

# Fenimore cooper's literary offenses essay sample



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Mark Twain criticizes Fenimore Cooper's Deerslayer tale in his essay, "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses." Twain's essay gives a litany of literary offenses in which Fenimore Cooper commits in his work. This passage describes the inaccuracy in Cooper's writing and his Indian story. Through his use of ad hominem, rhetorical questions and a mocking tone, Mark Twain manifests his critical attitude towards Cooper and his inaccurate writing. This piece is certainly an ad hominem, for it attacks not solely Cooper's wit, but Cooper's abilities as an observer himself. In paragraph 1, Twain says, "Cooper's eye was splendidly inaccurate. Cooper seldom saw anything correctly. He saw nearly all things as through a glass eye, darkly." Mark Twain has simply nothing nice or positive to say about Cooper. After completely negating all of Cooper's Indian story, Twain says, "This scow episode is really a sublime burst of invention; but it doesn't not thrill, because the inaccuracy of details throw a sort of air of fictitiousness and general improbability over it. This comes from Cooper's inadequacy as observer." Twain draws the reader in with a quick bit of positive lingo when he says the writing is a "sublime burst of invention," but then he immediately contradicts his words and proposes that the whole story is illogical. Twain also claims that he is simply "no architect" because the construction of his house is fallacious.

Later in paragraph 2 of this excerpt, Twain asks rhetorical questions to further his point and engage the reader in his thinking. He asks, "Did the Indians notice that there was going to be a tight squeeze? Did they notice that they could make money by climbing down out of that arched sapling and just stepping aboard when the ark scraped by?" He simply asks these to

prove the obliviousness of Cooper's Indians and furthermore, the obliviousness of Cooper. These rhetorical questions further Twain's argument with the development of his ethos. He proves to the reader that he has thought about all the specifics in Cooper's writing. Throughout the excerpt, Twain has a mocking tone which develops his critical attitude. Twain comes across as a bit surprised and in disbelief that Cooper's writing is as improbable as it is at some point. He says, " And missed the boat! That is actually what he did. He missed the house."

He mocks Cooper's conception of his Indians when Twain employs irony to explain that Cooper thinks his Indians are " marvelous creatures" but in reality, they are seldom sane Indians. Twain says that the reader wouldn't be able to believe what the five other Indians did after the first one jumped. He says, " you would not be able to reason it out for yourself." Twain says this because only Cooper's story makes sense to Cooper, but no other human being. When describing the actions of the five Indians, Twain applies a mocking tone because what he is explaining is humorous and ridiculous within itself. He says, " Then even No. 5 made a jump for the boat- for he was a Cooper Indian." Throughout " Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," Mark Twain develops and presents his critical attitude towards Cooper and his inaccuracy in his writing. He points out numerous faults and develops his position through the use of his rhetorical strategies.