

# A pilots life for me: life on the mississippi essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

It has been said that Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi* is not his best work.

One thing the book does very well is shed light on the lives of steamboat pilots during the 1800's. The book shows peoples economical life, and their social life. The way Mark Twain strings some of the stories together kind or makes the book feel unorganized, and not really connected. Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi* has some structure issues, but does a good job showing peoples life back in the 1800's. Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi* is a book about the experiences Samuel Langhorne Clemens had with the Mississippi. The first couple of chapters start off by giving the history of the river. Such as who discovered it, and who saw it as an importance. After he gives us some background knowledge Twain begins the story of his life on the Mississippi.

This story I felt is cut up into two parts, pre civil war times and post civil war times. The pre times are when he is a kid, and when he became a junior pilot for steamboats on the Mississippi. The second half is after the civil war when he returns to the Mississippi after a five year separation. The way Mark Twain writes this book is very interesting. It is not a straight forward bibliography.

It is more like a book based on actual events. The book tells the story of Mark Twain's life, but he makes up the name of characters and stories. Also Twain goes into a lot of side stories. Sometimes it can be chapter after chapter of side stories before he comes back to the main story of himself. The point that I think he was trying to get off was what the life was like for people along the Mississippi River during the 19th century. One thing the

book does very well is show what the economy was like in the 19th century. In the book Twain describes why being a pilot on a steam boat was such a great job one of his examples is the pay.

“ The pilot, even in those days of trivial wages, had a princely salary- from a hundred and fifty to two hundred dollars a month, and no board to pay. Two months of wages would pay a preacher’s salary for a year. ” (p. 72).

That told me that someone that was in the middle class made about forty five dollars a month. That puts things in a better perspective when you see the price of something back then you think it is really cheap, but with the value of the dollar back then it might have been considered expensive. An example of this in the book would be when he convinces Mr. Bixby to train him as a cub pilot for five hundred dollars.

That is an extreme amount of money that you would not know if he had not showed what the economy was like back then. Another way the Mark Twain’s Life on the Mississippi does a good job show peoples lives back in the 1800’s is it the book showed the social life of people. For example in the book it talks about how a kid got a job on a steamboat, and turned into a rock star.

No girl could withstand his charms. He cut out every boy in the village. When his boat blew up at last... But when he came home the next week, alive, renowned, and appeared all battered up and banged, a shining her. ” (pp.

66-67). It shows how times had changed, because kids that worked on steamboats now would not be the envy of everyone. One of the down falls in the book would be how the book is structured. When I was reading the book,

the way it was written seemed a little unorganized. Apparently I was not the only one that thought that. Marilyn Lancaster wrote in the Midwest Quarterly “ The disparity between Twain’s dual visions, both of which appear in the final text, creates a seemingly unbalanced narrative with the loose connections. ”[2] I think that the lack of structure has to do with how Twain goes from the being a narrator of his life, to telling stories that may or may not be fictional.

Also there is the long debate on what Twain was thinking when he wrote the second half of the book, because it is so different then the first. On the other hand there may be a reason for the reason why the second half is the way it is. What becomes clear from Kruse’s account of the genesis and composition of Life on the Mississippi is that the much-maligned second half actually reflects Twain’s longstanding idea for the book as a travelogue based on first-hand observation and research into which various statistics, anecdotes, lurid historical episodes, and yarns might be interpolated. ”[3] What the author is getting at is that is that Twain wanted to take the second half in a different direction then the first.

While it show that twain had structure when writing the second half it still was out of place and came off as confusing. Life on the Mississippi might be over looked by Mark Twain’s other books, such as The Adventures of Tom Sawyer or Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Just because it isn’t his best work does not mean that it is not a good read.

It provides valuable information of what the lie was like for people in the 19th century. Not only does it provide valuable information, but the book

also as mini stories in it that walks the line between fact and fiction that are very entertaining. Even though it has some structural issues, Mark Twain's Life on the Mississippi provides great examples of the life of people in the 1800's.