

TITLE OF LESSON

American Literature Unit 1 Lesson 14 – Twain’s Tools: Dialect  
*How Can Written Language Convey Oral Language?*

TIME ESTIMATE FOR THIS LESSON

One class period

ALIGNMENT WITH STANDARDS

California – Eng 11-12: R1.0-3, 2.0, 3.0-5, L/S1.0

MATERIALS

*Black Elk Speaks* – Reading  
 “A True Story” – Reading  
 “The Party” – Reading  
**Vocabulary Worksheet** – Student Page  
**Voice Writing Toolbox** – Student Page (one per student)  
**Project 1 – A True Story** – Student Page (one per student)  
 A computer or computers with Internet access (if possible) to visit  
<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/railton/huckfinn/truest1.html>  
 (Or, if no Internet access, a copy of the section of the lesson entitled Twain’s Notes.)

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- To determine Twain’s and Dunbar’s purposes for writing in dialect
- To brainstorm Twain’s strategies for writing in dialect
- To create a class toolbox for writing in dialect

FOCUS AND MOTIVATE STUDENTS – WARM-UP ACTIVITY

- 1) Homework Check – Stamp/initial homework assignments. Tell students to keep their homework to use during the class discussion. Pass back any graded assignments and have students place them in the appropriate section of their binders.
- 2) **Vocabulary** – Tell students to take out their “Unit 1 Vocabulary List 2” and write down the following words: sacred, cavalry, laborious, colloquial. Tell them to define these words tonight, writing the sentences from the reading that they use to help them figure out the definitions. They may also use dictionaries, but they still must write sentences that help them determine the definitions. Distribute a **Vocabulary Worksheet**, and tell them to fill it out for the word laborious.
- 3) **Daily Log** – Tell students to copy the Daily Log below.
- 4) **Sustained Silent Reading** - Read for fifteen minutes. At the end of silent reading, ask some students to point out an example of dialogue being spoken by one of the characters in their novel. Ask them how the author’s use of dialogue makes that character sound different from the other characters.

Date	Journal	Lecture Discussion	Activity	Readings	Homework
		Author’s Purpose	1. Read Translations of “A True Story.” 2. Brainstorm strategies for writing in dialect. 3. Create a toolbox.	“The Party”  “A True Story”	1. Read <i>Black Elk Speaks</i> , including the introduction. 2. Define vocabulary words. 3. Complete <b>Vocabulary Worksheet</b> for laborious. 4. Continue reading novels. 5. Review <b>Project 1 – A True Story</b> . 6. Organize binders. Due Lesson 15.

ACTIVITIES – INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP

1. Author's Purpose – Tell students to bring out their copy of "The Party" to examine during the following discussion. Remind the class of yesterday's discussion of "The Party." They discussed Dunbar's different styles of writing, speculating on why he made the choice he did, to write in two distinctly different styles. Ask the students to remind you of their guesses as to Dunbar's purpose in writing some of his poems in dialect. (Some of the students may have said that Dunbar, being an African-American poet, wanted to write in the voice that he heard many African-Americans use. If no one said this, ask the class if they think that might have been one of his reasons.) It would be useful, for your own background to this discussion, to consider the following analysis of Dunbar's poem, "We Wear the Mask":

*The poem is also an apologia for all that his own and succeeding generations would condemn in his work, for the grin of minstrelsy and the lie of the plantation tradition that Dunbar felt himself bound to adopt as part of the "myriad subtleties" required to find a voice and to be heard. The "subtleties" lead us to expect that honest feelings and judgments, when they occur, will be obliquely presented and may be difficult to apprehend, a point of view that many critics of Dunbar have not taken into account. It should be noted that the poem itself is "masked," its link to the black race, though obvious enough, not being openly stated. Yet in this one poem Dunbar left aside the falsity of dialect and the didacticism of his serious poems on black subjects and spoke from the heart. (from [http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/a\\_f/dunbar/mask.htm](http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/a_f/dunbar/mask.htm))*

