

Module 7: Realism in the Family

Topic 2 Content: Literary Styles of Mark Twain

Introduction

Literary Styles of Mark Twain

Dialect Colloquialism Exaggeration Embellishment

Introduction

Click on each of the folder tabs to examine some of the literary styles that made Mark Twain a famous and popular writer.

Image Caption: A caricature of Mark Twain from 1908



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Dialect

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Dialect

Dialect is a regional variety of language distinguished from other regional varieties by features of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Authors use informal spellings and punctuation, especially apostrophes, to show the accents or language differences of a particular region. For example, a writer may show how people drop the "g" on the ends of nouns and verbs by writing the word *talking* as *talkin'*. Often in films you will hear actors use a specific accent or pronounce words and phrases in a way that is meant to indicate a region. This device is usually used in conjunction with colloquialism.



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Colloquialism

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Colloquialism

Colloquialism is when a word or phrase is employed in conversational or informal language. Some modern examples are words that shorten or transform common phrases like *ya'll*, *gonna*, *havta*, *woulda*, or words that have become popular slang like *cool* (meaning popular) or *grub* (meaning food). They may also be idioms or clichés like "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." An author's word choice of *pop*, *soda*, or *coke* to refer to a soft drink can signal the regional character of the writing piece.



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Exaggeration

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Exaggeration

Yet another point specific to Twain's writing is his use of exaggeration, or a representation of something in an excessive manner. For example, in *Life on the Mississippi*, Twain describes a boy who becomes a steamboatman. The narrator conveys his jealousy by exaggerating that "No girl could withstand his charms." It is unlikely that every single girl in the village would have had her eye on him. Exaggeration is one of the devices that allowed Twain to write about more serious topics with humor while pushing a social agenda.



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Embellishment

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Embellishment

Embellishment is a fictitious addition to a factual statement. This made his pieces popular by adding considerable humor. For example, his short story called "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" relates the story of a man who would bet on anything. Twain embellishes the extremes to which Smiley would gamble by saying "If he even saw a straddle bug start to go anywheres, he would bet you how long it would take him to get to—to wherever he was going to, and if you took him up, he would follow that straddle bug to Mexico..."



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