rewrite might begin as follows:

Edward: What is thy name, lad (or miss)?
You: [insert your name here], an’ it please thee, sir.
Edward: ‘Tis an odd one. Where dost live?
You: In...

7. Suspension of disbelief is a literary term which refers to the willingness of the audience to accept the behavior and motivations of the characters for the duration of the story. There are several ideas in this chapter which the reader must accept for the story to progress. The reader must accept that Edward decides to change clothes with Tom, that Tom and Edward notice that they are identical after the switch, and that Edward is able to leave the palace without being recognized.

To what extent were you able to suspend your disbelief on the above points? Write a letter to Mark Twain discussing each point and giving him your impressions about the believability of the behavior and the motivations of the characters. Cite incidents from the story to illustrate your ideas.

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Chapter IV – The Prince’s Troubles Begin

8. As Edward experiences life as Tom Canty, he learns many different life lessons, which he often shares with the reader. For example, after he is poorly treated by the boys sheltered at Christ’s Hospital, Edward makes the following comment.

“When I am king, they shall not have bread and shelter only, but also teachings out of books; for a full belly is little worth where the mind is starved, and the heart.”

Write a letter to Edward letting him know that you understand the life lesson he is sharing with the readers. In the letter, discuss with Edward the extent to which you believe this life lesson can be applied to today’s modern world.

Chapter V – Tom As a Patrician

9. In this chapter, the King tries to test his son’s wits by asking him questions in different languages. Tom is able to answer the question in Latin, but he is unable to answer the King’s question in French. Suppose that your father, mother or guardian needed to verify your sanity. What kinds of questions might you be asked that would establish your sanity? Write a dialogue between yourself and a family member. In the dialogue the family member is trying to determine if you are sane.

The dialogue might begin as follows:

Family: Do you know who I am?
You: Yes, you are...