

Core English 314

American Literature

UNIT 4

01. 'The Celebrated Jumping Frog'

- Mark Twain

01. About the Author:

△ ***Born -Samuel Langhorne Clemens, November 30, 1835 Florida, Missouri, U.S.***

△ ***Died -April 21, 1910 (aged 74) Stormfield House, Redding, Connecticut, U.S.***

△ ***Samuel Langhorne Clemens*** , known by the pen name Mark Twain, was an ***American writer, humorist, essayist, entrepreneur, publisher and lecturer.***

△ He was praised as the *****greatest humorist the United States has produced****,* and **William Faulkner called him ***the father of American literature****.*

△ His novels include ***The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876) and its sequel, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884), with the latter often called the "Great American Novel"***.

△ Twain was ***raised in Hannibal, Missouri,* which later provided the *setting for both Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn.***

△ He served an apprenticeship with a printer early in his career, and then worked as a typesetter, contributing articles to his older brother Orion Clemens' newspaper.

△ Twain then ***became a riverboat pilot on the Mississippi River, which provided him the material for Life on the Mississippi (1883).***

△ He first achieved success as a writer with the humorous story *****The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County****, which was published in 1865;* it was based

on a story that he heard at Angels Hotel in Angels Camp, California, where he had spent some time as a miner. ***The short story brought him international attention.***

△ He ***wrote both fiction and non-fiction.*** As his fame grew, he became a much sought-after speaker.

△ ***Twain earned a great deal of money from his writing and lectures*** , but invested in ***ventures that lost most of it, such as the Paige Compositor*** , a mechanical typesetter that failed because of its complexity and imprecision.

△ ***He filed for bankruptcy in the wake of these financial setbacks, but in time overcame his financial troubles with the help of Standard Oil executive Henry Huttleston Rogers.***

△ ***Twain eventually paid all his creditors in full,*** even though his declaration of bankruptcy meant he was not required to do so. He was ***born shortly after the appearance of Halley's Comet, and predicted that his death would accompany it as well, dying a day after the comet was at its closest to Earth.***

△ ***His Most Famous Works:***

- His most famous novels included ***The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876) and Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884),*** which are loosely based on Twain's boyhood experiences in Missouri. Twain also wrote numerous short stories, most notably “ ***The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” (1865).***

△ ***His Achievements:***

Twain was recognized with three honorary degrees. He received ***honorary Master of Arts and Doctor of Letters degrees from Yale University in Connecticut, as well as an honorary Doctor of Letters from Oxford University, England.***

****02. About the Story:****

△ ***The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*** , short story by Mark Twain, first published in a ***New York periodical, The Saturday Press in 1865.***

△ The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” is an **1865 short story by Mark Twain.**

△ It was ***his first great success as a writer and brought him national attention.***

△ The story has also been published as **”Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog” and “The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County”.***

△ The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County, and ***Other Sketches is also the title story of an 1867 collection of short stories by Mark Twain.***

△ It was ***Twain’s first book and collected 27 stories that were previously published in magazines and newspapers.***

△ In a frame tale, ***one story appears—that is, it is framed by—another story.***

△ In “Jumping Frog” **the outer tale focuses on Mark Twain and his meeting with the talkative old storyteller, Simon Wheeler.**

△ This meeting occurs ***at the request of a friend of Twain’s, identified in some versions of the tale as A.***

****03. Characters:****

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****(1) Jim Smiley:****

An infamous huckster and gambler at Angel’s Camp and the story’s protagonist. A lucky man, Smiley will place a bet with anybody, at any time, for any reason. He particularly likes to bet on animal competitions and trains his frog to be the highest jumping frog in Calaveras County.

****(2) Simon Wheeler:****

An old storyteller in the mining town of Angel's Camp. Wheeler speaks in a gentle monotone and takes his outrageous stories seriously.

****(3) The narrator:****

The narrator of the story. The narrator calls upon Simon Wheeler as a favor to a friend to inquire about a man named Leonidas W. Smiley. The story is his account of what he hears.

****(4) The Stranger:****

A man who shows up in Angel's Camp one day. He takes Jim Smiley up on a bet that Smiley's frog can outjump any frog in Calaveras County.

****(5) The narrator's unnamed friend:****

An unnamed person and prankster. He makes up the name Leonidas W. Smiley knowing it will prompt Simon Wheeler to barrage the narrator with bizarre stories.

****(6) Rev. Leonidas W. Smiley:****

Purportedly a young minister, former resident of Angel's Camp, and friend of the narrator's friend. The narrator suspects that Leonidas W. Smiley is a fictional character his friend has invented as a set-up for the narrator's experience with Simon Wheeler.

(7) Dan'I Webster:

The famed jumping frog of Calaveras County, who is "trained" by Jim Smiley and is reputedly the best jumper of all frogs in the area.

(8) Andrew Jackson:

Bull pup turned fighting dog, who is "trained" by Jim Smiley and is notable for his last-ditch effort wins.

04. Theme:

"The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County", though short and satirical, explores a few important themes, ****such as underdogs winning, gambling, humor, and implausibility.****

05. Quotes:

(1) * *"Eh bien! I no see not that that frog has nothing of better than another."* *

(2) * *In compliance with the request of a friend of mine, who wrote me from the East.* *

- Narrator

(3) * *"They used to give her two or three hundred yards start, and then pass her under way"*. *

-Simon Wheeler

06. Critical Appreciation:

The narrator begins the story by explaining that a friend of his back East has asked him to check in on an acquaintance, Rev. Leonidas W. Smiley. To do so, the narrator seeks out an older man named Simon Wheeler, and the rest of the story is the result of that visit. The narrator notes that he suspects Leonidas W. Smiley doesn't really exist. He speculates that his friend knows the name will remind Wheeler of a man named Jim Smiley, and that Wheeler will launch into a long story about him. That is exactly what happens.