This analysis suggests the opinion that Dunbar used the voice he did just to become published, since it was not a dialect that was natural to him. Next, point out to the students, or have them point out, that "A True Story" is an example of a white author using dialect to tell an African-American's story. What do they believe his purpose is in using this dialect? Students may suggest the following theories:

- Twain wanted to experiment with several different types of voice in his writing.
- Twain wanted to mock the sound of African-American speech for humorous purposes.
- Twain was catering to audiences that enjoyed reading and hearing regional dialect (such as those who enjoyed minstrel shows and Dunbar's writing).
- Twain was primarily concerned with historical accuracy in his writing.
- Twain wanted to present Aunt Rachel's story in the most authentic and believable voice possible, to engage the sympathy of the audience to enhance the power of the story.

When students offer their educated guesses, ask them to say whether they believe Twain succeeded in his purpose and why. Be sure that students are providing evidence from all of their readings that back up their opinions. There may be (should be) some fairly heated differences of opinion here. The idea is not to attempt an absolute answer, but to sit with the controversy, to allow students to agree to disagree. Some students may be offended. Be sure that you remind them of their discussion guidelines which apply to any controversial issues they are addressing in class. When you have taken several guesses, read this background information to the students:

*This was the first MT piece ever published in the prestigious Atlantic Monthly magazine. It was also his first sustained attempt to represent the experience of slavery and to employ an African American voice. ("Sociable Jimmy," a sketch MT wrote about the same time, also shows his interest in "black" speech.) "Aunt Rachel" was Mary Ann Cord, a servant at Quarry Farm, the Elmira house where MT's sister-in-law had built him a study. MT of course claimed that a lot of preposterous tales were the petrified truth, but there is every reason to believe that this one time the "True Story" is true. When he sent the piece to Howells (the publisher), he expressed some doubts about it: "it is rather out of my line," he wrote, because it "has no humor in it." (Indeed, Howells later said that some Atlantic readers suspected it must contain a joke they just weren't getting.)*

**NOTE: "Sociable Jimmy" can be found at <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/railton/huckfinn/socjimmy.html>**

This information addresses some of the above theories. Twain's other writing does show an interest in experimenting with voice, but this still does not define what the purpose is for the experimentation. Clearly, the piece is not intended to be humorous or pandering. While Twain is very definite about the truthfulness of this story, he was not heretofore known for his historical accuracy. Ask the class this: if you were going to tell a story about an important event in someone's life, what would your purpose be for using their exact words? Would you do use their exact words if you were concerned that the person might be misrepresented if you

didn't? Would you do it if you felt that those exact words were the best words possible to tell what happened? Because the event happened not to you but to the speaker, and the speaker's words tell the story best? Point out that it was an unusual choice for a white author to make at the time, especially one who was known for his humorous writing. What would the response be today if a white author used the voice of an African-American in his/her writing? Can the class think of any examples of this? (As stated above, in Twain's time, the audience felt it might be a joke they weren't getting.)

