The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County
by Mark Twain

Learning Objectives

For pages 147–158
In studying this text, you will focus on the following objectives:

Literary Study: Analyzing dialect.
Reading: Analyzing comic devices.
Connect to the Story
With three classmates, brainstorm possible connections among the phrases and sentences that follow. Use these questions to get started: What kind of plot is suggested by these clues? What kind of conflict? What can you predict about the characters? With your group write a one-paragraph version of what you think the selection could be about.

tall tale
exaggeration
storyteller, Simon Wheeler
minister, Leonidas W. Smiley
gambler, Jim Smiley who will bet on anything

jumping frog, Dan’l Webster
“Well, I don’t see no p’ints about that frog that’s any better’n any other frog
a stomach filled with quail shot

Build Background
Read the background information. Underline key words that you think will be important to the story.

- Born Samuel Langhorne Clemens, Mark Twain took his pen name from a term used by riverboat captains navigating the Mississippi.
- Twain was a riverboat pilot, gold miner, journalist, and traveler who wrote about his experiences. His stories reflect both the colorful language and the ideas and values of the people he observed.
- His storytelling ability, sense of humor, and use of realistic detail established him as one of the greatest American novelists and an important influence on later authors, such as Ernest Hemingway, Garrison Keillor, James Thurber, and Bailey White.

Set Purposes for Reading
As you read, pay close attention to the techniques that Mark Twain uses to make you smile or laugh.

Literary Element  Dialect
A dialect is the form of a language spoken by people in a particular region or group or at a particular time. For example, one character in this story uses the words feller instead of fellow or recollect for remember. Dialects differ from one another and from standard language in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Writers often use dialect to make their characters seem realistic to a particular setting. As you read, look for examples of dialect and record them on a chart like the one below. For each example, record what the word or phrase means and what effect Twain achieves with it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example of Dialect</th>
<th>What It Means</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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</table>
**Reading Strategy**  **Analyze Comic Devices**

Comic devices are techniques an author uses to entertain readers. Some common devices include hyperbole, or exaggeration; understatement, or saying less than what is meant; and humorous expressions. Think about books, TV shows, and movies that you find funny. With your classmates brainstorm a list of the comic devices that are guaranteed to make you laugh. Record your ideas on the lines below. Star each device you expect to find in “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County.”

_________________________________________________
_________________________________________________
_________________________________________________
_________________________________________________
_________________________________________________

**Vocabulary**  **Etymologies**

Studying the etymology, or origin and history, of a word can help you better understand its meaning. For example, if you were to look up the word sabotage in a dictionary, you would find that sabotage derives from the French saboter, which developed from the word sabot, a kind of “wooden shoe.” In this story, an act of sabotage affects one character’s chance of winning a bet. How does the origin of the word relate to its modern-day meaning? Use the dictionary entry below to explain your ideas to a partner.

**Vocabulary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entry word</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
<th>Etymology</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Synonym</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sabotage</td>
<td>(sab’ a taz’ )</td>
<td>n. 1. willful damage of property or interference with the operations of a business or the government in order to obstruct normal functioning or production. 2. a deliberate attempt to harm, destroy, or stop some activity or effort. v. to purposefully destroy or damage something to gain an advantage [French sabotage fr. saboter—to clatter, destroy, or bungle with “sabots; fr. sabot—“wooden shoe;” may refer to the old practice of strikers damaging an employer’s machinery by throwing wooden shoes into it.] SYN vandalism</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Read the vocabulary words and definitions on the right. Say each word aloud. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, create a word web for the words garrulous and dilapidated. Use a dictionary to find the etymologies of each word and a thesaurus to find synonyms. You might also use online dictionaries and thesauri to help you research this information.