The narrator finds Simon Wheeler sleeping by the stove in a tavern in Angel's Camp, a mining town. After waking and greeting Wheeler, the narrator asks him about Leonidas W. Smiley. Wheeler then sits the narrator down in the corner of the tavern and begins to speak. The narrator notes that during the entire account which follows, Wheeler hardly shows any emotion and never wavers from a singular gentle and monotonous tone of voice. According to the narrator, Wheeler doesn't find anything funny whatsoever about the story he tells and in fact takes the matter extremely seriously and regards the men in the story as heroes. The narrator finds this absurd, but he does not interrupt Wheeler throughout his narrative.

Wheeler begins by describing a man named Jim Smiley, who came to Angel's Camp in the winter of 1849 or spring of 1850. The interesting thing about Jim Smiley is that he would make a bet with anybody about anything. If a person was reluctant to take the bet, Smiley would switch sides just to entice them. Smiley loved to bet because he was very lucky and would almost always win. He especially loved to bet on animals, including horse races and dog-, cat-, and even chicken fights. But he would bet on unconventional and unusual things, too. He might bet on which bird among two would be the first to fly off a wire and which speaker at the town meeting was best at speaking. He would bet on where a random straddle-bug was going and how long it would take for it to get there and then follow the bug to Mexico so he could find out. One time Parson Walker's wife was sick, and it was expected she may die. When she showed improvement and it looked like she may live, Jim Smiley told Walker he'd bet that she'd die anyway.

To feed his gambling habit, Jim Smiley kept a series of animals that he would use to place bets. One of these was a sickly mare with a variety of ailments. Despite looking like a wreck and starting each race slowly, the mare would get a burst of energy at the end of a race and almost always come out the winner, if barely. Another was a dog that Smiley named Andrew Jackson, who did nothing but sit around looking lazy. However, whenever Smiley put him up to a fight and bet on him, Andrew Jackson would suddenly get tough and mean. He would even let the other dog bully him and beat him up so the bets against him would pile up. Then suddenly Andrew Jackson would grab the other dog's hind leg with his jaw and clamp down and never let go, and he would win the fight. Smiley never lost a bet on Andrew Jackson until he fought a dog without any hind legs. When it was time to clamp down on the other dog's leg, Andrew Jackson discovered that he didn't have any and gave up the fight. The old dog looked at Jim Smiley with disappointment on his face, as if he were heartbroken, then limped away, laid down, and died.

Next Jim Smiley caught a frog and decided to train it. For three months, all Smiley did was teach the frog to jump. He taught the frog to jump so high he would do one or two somersaults in the air and land back on his feet. Smiley said the frog only needed education to be able to do anything. He named the frog Dan'l Webster and started teaching him to catch flies. Dan'l Webster got so good at catching flies that Smiley only need to say, "Flies, Dan'l, flies!" and the frog would leap up, grab a fly off the counter with his tongue, and land back on his feet on the floor again, looking modest. Dan'l Webster's specialty was jumping from a sitting position, and he could go higher than

any frog there ever was. Jim Smiley was proud of his frog and bet on him whenever he could. People who had traveled everywhere said Dan'l Webster was the best jumping frog they'd ever seen.

One day, Jim Smiley was sitting in the camp with a small lattice box containing Dan'l Webster when a stranger walked up and asked him what was inside. Smiley told the stranger it was a frog. The stranger examined the frog in the box and asked what it was good for. Smiley responded that the frog could outjump any frog in Calaveras County and that he would bet the stranger forty dollars on it. The stranger said he didn't see anything special about the frog, and he didn't have a frog himself, but would take the bet if he did. Smiley said he'd go and get a frog for the stranger, so the stranger agreed to the bet. Smiley handed the box to the stranger and went down to the swamp to catch a frog. While Smiley was away, the stranger picked up Dan'l Webster, opened his mouth, and filled his body with a quail shot.

Jim Smiley returned with a frog from the swamp and put the two side by side, ready for the jumping contest. Smiley then counted to three and the two men touched their respective frogs from behind to urge them to jump. The new frog jumped forward. Dan'l Webster, however, only gave a heave like he was trying to jump but couldn't budge. Smiley was surprised and confused, but he paid the stranger the forty dollars as agreed. As the stranger walked away, he again said aloud that he didn't see anything special about that frog. Smiley stood looking at Dan'l Webster for a while, wondering what was wrong with him. He noticed the frog did look a little baggy. He picked up the frog and was surprised to find that Dan'l Webster felt like he weighed five pounds! He then turned the frog upside down, causing Dan'l Webster to belch out all the quail shot inside him. Smiley suddenly understood what had happened and was angry. He went looking for the stranger but never found him.

At this point, Simon Wheeler hears his name called from outside and stops his story about Jim Smiley. He tells the narrator to sit still while he goes outside to check why he's wanted. However, the narrator has had enough, and knowing he isn't going to get any information about Rev. Leonidas W. Smiley, he starts to leave. As he reaches the door, Wheeler is just on his way back inside. Wheeler immediately starts in again with another story about Jim Smiley, this time about Smiley and a one-eyed cow with a stump of a tail like a banana. But the narrator, annoyed, interrupts Wheeler to tell him he doesn't want to hear any more about Jim Smiley, and he leaves.

07. Conclusion:

Getting what you want sometimes means playing by your own rules.

The main characters in “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” all recognize that in a place like Angel’s Camp, there are no rules, and getting what you want means playing by your own.

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