2. **Reading** Translations and **Notetaking** – Tell students to bring out their copy of “A True Story” and their translation of “A True Story”. Begin by reading the introduction of the story. When you get to the first dotted line, ask the students to raise their hands if they translated the next section. Ask everyone who translated the next section to read their translation. Tell the students that, while each student reads, they should take notes on how the translations differ from one another. (Let them know that everyone is going to read their translation eventually, so no one should be embarrassed about being singled out.) Go through the story one section at a time, having all students read their translations with the rest of the class taking notes on the variations. When all of the sections have been read, ask students to point out some of the ways that the translations varied. What strategies did people use to translate the story? How did they place the story in their voices rather than the voice used by Twain? Did they read aloud a sentence, try saying the sentence in their own words, then write down those words? Or did they read a whole paragraph and paraphrase the events of the paragraph? Did they make an outline of events? Did they figure out what a word was and then look for that word elsewhere in the story? Tell the students that listening to the different versions of the story can help them figure out strategies, as well as informing them how the story itself changes when taken out of Aunt Rachel's voice.
3. **Brainstorm** Twain's Tools – Now, tell the students that the class will brainstorm the methods that Twain used to capture the speech of Aunt Rachel in “A True Story”. The class will extend the writing strategy of voice they learned in Freshman year, adding elements specific to Twain's strategies for capturing voice. Then they will be using the strategies listed to capture the voice of a guest speaker. Using the toolbox, they will recreate a true story, based on a talk given by a guest speaker tomorrow. Ask students to begin brainstorming what Twain does to convey the real Voice of Aunt Rachel, and make us believe that he has captured the dialect accurately. Remind them about the tools discussed in Freshman year, surrounding Voice (e.g., dialect, dialogue, slang, character description of age, class, gender, religion). Take as many ideas as possible. If no one comes up with the following, make sure to write them on the board yourself:
  - Introduces the story in standard English, a contrast to the voice of the Aunt Rachel.
  - Gives a description of Aunt Rachel, her physical qualities and her vocal style.
  - Spells words the way they sound (phonetic spelling)
  - Uses consistency in his phonetic spelling (always spells the same sounds and words the same way)

If your classroom has computers with Internet access, it would be extremely useful to have at least one student go to the following website: <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/railton/huckfinn/truest1.html>. This has the actual manuscript of the story, where it is possible to see Twain's changes and notes written on the text. The students can click on the page number links to see the pages of the manuscript. If you do not have access to this, you can write some of the examples (see Twain's Notes, below) on the board. Explain that you are writing some of the notes from Twain's handwritten manuscript. When you point out any of Twain's notes, ask the class to contribute ideas about his strategies, and what the notes reveal he is doing to capture the speaker's voice (That is, use the specific examples to generalize about the strategies):

Twain's Notes:

- On page 5, 'cause is changed to 'case, Virginia is spelled as Fo'ginny. (Twain pays attention to the sounds of words that we expect to hear one way, but end up sounding different from our expectations.)
- On page 9, “O de good God” is changed to “O de Good gracious,” and on page 14, the phrase “make 'em walk chalk” is added. (Twain pays attention to certain expressions used by the speaker, which helps flesh out the person's individual voice.)
- On page 11, the word grabbed is changed to grab'. (Twain pays attention to dropped endings of words, and placed apostrophes there.)

- On page 18, “how could I know it” is changed to “how was I gwyne to know it.” On page 23, “I am” is changed to “I is.” (Twain resists the urge to correct the grammar of the speaker to a more standard English form.)

After several ideas have been written on the board, distribute the **Voice Writing Toolbox** to each student. This will be the checklist they will use for their own assignment of writing in dialect. Go through the ideas suggested, one by one, and have them add any that are not already included to the toolbox. Make sure to create your own master copy, as well. (Note that they do not need to fill in the Examples section at this time). They should keep these checklists, but turn in last night’s assignment.

4. Review Homework – Distribute the **Project 1 – A True Story** and tell students to read it over tonight. This is the project they will begin tomorrow. Distribute the reading *Black Elk Speaks* and tell students to read it, **highlighting and annotating** along the way. They should answer the following question as they read: What strategies did the translator use to capture Black Elk’s Voice? Tell them to make a list of each strategy used and give a specific example from the text for each.
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#### HOMEWORK

- 1) Read *Black Elk Speaks*, including the introduction. **Highlight and annotate**. Identify the strategies used by the translator to capture voice and list examples from the text for each.
  - 2) Define vocabulary words.
  - 3) Complete **Vocabulary Worksheet** for laborious.
  - 4) Continue reading novels.
  - 5) Review **Project 1 – A True Story**.
  - 6) Organize binders according to date and section. Be sure all Daily Logs are filled in and place in the front of your binder. You will be graded on the organization and thoroughness of your binder. Do you have all of your assignments complete and placed according to date and section?
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#### GROUP ROLES

None

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#### DOCUMENTATION FOR PORTFOLIO

##### Unit 1

None