**Vocabulary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Synonyms</th>
<th>Sample Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>garrulous</td>
<td>adj. extremely talkative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conjecture</td>
<td>v. to guess; to form an opinion without direct evidence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>dilapidated</td>
<td>adj. shabby; fallen into ruin because of neglect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interminable</td>
<td>adj. seemingly endless</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enterprising</td>
<td>adj. showing energy and initiative, especially in beginning new projects</td>
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</table>
In compliance with the request of a friend of mine, who wrote me from the East, I called on good-natured, garrulous old Simon Wheeler, and inquired after my friend’s friend, Leonidas W. Smiley, as requested to do, and I hereunto append the result. I have a lurking suspicion that Leonidas W. Smiley is a myth; that my friend never knew such a personage; and that he only conjectured that, if I asked old Wheeler about him, it would remind him of his infamous Jim Smiley, and he would go to work and bore me nearly to death with some infernal reminiscence of him as long and tedious as it should be useless to me. If that was the design, it certainly succeeded.

I found Simon Wheeler dozing comfortably by the bar-room stove of the old dilapidated tavern in the ancient mining camp of Angel’s, and I noticed that he was fat and bald-headed, and had an expression of winning gentleness and simplicity upon his tranquil countenance.

He roused up and gave me good-day. I told him a friend of mine had commissioned me to make some inquiries about a cherished companion of his boyhood named Leonidas W. Smiley—Rev. Leonidas W. Smiley—a young minister of the Gospel, who he had heard was at one time a resident of Angel’s Camp. I added that, if Mr. Wheeler could tell me any thing about this Rev. Leonidas W. Smiley, I would feel under many obligations to him.

1. Append means “add something extra” or “attach.”
2. Infernal means “awful” or “very unpleasant.”
3. Angel’s refers to Angel’s Camp, a mining camp in California.
4. A tranquil countenance is a calm face.
Simon Wheeler backed me into a corner and blockaded me there with his chair, and then sat me down and reeled off the monotonous narrative which follows this paragraph. He never smiled, he never frowned, he never changed his voice from the gentle-flowing key to which he tuned the initial sentence, he never betrayed the slightest suspicion of enthusiasm; but all through the interminable narrative there ran a vein of impressive earnestness and sincerity, which showed me plainly that, so far from his imagining that there was any thing ridiculous or funny about his story, he regarded it as a really important matter, and admired its two heroes as men of transcendent genius in finesse.

To me, the spectacle of a man drifting serenely along through such a queer yarn without ever smiling, was exquisitely absurd. As I said before, I asked him to tell me what he knew of Rev. Leonidas W. Smiley, and he replied as follows. I let him go on in his own way, and never interrupted him once:

There was a feller here once by the name of Jim Smiley, in the winter of ’49—or may be it was the spring of ’50—I don’t recollect exactly, somehow, though what makes me think it was one or the other is because I remember the big flume wasn’t finished when he first came to the camp; but any way, he was the curiosest man about always betting on any thing that turned up you ever see, if he could get any body to bet on the other side; and if he couldn’t he’d change sides. Any way that suited the other man would suit him—any way just so’s he got a bet, he was satisfied. But still he was lucky, uncommon lucky; he most always come out winner. He was always ready and laying for a chance; there couldn’t be no solitry thing mentioned but that feller’d offer to bet on it, and take any side you please, as I was just telling you. If there was a horse race, you’d find him flush, or you’d find him busted at the end of it; if there was a dog-fight, he’d bet on it; if there was a cat-fight, he’d bet on it; if there was a chicken-fight, he’d bet on it; why, if there was two birds setting on a fence, he would bet you which one would fly first; or if there was a camp-meeting, he would be there reg’lar, to bet on Parson Walker, which he judged to be the best exhorter about here, and so he was, too, and a good man. If he even seen a straddle-bug start to go anywheres, he would bet you how long it would take him to get wherever he was going to, and if you took him up, he would foller that straddle-bug to Mexico but what he would find out where he was bound for and how long he was on the road. Lots of the boys here has seen that Smiley, and can tell you about him. Why, it never made no difference to him—he would bet on any thing—the dangdest feller. Parson Walker’s wife laid very sick once, for a good while, and it seemed as if they warn’t going to save her; but one morning he come in, and Smiley asked how she was, and he said she was considerable better—thank the Lord for his inf’nit mercy—and coming on so smart that, with the blessing of Prov’dence, she’d get well yet; and Smiley, before he thought, says, “Well, I’ll risk two-and-a-half that she don’t, any way.”

