

Scrapbooks, The Collecting of Creative Ideas

Student Activity



Clemens holding lighting current,

1894. Courtesy The Mark Twain House, Hartford

reviews, drawings and cartoons, photos and plates, magazine stories, letters and envelopes, and even checks. Others, maintained by his family who added items added after he died, include entries that discuss his children's lives, last hours, funeral, will, estate, and bequests. Some entries examine issues of time and place, such as the political history of California and Nevada in the 1860s and 1870s.

Part A: Mark Twain was an avid keeper of scrapbooks, a hobby he reserved for Sundays. Existing collections of these scrapbooks reflect aspects of his private and professional life. Twain's appreciation for scrapbooks eventually led to a business venture. In 1872, he patented the self-pasting scrapbook, marketing it as "Mark Twain's Patent Scrapbook." Published by Daniel Slote & Co. of New York, it had gummed, perforated pages designed to make scrapbook additions easier, cleaner, and neater to do. By 1901, at least 57 different types of his albums were available. There are those who argue that Twain's scrapbooks were more lucrative than some of his book sales.

Twain's scrapbooks hold items that reveal not only much about his life, but also about the times in which he lived. Most entries focus on Twain

as a public figure and author: newspaper clippings of articles, book reviews, drawings and cartoons, photos and plates, magazine stories, letters and envelopes, and even checks. Others, maintained by his family who added items added after he died, include entries that discuss his children's lives, last hours, funeral, will, estate, and bequests. Some entries examine issues of time and place, such as the political history of California and Nevada in the 1860s and 1870s.

With your partners, examine the "Twain Scrapbook" entry you have been assigned or selected to review. What does this selection tell you about life in the 19th Century? What historic events does it highlight? What does it tell you about Mark Twain's life and work?

Part B: It's not unlikely that you, family members or friends have one or several scrapbooks. Take some time to examine (and enjoy) one or more of these collections. List the items you find, describe what they represent, and note what you can learn from them. Discuss with your classmates your conclusions about the uses and value of scrapbooks.

With your peers, create a unique scrapbook, much in the way Mark Twain did, adding to it memorabilia that best reflect your lives. You may focus on a specific location, like the place where you live, or on a theme, maybe being a teen in the 21st Century.

Some existing collections of Twain's scrapbooks contain unique items, such as the writer's only surviving clippings of letters and stories published in the Virginia City *Territorial Enterprise* in the 1860s. Others hold his stories published in periodicals like *Harper's*, *The Jolly Joker*, and the *Funniest of Phun*. Twain used portions of these entries to later write some of his book collections. For example, *Roughing It*, Twain's 1872 book about going to Nevada, likely has a strong basis in articles he wrote about the state and its political history.

Using the scrapbooks you and your peers have created, select an outstanding theme, place, event, etc. that inspires your creative thoughts. Begin to script a piece of writing – a short story, essay, speech, poem, critical analysis, book chapter – in your mind, keeping notes in a journal, jotting down inspirational events, catchy phrases, the characteristics of unusual people.

In the role of a 30th Century historian, who discovers this unique scrapbook collection, write a newspaper article that highlights your "terrific" findings. Highlight what the scrapbooks reveal about the times, events, places, and individuals of the period in which they were assembled. Perhaps, in Twain fashion, you can write in a humorous tone. Make sure to build on all the relevant details found in the scrapbook entries you have chosen, and research what you need to know, especially if you are discussing a specific event or place.

Refer to your notes and research to write your piece. Work with your peers in writing groups to rethink and revise your work. After you have completed your piece, read it to the class and ask them to figure out which scrapbook entries you used as a backdrop for your writing.