

## 10 Reasons to Read Mark Twain Today

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1. Because, as Ernest Hemingway once put it, “All of American literature begins with a book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*.”
2. Because Mark Twain is the funniest of all American writers.
3. Because Mark Twain is, along with William S. Burroughs, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., and Robert Coover, America’s greatest satirist.
4. Because Twain was an extremely *innovative* writer whose experiments in point of view and treatment of voice were revolutionary (*Huckleberry Finn*, for example, is the first and best novel I am aware of to be told entirely from the perspective — and in the voice — of such a young child).
5. Because Twain was the first American writer to compose novels on a typewriter; so that like Nietzsche (another early author to use the typewriter), Twain was among the first artists to recognize just how profoundly typewriters would transform the composition process.
6. Because Twain’s novel, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, is the greatest American science fiction novel of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (certainly far greater from a literary

standpoint than, for example, Edward Bellamy's enormously popular and influential utopian novel, *Looking Backward*).

7. Because *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* is probably the greatest American work employing the "changeling" motif — at least until that great film, *Start the Revolution without Me* (starring Donald Sutherland and Gene Wilder) — appeared in the early 1970s.
8. Because Twain's *The Mysterious Stranger*, "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," and *Letters from the Earth* — bleakly despairing treatments of human foibles, follies, and venality that he wrote late in life — are among the darkest, and most darkly *humorous*, works of pre-WWII American literature; and, hence, they anticipate the sorts of "black humor" that would characterize so much of the first phase of postmodern experimentalism during the 1960s and early 1970s.
9. Because Huck Finn's decision at the end of *Huckleberry Finn* to "light out for the territories" rather than accept the fruits of civilization remains the most perfect expression of the "open road" motif to appear until Bruce Springsteen's *Born to Run* was released in 1975.
10. Because Twain's and Whitman's transformations of American idioms into poetry began a process that has continued throughout the past 100 years in the works of William Carlos Williams, Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, William Gibson, Bruce Springsteen, and many others.