5. Transcendent means “above others” or “superior.”
6. Finesse is the smooth or artful handling of a situation.
7. Here, flush means “having a large amount of money” or “rich.”
8. A camp-meeting is an outdoor religious gathering, sometimes held in a tent.
9. An exhorter is someone who urges by giving strong advice or warnings; here, a preacher.
10. A straddle-bug is a long-legged beetle.
11. Prov’dence (Providence) is God.
12. Risk two-and-a-half means “risk, or bet, $2.50.”
The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County

Thish-yrer 13 Smiley had a mare—the boys called her the fifteen-minute nag, but that was only in fun, you know, because, of course, she was faster than that—and he used to win money on that horse, for all she was so slow and always had the asthma, or the distemper, or the consumption. 14 or something of that kind. They used to give her two or three hundred yards start, and then pass her under way; but always at the fag-end 15 of the race she’d get excited and desperate-like, and come cavorting 16 and straddling up, and scattering her legs around limber, sometimes in the air, and sometimes out to one side amongst the fences, and kicking up m-o-r-e dust, and raising m-o-r-e racket with her coughing and sneezing and blowing her nose—and always fetch up at the stand 17 just about a neck ahead, as near as you could cipher it down. 18

And he had a little small bull pup, that to look at him you’d think he wan’t worth a cent, but to set around and look ornery, and lay for a chance to steal something. But as soon as money was up on him, he was a different dog; his under-jaw’d begin to stick out like the fo’castle of a steamboat, and his teeth would uncover, and shine savage like the furnaces. And a dog might tackle him, and bully-rag 19 him, and bite him, and throw him over his shoulder two or three times, and Andrew Jackson—which was the name of the pup—Andrew Jackson would never let on but what he was satisfied, and hadn’t expected nothing else—and the bets being doubled and doubled on the other side all the time, till the money was all up; and then all of a sudden he would grab that other dog jest by the j’int of his hind leg and freeze to it—not chaw, you understand, but only jest grip and hang on till they threwed up the sponge, 20 if it was a year. Smiley always come out winner on that pup, till he harnessed 21 a dog once that didn’t have no hind legs, because they’d been sawed off by a circular saw, and when the thing had gone along far enough, and the money was all up, and he come to make a snatch for his pet holt, 22 he saw in a minute how he’d been imposed on, and how the other dog had him in the door, 23 so to speak, and he ’peared surprised, and then he looked sorter discouraged-like, and didn’t try no more to win the fight, and so he got shucked out 24 bad. He give Smiley a look, as much as to say his heart was broke, and it was his fault, for putting up a dog that hadn’t no hind legs for him to take holt of, which was his main dependence in a fight, and then he limped off a piece and laid down and died. It was a good pup, was that Andrew Jackson, and would have made a name for hisself if he’d lived, for the stuff was in him, and he had genius—I know it, because he hadn’t had no opportunities to speak of, and it don’t stand to reason that a dog could make such a fight as he could under them circumstances, if he hadn’t no talent. It always makes me feel sorry when I think of that last fight of his’n, and the way it turned out.

