“THE NOTORIOUS JUMPING FROG OF CALVERAS COUNTY”
BY MARK TWAIN

Presenter: Danielle Reites
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

- Samuel L. Clemens, 1835-1910
- Raised in Hannibel, Missouri
- Printer’s apprentice, steamboat pilot, writer, humorist, lecturer (Baym 118-121)
ABOUT THE STORY

- Aka "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County"
- First published in the November 18, 1865, edition of *The New York Saturday Press,* under the title "Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog."
- One of his first writings
- Helped establish him as a humorist (Baym 118)
HISTORICAL CONTEXT - 1865

- The West was still in the process of being settled
- The Industrial Revolution was beginning in the East though many people still lived a more agriculturally centered way of life
- Regional writing
  - “Expression of the realist impulse” (Baym 13)
  - Designed to both preserve a way of life and come to terms with changes industrialization was bringing (Baym 13)
  - “By the end of the nineteenth century almost every region had one or more ‘local colorists’” (Baym 13)
**OTHER MAJOR WORKS**

- First book *Roughing It* (1867) - debunked idea of West as place of fortune
- *Innocents Abroad* (1869) – letters from a fictitious character (who readers believed Twain was just reporting about) who often said unorthodox and impolite things
- *A Boy’s Manuscript* (1870), which later became *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*
- *Life on the Mississippi* (1883)
- *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884)

“When Twain was asked for his impressions of the Holy Land, he said he knew for a fact there would be no Second Coming, for if Jesus had been there once he certainly wouldn’t go back.”

--Nina Baym
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the **tone** of the story? What in the text supports this idea?

2. Does the narrator describing the story as a “monotonous narrative” (122) when he heard it have any affect on how you perceived it?

3. How does Simon Wheeler use exaggeration to establish the kind of man Jim Smiley is? Is exaggeration still a common vehicle for humor today? Can you think of any examples?

4. What causes Andrew Jackson to die?

5. How does Smiley’s cunning in choosing animals that don’t look like they could compete compare to the cunning of the stranger in filling the frog with quail shot? Is there a ethical distinction between the two? (Lorcher)
1. What character traits are elevated above others in the story? (Cleverness vs. education? Ethics even among swindlers? Westerners’ love of a good tall tale vs. Easterner’s perspective of it as monotonous?)

2. How does point-of-view contribute to the humorous effect of the story?

3. Though this story is classified as a tall tale, there are several aspects of the story that make it realistic. Explain how setting, characterization, and diction contribute to its realism.
THEMES

- Contrast between East and West
  - Educated and unappreciative of humor
  - Full of tall tales and somewhat rough around the edges

- The rules of the West (ethics even among gamblers)

- Even those who seem unlikely to win/be smart (Smiley, the dog, the frog) can win/be intelligent
Symbols:
- Angel’s Camp – symbol of the West, which also symbolizes an adventurous, crafty spirit, rougher living, love of telling tall tales

Allusions:
- Names of the animals
  - Andrew Jackson – 7th president; a man of the people who believed in equality for all
  - Daniel Webster – senator and Secretary of State; known for being a good narrator
“Mini-bio Mark Twain”

- Illustrated the influence Twain has had and a little bit about why
