

Twain: Research Topics

Instructions:

Working with the members of your group, research one of the following topics. You may use print or Web resources.

1. Gather data about the nature of the landscape around Hannibal. Is the Mississippi River narrow or broad in the vicinity of Hannibal? Are there challenging currents? Are there small river islands? Is the area around Hannibal primarily woods, boulder, prairie or a combination of those landscapes? What is the prevailing climate? You may wish to make a sketch of the topography of the area to accompany your presentation.
2. What was the cultural climate of American village towns in the Missouri/Illinois Mississippi River basin in the 1840s and 1850s? What role did the steamboat play in their development? Did the railroad run through or near the villages in that time period? What would have been the prevailing architecture of the houses and church(es)? What types of shops and shop buildings would have been established? Consider making a sketch of your perception of the layout of a Missouri river village town in 1840-1850 to accompany your presentation.
3. Gather data about the American one-room schoolhouse in the 1840s-1850s. Who attended these schoolhouses? Who taught? Was there more than one teacher? Did the teacher(s) have a college degree? How were classes organized? What was the curriculum? What connotative properties would you ascribe to "the one-room schoolhouse"?
4. What was the Missouri Compromise? Although negotiated formally in 1821 when Missouri became a state, in what ways might it have affected the inhabitants and culture of river towns such as Hannibal by 1850? What does the long-reaching effect have to do with Mark Twain?
5. What was center of social life in towns such as Hannibal in the 1840s-1850s? Collect some specifics about the nature of social gatherings. What would the dress fashions be? For adults? For children? (Consider making some sketches.) Would there be social dancing? If so, what would the dancing and the accompanying music be like? What type of people do you think would be considered the social elite of the town? Whom do you think would be the outcasts? Why?