

The New Normal: The Past Speaking To Our Students' Present

What follows are instructional exemplars for elementary, middle school, and high school. Each module includes

- Curricular Objectives
- Thematic Thread Guiding Questions based on STI 2020 themes to spark classroom exploration and discussion
- Interactive Activities
- Excerpts from primary source curricular texts (fiction, nonfiction)
- Excerpts from primary source Mark Twain (fiction, nonfiction: speeches, interviews, journals, notes, letters)
- Primary and secondary sources to complement texts:
 1. Historical periodicals
 2. Images
 3. Historical documents
 4. Artifacts
 5. CMTS videos:
- Contemporary resources to scaffold/interleave with curricular and Mark Twain texts

Each exemplar models how teachers can build on and create their own modules.

We will also include more exemplars throughout the year for participants to access with resources.

Middle School: Grades 6-8 NYEngage Standards: **NOTE:** Because we will continue to add instructional content using many of the recommended texts, please know that in addition to the texts used here, other texts listed in grades 6-8 will also have instructional modules added after the Institute throughout the year.

Curricular Objectives:

Module 1: Close Reading and Writing to Learn: Myths: Not Just Long Ago; Journeys and Survival; Finding a Home: Refugees

Module 2: Working with Evidence: Rules to Live By; Working Conditions; Taking a Stand

Module 3: Understanding Perspectives: The Land of the Golden Mountain; Slavery: The People Could Fly; Japanese American Relations in WWII

Module 4: Research, Decision Making, and Forming Positions

Excerpts—Curricular:

- *A Long Walk to Water* Linda Sue Park
- “Commonwealth Club Address” César Chávez
- *To Kill a Mockingbird* Harper Lee
- *Narrative in the Life of Frederick Douglass* Frederick Douglass

Excerpts—Mark Twain:

- “A True Story” (short story)

- Influenza and Plasmon in *Mrs. Mark Twain: The Life of Olivia Langdon Clemens, 1845-1904*
- Letter excerpt: “About young John D. Rockefeller’s Sunday-school talks (Tuesday, March 20, 1906) in *Autobiography of Mark Twain, Volume 1*
- Autobiographical Dictation 6 December 1906 in *Autobiography of Mark Twain, Volume 2*
- Olivia and tuberculosis in *Mrs. Mark Twain: The Life of Olivia Langdon Clemens, 1845-1904*
- Mark Twain on consumption (speech)
- Mark Twain excerpt “Independence Day” 4 July 1907 (speech)
- Frederick Douglass excerpt: “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” 5 July 1852 (speech)

Thematic Thread Guided Questions:

- Pandemic
 1. While the definition of “pandemic” most assuredly includes universal and widespread disease, another definition of this same word includes “reference to a political system in which all people are governed equally . . . usually understood as an extended use of sense” (*Oxford English Dictionary*).
 Excerpts from the curricular texts listed above, along with Olivia Langdon’s illness and the influenza pandemic during Mark Twain’s time, provide an interesting comparison/contrast of how the term “pandemic” can have multiple meanings—all converging, affecting many, many people. What joins both meanings among the texts listed is the sense of loss, aloneness, hope/hopelessness, fear, uncertainty, loss of freedom, resilience, perseverance.
 Individually or in groups, explore how COVID-19 has affected you and others whom you know. Use examples from the texts above, fiction/nonfiction, to inquire and compare/contrast how real people, like César Chávez and those for whom he valiantly fought and fictional characters, like Nya and Salva, confront their kind of pandemics. Make sure to take notes for later use.
- Pivotal Social Moments
 1. What *does taking a stand look and feel like today?* What did it look and feel like in the past? In each of the listed curricular texts, characters (Scout, Calpurnia) and real people (Frederick Douglass and Cesar Chavez) find themselves challenged by seemingly insurmountable challenges—both personally and socially.
 Have you ever found yourself or friends or family members in uncomfortable or challenging situations when someone must stand up and and take a stand? Or, take a knee to make a statement? As a class or in groups, explore the following and use the curricular text(s) with the two speeches about the 4th of July by Frederick Douglass and Mark Twain to compare and contrast:
 - ❖ What can prompt a person to decide to take a stand or take a knee?
 - ❖ How far should one take this challenge? For example, Calpurnia takes an ultimate stand to assert her visibility and voice: she stands up and speaks out in both the Quarters and in Scout’s and Jem’s community. Calpurnia

openly educates herself and her son at a time when an educated Black person was essentially a walking and talking target for racism and violence.