13. Thish-yrer is dialect for “this here.”
14. Consumption is another name for tuberculosis.
15. The fag-end is the last part.
16. Cavorting means “running and jumping around playfully.”
17. Fetch up at the stand means “arrive at the grandstand,” which was placed at the finish line.
18. Cipher it down means “calculate it.”
20. Thowed up the sponge means “gave up the contest.”
21. Here, harnessed means “set up a fight with.”
22. A pet holt is a favorite hold.
23. Had him in the door means “had him at a disadvantage or in a tight place.”
24. Shucked out means “beaten” or “defeated.”
Well, thish-yr Smiley had rat-tarriers, and chicken cocks, and tom-cats, and all them kind of things, till you couldn’t rest, and you couldn’t fetch nothing for him to bet on but he’d match you. He ketched a frog one day, and took him home, and said he cal’klated to edercate him; and so he never done nothing for three months but set in his back yard and learn that frog to jump. And you bet you he did learn him, too. He’d give him a little punch behind, and the next minute you’d see that frog whirling in the air like a doughnut—see him turn one summerset, or may be a couple, if he got a good start, and come down flat-footed and all right, like a cat. He got him up so in the matter of catching flies, and kept him in practice so constant, that he’d nail a fly every time as far as he could see him. Smiley said all a frog wanted was education, and he could do most any thing—and I believe him. Why, I’ve seen him set Dan’l Webster down here on this floor—Dan’l Webster was the name of the frog—and sing out, “Flies, Dan’l, flies!” and quicker’n you could wink, he’d spring straight up, and snake a fly off’n the counter there, and flop down on the floor again as solid as a gob of mud, and fall to scratching the side of his head with his hind foot as indifferent as if he hadn’t no idea he’d been doin’ any more’n any frog might do. You never see a frog so modest and straightfor’ard as he was, for all he was so gifted. And when it come to fair and square jumping on a dead level, he could get over more ground at one straddle than any animal of his breed you ever see. Jumping on a dead level was his strong suit, you understand; and when it come to that, Smiley would ante up money on him as long as he had a red. Smiley was monstrous proud of his frog, and well he might be, for fellers that had traveled and been everywheres, all said he laid over any frog that ever they see.

25. Rat-tarriers are dogs (terriers) once used for catching rats.
26. Chicken cocks are adult male chickens (roosters) that are trained to fight.
27. Cal’klated is dialect for calculated, meaning “planned.”
28. Here, learn means “teach.”
29. Dan’l Webster refers to Daniel Webster (1782–1852), a famous public speaker who served as a U.S. senator and a U.S. secretary of state.
30. Here, straddle means “jump.”
31. Ante up means “to put into the betting pool” or “to bet.”
32. A red refers to a red cent, meaning “any money at all.”
Well, Smiley kept the beast in a little lattice box, and he used to
fetch him down town sometimes and lay for a bet. One day a feller—a
stranger in the camp, he was—come across him with his box, and says:
“What might it be that you’ve got in the box?”

And Smiley says, sorter indifferent like, “It might be a parrot, or it
might be a canary, may be, but it an’t—it’s only just a frog.”

And the feller took it, and looked at it careful, and turned it round
this way and that, and says, “H’m—so ’ris. Well, what’s he good for?”

“Well,” Smiley says, easy and careless, “He’s good enough for one
thing, I should judge—he can outjump any frog in Calaveras county.”

The feller took the box again, and took another long, particular look,
and give it back to Smiley, and says, very deliberate, “Well, I don’t see no
p’ints about that frog that’s any better’n any other frog.”

“May be you don’t,” Smiley says, “May be you understand frogs, and
may be you don’t understand ’em; may be you’ve had experience, and may
be you an’t only a amature, as it were. Anyways, I’ve got my opinion, and
I’ll risk forty dollars that he can outjump any frog in Calaveras county.”

And the feller studied a minute, and then says, kinder sad like,
“Well, I’m only a stranger here, and I an’t got no frog; but if I had a frog,
I’d bet you.”

And then Smiley says, “That’s all right—that’s all right—if you’ll
hold my box a minute, I’ll go and get you a frog.” And so the feller took
the box, and put up his forty dollars along with Smiley’s, and set down
to wait.

So he set there a good while thinking and thinking to hisself, and
then he got the frog out and prized his mouth open and took a teaspoon
and filled him full of quail shot—filled him pretty near up to his
chin—and set him on the floor. Smiley he went to the swamp and slopped
around in the mud for a long time, and finally he ketched a frog, and
fetched him in, and give him to this feller, and says:

“But, if you’re ready, set him alongside of Dan’l, with his fore-paws
just even with Dan’l, and I’ll give the word.” Then he says, “One—two—
three—jump!” and him and the feller touched up the frogs from behind,
and the new frog hopped off, but Dan’l give a heave, and hysted up his
shoulders—so—like a Frenchman, but it wan’t no use—he couldn’t
budge; he was planted as solid as an anvil, and he couldn’t no more stir
than if he was an-chored out. Smiley was a good deal surprised, and
he was disgusted too, but he didn’t have no idea what the matter was,
of course.

