

**RIVER BOY: THE STORY OF MARK TWAIN  
BY WILLIAM ANDERSON**

**Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2006  
Grades 3-5**

Submitted by Courtney Kraemer, Youth Services Librarian  
Terrebonne Parish Library System, Houma

**Title: River Boy: The Story of Mark Twain**

**Author: William Anderson**

**Illustrator: Dan Andreasen**

**Publisher: HarperCollins, 2003**

**Pages: 40**

### **Summary**

"Ste-e-e-eamboat's a-comin'!" Along the banks of the great Mississippi River, a young boy named Samuel Clemens raced to the docks whenever he heard that familiar cry. He dreamed of exploring the world beyond his river town. Little did he know that one day he would become the famous writer Mark Twain and write about his boyhood adventures along the bustling river waterfront in the classic stories *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Sam's exploits took him from the printing presses of the Hannibal Courier to the decks of the steamboats that travel the mighty Mississippi, and even to the Wild West. Noted historian William Anderson tells the colorful story of Sam's life as he grew from a mischievous boy into the enterprising author. Dan Andreasen's fresh, vibrant paintings capture the spirit of the storyteller who will live on forever as one of America's literary icons. This picture biography is a very appealing introduction to Sam Clemens' life. It shows how influential the Mississippi River was and makes clear connections between Sam's life and his writing.

### **Awards and "Best Book" Lists**

Notable Children's Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies (NCSS/CBC)  
IRA/CBC Teacher's Choice, 2004

### **Author's Biography**

William Anderson has written many books of history, biography, and travel. As a teacher, he has often taught the books of Mark Twain, and he visited Twain's home sites while researching this book. Mr. Anderson lives and writes in Michigan.

## **Illustrator's Biography**

Dan Andreasen has illustrated more than fifty picture books and novels. He lives with his wife, Sharon, and their two children, Emily and Bret, in Orlando, Florida.

## **Other Books Written by William Anderson**

*Pioneer Girl: The Story of Laura Ingalls Wilder*  
*Laura Ingalls Wilder: A Biography*  
*The World of the Trapp Family*  
*World of the Louisa May Alcott*

## **Other Books Illustrated by Dan Andreasen**

*The American Girl Series* by Valerie Tripp  
*By the Dawn's Early Light* by Steven Kroll  
*Eagle Song* by Joseph Bruchac  
*The New Little House Series* by Marie Wilkes  
*Pioneer Girl: The Story of Laura Ingalls Wilder* by William Anderson  
*Streets of Gold* by Rosemary Wells

## **Related Titles**

*American Boy: The Adventures of Mark Twain* by Don Brown  
*A Brilliant Streak: The Making of Mark Twain* by Kathryn Lasky  
*The Mark Twain You Never Knew* by James Lincoln Collier  
*Mark T-W-A-I-N! A Story about Samuel Clemens* by David R. Collins

## **Classroom Connections**

- Have students trace Samuel Clemens' travels throughout his life on a map of the world.
- Have students research and list other important events that have occurred on dates when Halley's Comet appeared (Sam Clemens' birthday).
- When Sam wanted to go to South America, a fifty-dollar bill blew in his face. Have students write a story telling what they would do if the wind blew a fifty-dollar bill in their face.
- Teach the students about currency inflation. Have students research the costs of common items in Mark Twain's day and today. How much would that \$50 be worth today?
- The book mentions that Twain "knew how important libraries were for children, so he gave one to the town." Have students search the Internet

and find the library's website. Mark Twain Public Library in Redding Connecticut: [http://www.marktwainlibrary.org/homeport/homeport\\_frm.html](http://www.marktwainlibrary.org/homeport/homeport_frm.html)

- Compare this picture biography with the other biography on the LYRC Ballot this year: *Sacagawea* by Lise Erdrich. Illustrated by Julie Buffalohead. Lerner, 2003.
- Introduce the students to other picture biographies such as:
  - *Talkin' about Bessie: The Story of Aviator Elizabeth Coleman* by Nikki Grimes. Illustrated by Earl Lewis. Scholastic Incorporated, 2002. (LYRC 2005)
  - *The Dinosaurs of Waterhouse Hawkins* by Barbara Kerley. Illustrated by Brian Selznick. Scholastic, Inc., 2001. (LYRC 2004)
  - *Rocks in His Head* by Carol Otis Hurst. Illustrated by James Stevenson. HarperCollins Children's Books, 2001. (LYRC 2004)
  - *When Marian Sang: The True Recital of Marian Anderson* by Pam Munoz Ryan. Illustrated by Brian Selznick. Scholastic Press, 2002. (LYRC 2005)

## Websites

William Anderson

<http://www.williamandersonbooks.com/>

Author's web page includes a bibliography, a biography, and a personal interview.

Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum

<http://www.marktwainmuseum.org/>

This site features pictures of the buildings that served as models for places in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

Mark Twain House and Museum

<http://www.marktwainhouse.org/>

This site has a special "Teachers and Students" Section with reproducible worksheets and lesson plans, as well as a virtual tour of the house. Also includes a description of the life of Mark Twain and a list of his works with a brief summary of each.

Mark Twain Quotations

<http://www.twainquotes.com/index.html>

This website indexes hundreds of Twain's quotations from speeches, writings and letters.

### Mark Twain Study Guides

<http://www.boondocksnet.com/twainwww/guides.html>

This web page offers in-depth coverage of many aspects of Twain's most popular works.

### PBS – Mark Twain: Classroom Activities

[http://www.pbs.org/marktwain/learnmore/activities\\_report.html](http://www.pbs.org/marktwain/learnmore/activities_report.html)

The ideas on this site are intended for upper grades, but some may be adapted.

### PBS – Mark Twain and the American West

[http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/lesson\\_plans/lesson02.htm](http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/lesson_plans/lesson02.htm)

Site says lessons are for grades 8-12, but some of the activities could be incorporated and simplified for younger children (ex: why some authors chose to write under different names).

Mark Twain, American humorist (comic writer) and novelist, captured a world audience with stories of boyhood adventure and with commentary on man's faults that is humorous even while it probes, often bitterly, the roots of human behavior. Childhood along the Mississippi. Mark Twain was born Samuel Langhorne Clemens on November 30, 1835, in the frontier village of Florida, Missouri. He spent his boyhood in nearby Hannibal, on the banks of the Mississippi River, observing its busy life, fascinated by its romance, but chilled by the violence and bloodshed it bred. Clemens was eleven years old. Along the banks of the great Mississippi River, a young boy named Samuel Clemens raced to the docks whenever he heard that familiar cry. He dreamed of exploring the world beyond his river town. Little did he know that one day he would become the famous writer Mark Twain, and write about his boyhood adventures along the bustling river waterfront in the classic stories *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Sam's exploits take him from the printing presses of the Hannibal Courier to the decks of the steamboats that travel the mighty Mississippi, and even to the Wild

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