- ❖ Provide some examples you have taken or that you have seen or heard with taking a stand.
- Power of Language/Voice
 1. No one is invisible or without voice and freedom, although we may sometimes feel that we lack one or two or all of them. Authors like Mark Twain use words in fiction and nonfiction—language—to make themselves heard, heard for themselves and heard by so many others. Like Mark Twain and Frederick Douglass, Harper Lee, and César Chávez language was their most powerful tool: word choice, imagery, details, facts, examples, personal narrative are a few of the traits these writers all share.

Individually, select an excerpt from one of the curricular texts and select an excerpt from Mark Twain. You may also use the primary and secondary resources, such as the newspapers. As you compare and contrast your selections, explore and identify examples of how each author uses language and voice to communicate, illustrate, and argue for a perspective.

Share with the class examples of how you use your voice(s) and perspective(s) verbally, on social media, in class, and other situations.

Interactive Activities—Scaffolding Curricular and Mark Twain: Connecting Themes

- A. Part of what defines Mark Twain and his era was social change and, sometimes, social upheaval. Twain was fully aware of slavery, the Civil War, suffrage movement, the lack of rights for children, Reconstruction, even the emergence of the Jim Crow era. In addition to these pivotal social moments, Asians and Latinos were also experiencing inequities and inequality.

- ❖ What defines your time, today?
- ❖ How would you describe it to someone who would be unfamiliar with the United States?
- ❖ How does your era today compare and contrast with that of Mark Twain’s and Frederick Douglass’?

Individually or in small groups, create a **Your Perspective and Voice Are Heard Podcast**. Your initial resources for the podcast will be the results from your discussions and reading of the questions above and the texts you have read. Select four-five people to interview for your podcast.

- ❖ Identify and describe to each participant the assigned text(s) you have read.
- ❖ Identify and describe to each participant the Mark Twain excerpt.
- ❖ Ask each participant the 3 questions you and your classmates have already discussed.
- ❖ Be prepared to ask follow-up question(s) if you want to explore a particular point further.

Once you have completed your podcast, share with the class. Also, if your teacher and school allow, share the podcasts with the school.

- B. What comes to your mind when you see the phrase “rules to live by?” What would you include as illustrations of the phrase? Would you include family rules, school rules, community, social, and universal rules? Using one of the assigned texts, such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* or “Commonwealth Club Address,” explore the actions and words of Scout and Calpurnia, and César Chávez. Can you identify and understand their questions and perspectives on the “rules of law” in their times? Did they want to effect change? Why or why not? As you explore and investigate the assigned text, also think about comparisons and contrasts in the excerpt Mark Twain’s “Independence Day” speech.

Create a **Multi-Media Rules of Law Vision Board**. You may create your vision board individually or in small groups and then share out. Your **Multi-Media Rules of Law Vision Board** will illustrate your research findings on “the rule of law” discovered in the assigned text, the Mark Twain excerpt, and your own time. Feel free to use some of the primary, secondary, and contemporary resources. And, use your own resources: personal narrative, interviews with family, friends, teacher, music, and television. Your **Multi-Media Rules of Law Vision Board** will also include a written commentary to guide those who will read and view and hear what you have created. Be sure to provide your final analysis of your perspective on this phrase.

Primary and Secondary Resources:

1. “Plasmon” in *The Province* Vancouver, British Columbia 13 Nov 1906 (Elem)
2. “Plasmon” in *Kansas City Kansas Globe*, 20 Sep 1906 (MS/HS)
3. “Influenza” in *The Baltimore Sun*, 14 Apr 1907
4. “Influenza” in *The Sun NYC*, 14 Apr 1907
5. “Tuberculosis” in *NY Tribune*, 3 Aug 1901
6. “Diptheria [sic]-Take Precautions” in *Democrat’s and Chronicle* 14 Dec 1882
7. “Diptheria [sic]” *Star-Gazette Elmira, NY*, 12 Nov 1902

Contemporary Resources:

1. Open Letter from Boston Physicians, 14 March 2020
2. The Houston Years of George Floyd, *Houston Chronicle*, 30 May 2020
3. Keeping Our Eyes on The Prize: Mr. George Floyd, GenZ, and Our Teaching, *EdWeek*, June 2020