The feller took the money and started away; and when he was going
out at the door, he sorter jerked his thumb over his shoulders—this
way—at Dan’l, and says again, very deliberate, “Well, I don’t see no p’ints
about that frog that’s any better’n any other frog.”

33. P’ints is dialect for points, meaning “qualities” or “characteristics.”
34. Quail shot is ammunition made up of small lead pellets.
Smiley he stood scratching his head and looking down at Dan’l a long time, and at last he says, “I do wonder what in the nation that frog throw’d off for—I wonder if there ain’t something the matter with him—he ’pears to look mighty baggy, somehow.” And he ketch’ed Dan’l by the nap of the neck, and lifted him up and says, “Why, blame my cats, if he don’t weigh five pound!” and turned him upside down, and he belched out a double handful of shot. And then he see how it was, and he was the maddest man—he set the frog down and took out after that feller, but he never ketch’ed him. And—

[Here Simon Wheeler heard his name called from the front yard, and got up to see what was wanted.] And turning to me as he moved away, he said: “Just set where you are, stranger, and rest easy—I ain’t going to be gone a second.”

But, by your leave, I did not think that a continuation of the history of the enterprising vagabond Jim Smiley would be likely to afford me much information concerning the Rev. Leonidas W. Smiley, and so I started away.

At the door I met the sociable Wheeler returning, and he buttonholed me and recommenced:

“Well, thish-yer Smiley had a yaller one-eyed cow that didn’t have no tail, only jest a short stump like a bannanner, and——”

“Oh! hang Smiley and his afflicted cow!” I muttered, good-naturedly, and bidding the old gentleman good-day, I departed.

35. Afford means “give” or “provide.”
36. Buttonholed means “detained in conversation.”
Connect to the Story
Look back at the one-paragraph story prediction summary you wrote. Then answer these questions.

How close did you get in predicting the story line? ______________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________

What were the biggest differences between your version and Twain’s? ________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________

Whose story is funnier? What elements made one story funnier than the other? _____________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________

From what you’ve learned, in what way does this short story reflect the world that Mark Twain knew? _____________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________

Literary Element Dialect
Twain was a master at using language to develop unique personalities. Regional dialects, the form of a language spoken by the people of a particular area, are an important part of Mark Twain’s style of writing. Review the chart you started on page 149. On the lines below, write a sentence that summarizes the effect of Simon Wheeler’s dialect.
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________

Why would the story be less effective if he spoke standard English?
_________________________________________________________________________________________________

Reading Strategy Analyze Comic Devices
Review your list of comic devices that you wrote on page 149. Now that you have read the selection, which comic devices does Twain use? On a separate sheet of paper, give an example of each device.
After You Read

Vocabulary

garrulous   conjecture   dilapidated   interminable   enterprising

A. Word Meaning  Each of the statements below describes how you might use one of the vocabulary words. Write the correct words next to the statements.

1. You might use this word to describe the condition of something before you apply a new coat of paint. ____________

2. If you hate winter, you might use this word to describe its length. ____________

3. You might use this word to describe the kind of person who gets stares and dirty looks from audience members at the movies. ____________

B. Etymologies  Match each boldfaced vocabulary word in the left column with its etymology in the right column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary Word</th>
<th>Etymology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>________________</td>
<td>dilapidated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>________________</td>
<td>enterprising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>________________</td>
<td>conjecture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. Etymologies  Use a dictionary and other online tools to look up the etymology of the word region. Explain how the origin of the word is reflected in its present day political, geographic, or historic meaning.

______________________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________________
Web
A web can help you brainstorm and organize your thoughts on a topic. To help you examine, review, and draw conclusions about Twain’s use of comic effects to entertain his audience, fill out the idea web that follows. Then answer the question at the bottom of the page.

What comic device does Mark Twain use most effectively in this story? Support your choice with details from the story.

_________________________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________________________

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