

## QUARRY FARM FIREPLACE CREATIVE WRITING CONTEST



*Twain on the Quarry Farm Porch*

It was July 1886 and my parents and I had been invited to join Susan Crane and her husband Theodore for dessert at Quarry Farm, their home overlooking the city of Elmira, New York, the Chemung River Valley, and the hills beyond. As our carriage made its way up East Hill, we passed the Elmira Water Cure Sanitarium and the home of the Reverend Thomas Beecher and his wife Julia. Our drive up to Quarry Farm was filled with great anticipation for not only would we be spending the evening with the Cranes but also with Susan Crane's sister Olivia, Olivia's three daughters and her most famous husband, Mark Twain. As our carriage stopped at the side of the big front porch, I spied out on the lawn a series of little pegs. My parents had told me about the lawn game that Mark Twain had devised to teach his children English history and also about Ellerslie, the playhouse that Aunt Susie Crane had recently had built for her nieces. I had heard that the playhouse had its own fireplace!

My thoughts were quickly interrupted by the welcoming greetings of Susan Crane who appeared on the Quarry Farm porch, followed by Olivia, her daughters, and several cats. But, Mark Twain was nowhere to be seen! As we were led into the cozy home, I saw the dining room to my left and on the large table I noticed that a plentiful and lovely dessert had been laid out. And then, as my eyes wandered across the hall into the parlor, I noticed a man with a big bushy mustache, smoking a cigar. This was Mark Twain himself! He was sitting in front of a beautifully tiled fireplace, with a tortoise-shell cat curled up on his lap. As he rose from his chair, I gathered the courage to ask the name of his cat and he replied that his name was "Sour-Mash." Mark Twain then asked us to gather around the fireplace with him for he had a creative task for us. This evening, instead of reading from the pages that he had written during the day in his Study, he invited us to choose a favorite tile that decorated the hearth and then to imagine a story to accompany the tile. I noticed that there were little scenes of animals on the tiles and I was quickly engrossed by several of the scenes. He told us that one of the best storytellers that ever lived was a person from a long time ago named Aesop and that the scenes around the fireplace were all about his stories. Mark Twain explained to us the various details that must accompany our new story and told us that we would all share our stories after dessert. He chuckled and left us with our thoughts as we moved back into the dining room for a splendid dessert that had been prepared by Mary Ann Cord, their cook.



*The Fireplace in the Quarry Farm Parlor*

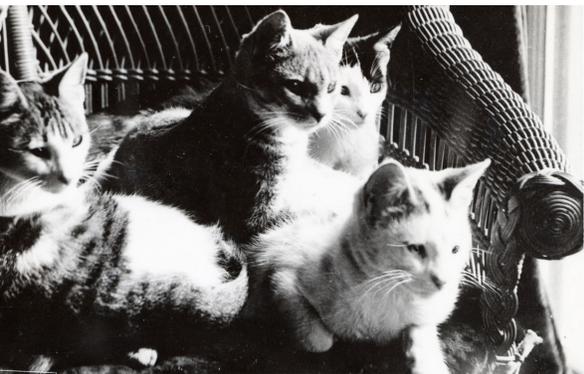
*Here are the details that Mark Twain instructed us to consider when creating our stories. Each storyteller should do the following:*

1. Look at the fireplace in the Quarry Farm Virtual Tour and then select one of the tiles that captures your attention. Both the Virtual Tour and images of the tiles can be found at **MarkTwainStudies.org**.
2. Understand that the tiles illustrate fables written by the Ancient Greek storyteller Aesop whose stories are illustrated in these tiles. Almost all of Aesop's fables contain animals who speak as humans and illustrate a moral lesson.
3. Write your own fable, different from Aesop's original, based on the tile that you have chosen.

4. The narrative should include the following:
  - A. A description of what is happening in the scene.
  - B. A description of the setting (time of day, season, landscape).
  - C. A description of the relationship of the characters. Are they strangers? Do they know each other?
  - D. A description of what the characters are saying or feeling.
  - E. A statement of the problem or dilemma that the characters are discussing in your story.
  - F. A moral or a statement that sums up the lesson in the story
  - G. A title for your story.



*Susan Crane on the Quarry Farm Porch*



*The Quarry Farm Cats*

When we had finished our dessert and were summoned back into the parlor, Mark Twain asked each of us to tell our story. I was a bit timid because his daughters, Suzy, Clara and Jean, had done this many times and I was quite new at this. But we all took our turns and shared the stories that we had created Mark Twain seemed happy with all of our efforts...even mine! This was an evening that I will always remember!!

Students from local schools are encouraged to submit their stories to the Center for Mark Twain Studies. A “local school” is defined as being no more than 25 miles away from Quarry Farm. The deadline for the stories is April 16, 2018. Three winners from three different schools will be chosen by the CMTS Staff. Winners will be given a personal tour inside of Quarry Farm and will be able to read their story right next to the Quarry Farm Parlor Fireplace. Winners will also be able to bring their class and or entire grade (depending on overall size). The tour of Quarry Farm will conclude with Mark Twain’s favorite dessert: gingerbread, vanilla ice cream and lemonade!

All the fireplace tiles and a full virtual tour of Quarry Farm can be found at [MarkTwainStudies.org](http://MarkTwainStudies.org).

**THIS CONTEST IS OPEN TO 2ND THROUGH 6TH GRADERS.**

Please submit all your stories by April 16, 2018 to the Center for Mark Twain Studies, Elmira College, 1 Park Place, Elmira, NY 14901

CMTS has made this assignment fit neatly into the New York and Pennsylvania Common Core Standards.

**COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS ANCHOR STANDARDS FOR WRITING**

#3 *Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.*

**Grade 5: Text Types and Purposes:**

1. Orient the reader by establishing a situation and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally.
2. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, description, and pacing, to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations.
3. Use a variety of transitional words, phrases, and clauses to manage the sequence of events.
4. Use concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events precisely.
5. Provide a conclusion that follows from the narrated experiences or events

While this assignment demonstrates the 5th grade Standards, these standards can apply to the 2nd through 6th grade levels. For example the 2nd grade Standard reads: *Write narratives in which they recount a well-elaborated event or short sequence of events, include details to describe actions, thoughts, and feelings, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide a sense of closure.*

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