



Book club 2: History & Society

A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court by Mark Twain

Rules

In this book club you will discuss *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court* by Mark Twain in a group of 4-6 readers. The book club opens with a brief introduction that one of you reads out loud. The book club then continues in four rounds:

- 1 Round 1 consists of 5 questions about the plot. One of the group members acts as the quiz master who reads each question out loud, after which everyone (including the quiz master) writes down their answer. The correct answers will appear on the screen after you have turned over the final question card. You may then check your answers and calculate your scores.
- 2 Round 2 consists of asking and answering questions each of you have about the book/story: in turn, the players say what they did not understand about the book and try to find an answer together. When the biggest confusions are solved, round 3 starts.
- 3 Round 3 consists of discussion questions. The person with the most correct answers to the quiz questions from round 1 gets to be the first to turn over a card and respond to the question. The other members of the group may then add to the discussion by responding and sharing their ideas. Take turns until all cards are flipped.
- 4 Round 4 is when you get to review the text. How many stars would you give the text and why? Discuss this together until you have reached a shared verdict. Use the text box to explain your choice.

This book club was developed by the editors of LitLab, a digital laboratory for high school literature research. For more teaching materials, visit www.litlab.nl. A teacher's guide and a didactic justification of this teaching method are available at www.litlab.nl/docenten.



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Introduction

'There it was, you see. A man is a man, at bottom. Whole ages of abuse and oppression cannot crush the manhood clear out of him'.

In *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* we meet Hank Morgan as he is inexplicably teleported back to sixth century Great Britain. After a surprisingly quick adjustment to the ways of those times, Hank manages to get himself installed as an influential counselor to none other than King Arthur himself. From there on out Hank spares no effort to turn what he experiences as a barbaric society into something more to his liking. Hank has a preference for his own era, but as the novel progresses, it raises doubts about whether modern society is actually superior to its medieval counterpart. This book club encourages you to question concepts of history, morality, and human progress while discussing what is arguably one of the funniest novels from nineteenth-century American literature.

Round 1: Quiz

Turn over the 5 cards with quiz questions one by one. Write down the answer on a piece of paper.

Round 2: Initial questions

What questions popped into your head while reading *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*? Were there any parts that left you confused or wondering? Take turns sharing your questions about the story and try to come up with answers together. Use evidence from the text to support your ideas.

Round 3: Discussion

The player with the most correct answers to the quiz questions gets to turn over a card first from one of the two piles of discussion questions. Once they have answered the question, the other members of the group may then add to the discussion by responding and sharing their ideas.

Round 4: Review

Review *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* by rating the novel on a scale of one to five stars, and then provide an explanation for your choice. Discuss what aspects you enjoyed and what aspects you didn't, and provide reasons for your opinions. Reflect on whether the discussion influenced your individual perspective, and if so, how. Incorporate examples and arguments from your responses to the discussion questions to support your review.



Question 1

How does Hank Morgan convince Arthur and his retainers to let him live at the beginning of the novel?

Question 2

By what title is Hank known throughout 6th century Britain?

Question 3

What do the princesses that Hank and Sandy set out to save turn out to be?

Question 4

What is Hank's great mission throughout the novel?

Question 5

What causes Hank's mission to fail in the end?

Answers

- 1 He pretends to be responsible for the arrival of a solar eclipse, thus scaring everyone at the court.
- 2 The Boss
- 3 Pigs
- 4 Turning 6th century Britain into a modern democracy.
- 5 The Church gets him out of the country and reverses most of the progress that had been achieved.



Question

3

Question

2

Question

1

Answers

Question

5

Question

4



Personal connections? 1

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court is an early example of a time travel story. Have you ever read, heard, or watched any other time travel stories? How do they compare to this one?

Personal connections? 2

What did you think the Middle Ages were like before reading this novel? Where did you first learn about the (early) Middle Ages and what are some key features you remember? Did reading the novel change the way you imagine the Middle Ages now?

Personal connections? 3

Did you know about King Arthur and his knights of the round table before reading this novel? If so, which characters, places or tales do you remember in particular? Did they appear in this novel?

Personal connections? 4

Describe the characters, actions, and behaviors of King Arthur and his knights. Does the picture this creates correspond to the picture you had of them before reading the novel?

Personal connections? 5

What are your thoughts about Hank's character? Is he a reliable narrator? Do you agree with what he's trying to achieve and how he's trying to achieve it? Why or why not?

Personal connections? 6

Hank is very determined as he embarks on his journey into the Middle Ages. Imagine that you are teleported back to this point in history. How do you think you would manage? What would you do first? How would you survive?

Personal connections? 7

Hank secretly introduces countless modern inventions to King Arthur's court. Which modern invention / technology would you bring to the Middle Ages. Why?

Personal connections? 8

Mark Twain is a highly comical writer at times. One example of this is that the novel's main character often struggles with different medieval inconveniences. Can you give examples of when this happens? Which one was the most memorable? How would you have dealt with it?



Personal connections?

3

Personal connections?

2

Personal connections?

1

Personal connections?

6

Personal connections?

5

Personal connections?

4

Personal connections?

8

Personal connections?

7



Food for thought? 1

Look up and/or discuss why Arthurian tales have been told throughout the centuries. How does Mark Twain's story differ from the traditional Arthurian tale in terms of the message it is trying to convey?

Food for thought? 2

How would you describe the general tone the narrator uses to tell the story? How does it affect the story and the message?

Food for thought? 3

For most of his life, Twain passionately opposed slavery, recognising it as a grave injustice. How does the passage in which Arthur and Hank are sold into slavery contribute to the political message of the book? Consider the historical context of slavery being legal during Twain's lifetime.

Food for thought? 4

Throughout the nineteenth century, English literature often depicted the Middle Ages in a favorable and romanticised way. What kind of attitude does this novel have towards the Middle Ages? Can you give examples that back up your response?

Food for thought? 5

Famous English author George Orwell (*Animal Farm*, 1984) did not like the message he took from reading the book and called it a "deliberate flattery of all that is worst and most vulgar in American society". What is your take on this criticism? Do you agree?

Food for thought? 6

Throughout the book, the (Roman Catholic) church is constantly presented as one of Hank's greatest adversaries. Why and how is the church such a threat to his plans?

Food for thought? 7

Consider Hank's feelings for the character of the king. Do you believe Hank's attitude towards King Arthur corresponds to his greater aims of turning the kingdom into a modern democracy? Why or why not?

Food for thought? 8

How does the end of the novel (before Hank is teleported back to his own time by Merlin) affect the meaning or message of the story?



Food for thought?

3

Food for thought?

2

Food for thought?

1

Food for thought?

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Food for thought?

5

Food for thought?

4

Food for thought?

8

Food for thought?

7