

Essay Assignment

Excerpt from *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*

It was back in those far-distant days--1848 or '9--that Jim Wolf came to us. He was from Shelbyville, a hamlet thirty or forty miles back in the country, and he brought all his native sweetnesses and gentlenesses and simplicities with him. He was approaching seventeen, a grave and slender lad, trustful, honest, a creature to love and cling to. And he was incredibly bashful.

It is to this kind that untoward things happen. My sister gave a "candy-pull" on a winter's night. I was too young to be of the company, and Jim was too diffident. I was sent up to bed early, and Jim followed of his own motion. His room was in the new part of the house, and his window looked out on the roof of the L annex. That roof was six inches deep in snow, and the snow had an ice-crust upon it which was as slick as glass. Out of the comb of the roof projected a short chimney, a common resort for sentimental cats on moonlight nights--and this was a moonlight night. Down at the eaves, below the chimney, a canopy of dead vines spread away to some posts, making a cozy shelter, and after an hour or two the rollicking crowd of young ladies and gentlemen grouped themselves in its shade, with their saucers of liquid and piping-hot candy disposed about them on the frozen ground to cool. There was joyous chaffing and joking and laughter--peal upon peal of it.

About this time a couple of old disreputable tom-cats got up on the chimney and started a heated argument about something; also about this time I gave up trying to get to sleep, and went visiting to Jim's room. He was awake and fuming about the cats and their intolerable yowling. I asked him, mockingly, why he didn't climb out and drive them away. He was nettled, and said over-boldly that for two cents he would.

It was a rash remark, and was probably repented of before it was fairly out of his mouth. But it was too late--he was committed. I knew him; and I knew he would rather break his neck than back down, if I egged him on judiciously.

"Oh, of course you would! Who's doubting it?"

It galled him, and he burst out, with sharp irritation--

"Maybe you doubt it!"

"I? Oh no, I shouldn't think of such a thing. You are always doing wonderful things. With your mouth."

He was in a passion, now. He snatched on his yarn socks and began to raise the window, saying in a voice unsteady with anger--

"You think I dasn't--you do! Think what you blame please--I don't care what you think. I'll show you!"

The window made him rage; it wouldn't stay up. I said--

"Never mind, I'll hold it."

Indeed, I would have done anything to help. I was only a boy, and was already in a radiant heaven of anticipation. He climbed carefully out, clung to the window-sill until his feet were safely placed, then began to pick his perilous way on all fours along the glassy comb, a foot and a hand on each side of it. I believe I enjoy it now as much as I did then: yet it is a good deal over fifty years ago. The frosty breeze flapped his short shirt about his lean legs; the crystal roof shone like polished marble in the intense glory of the moon; the unconscious cats

sat erect upon the chimney, alertly watching each other, lashing their tails and pouring out their hollow grievances; and slowly and cautiously Jim crept on, flapping as he went, the gay and frolicsome young creatures under the vine-canopy unaware, and outraging these solemnities with their misplaced laughter. Every time Jim slipped I had a hope; but always on he crept and disappointed it. At last he was within reaching distance. He paused, raised himself carefully up, measured his distance deliberately, then made a frantic grab at the nearest cat--and missed. Of course he lost his balance. His heels flew up, he struck on his back, and like a rocket he darted down the roof feet first, crashed through the dead vines and landed in a sitting posture in fourteen saucers of red-hot candy, in the midst of all that party--and dressed as he was: this lad who could not look a girl in the face with his clothes on. There was a wild scramble and a storm of shrieks, and Jim fled up the stairs, dripping broken crockery all the way.

Jim’s Narrative

due: _____

Prewriting

- Student completes timeline, listing 20 important moments of Jim’s journey with Huck (3pts.).
- Typed, peer-reviewed, draft (3pts).

___/6

Ideas

- Student chooses one **key** event Jim would remember years later and retells that part from Jim’s perspective, maintaining the accuracy of the story while introducing new insight about Jim’s character.

(2 pgs). ___/4

The **scene** chosen does the following:

- Move action forward leading to a turning point.
- Give insight into Jim or Jim’s attitude about another character.
- Create a desired emotional effect.

___/10

The **details** of the narrative do the following:

- Reveal character & motivation.
- Make the story colorful (WC!). Entertain me!
- Create a picture of the setting.

___/10

Organization

- Narrative has a clear beginning, middle and end.

___/10

Point of View/Voice

- Narrative remains in Jim’s voice.
- Dialogue exchange rings true.
- Verb tenses make sense.

___/10

Conventions

- Conventions, especially dialogue format, are accurate.
- You may write in Jim’s vernacular, but use correct punctuation, capitalization, spacing, and spelling of non-dialect words. If you change the spelling for effect, use the apostrophe to show omission of letters.

___/10

Total ___/50

50-48 A+; 47-A; 46-45 A-; 44-3 B+; 42 B; 41-40 B-; 39-38 C+; 36-C; 35 C-; 34-33D+; 32 D; 31-30 D-; 29-0 F