

# The Prince and the Pauper

Mark Twain



## About the author

Mark Twain's real name was Samuel Clemens and he was born in Missouri in 1835. In 1839, his family moved to Hannibal, a town on the Mississippi river, where young Clemens experienced the excitement and colorful sights of the waterfront. Hannibal, and the variety of people he met there, feature widely in many of his books, particularly *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). In these books, the name of his hometown is changed to St. Petersburg.

Clemens had some schooling, but became a printer's apprentice when his father died in 1847. He left Hannibal to travel in 1853 and decided he wanted to be a riverboat pilot. So he began working on the steamboats on the Mississippi. In 1861, the American Civil war stopped river traffic and he moved to Nevada. After an unsuccessful attempt at gold and silver mining, he started work for a newspaper, writing under the pen name Mark Twain. Clemens wrote his first popular story *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County* in 1865 and continued to work as a correspondent for various newspapers, travelling all over the United States and Europe. Between 1873 and 1889 he wrote seven novels. His best books are considered to be the skilful re-creations of American life in the period of his youth. Clemens died in 1910, but Mark Twain is still remembered as one of America's greatest writers.

## Summary

A rich prince decides to exchange clothes with a poor beggar boy, who closely resembles him, in order that they can experience each other's lives for a brief while. However, when the prince leaves the palace, he discovers

that nobody recognises him as a prince, only as a poor beggar. He is badly treated by the poor boy's father and made to beg. The poor boy lives the life of a prince, with fine clothes and food and lots of servants. This doesn't make him happy and he wants to leave. Despite his attempts to convince everyone he is not the prince, nobody believes him. After a series of adventures among the poor people of London, the real prince returns to the palace and convinces everyone of the truth of their identities and the story ends happily.

**Chapters 1–3:** It is London in the year 1537 and two boys are born on the same day. One boy's name is Tom Canty and his family is very poor, and the second is called Edward Tudor, Prince of Wales, and is the son of King Henry VIII. Ten years later, and Tom is begging for money on the streets. He lives with his family, all crowded into one room. Sometimes people don't give him money and then his father, John Canty, beats him. Everyday Tom visits Father Andrew who teaches him many things. Tom wants to be a prince and plays King and Princes games with his friends. Everyday Tom goes to see Westminster Palace, the home of the King and his young son, Edward, and then one day he sees the young prince. The prince invites Tom into the palace. The two boys talk about their different lives. Edward becomes sad when he hears about Tom's friends because he himself has no one to play with. Suddenly he has an idea. The two boys swap clothes and now Tom is the prince and Edward the pauper. Before leaving Tom alone in the palace, Edward puts a heavy object (which we later learn is the Great Seal) under a cup on a shelf.

**Chapters 4–6:** Outside the palace a soldier hits Edward. Edward tells him that he is the prince and everyone laughs and thinks he's crazy. He decides to find Tom's house. There he explains everything to Tom's father, who doesn't believe him, and thinks his son has gone mad. Meanwhile, Tom is exploring the palace. The servants think the prince is behaving strangely, possibly ill, and he is taken to see his ageing father, the King. Tom tells him that he is not his son. The king tests the boy by asking him a question in Latin, to which Tom replies in Latin. This convinces the king that Tom is his son and that he must be ill. He is further convinced of the boy's illness when he is informed that he can't remember anything about the Great Seal, which he is supposed to have in his possession. Then, Tom goes on a boat to a big party at the Guildhall.

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**Chapters 7–9:** Edward is being dragged home by John Canty when Father Andrew tries to help him and is killed by Canty. In Tom's house Edward tries unsuccessfully to convince the family of his true identity. People are talking about the murder, so Canty runs away taking the boy with him. Edward escapes and heads for the Guildhall. He tries to see Tom but is threatened by the crowd. He is befriended by Miles Hendon, a king's soldier, who fights off the crowd and takes Edward back to his house. Here they learn that King Henry is dead. Edward is now the new king. At dinner, Miles tells Edward about his family. His brother, Arthur, is a bad man. He wants to take their father's money and house and steal Miles's girlfriend. Miles wants to see his father and put the record straight. The next morning Edward has disappeared and Miles learns that he has been tricked into going to a meeting by an accomplice of John Canty.

**Chapters 10–12:** Tom is dressed and fed by the servants and is taken to the Great Room and seated on the king's chair. Lord Hertford makes him sign papers involving money and he begins to wish he was back with his friends. Meanwhile, Edward meets Hugo, the associate of John Canty, who takes him out of London to a house in the woods on the pretence he is taking him to see the injured Miles Hendon. Instead he encounters John Canty, who sends them both out to beg. They come to a town and Edward is accused of stealing a chicken. The crowd wants to kill him but he is saved by the sudden arrival of Miles Hendon. Miles and Edward travel to Hendon House, Miles's home. Here they see Miles's brother, Arthur, who pretends not to recognise Miles and insists that his brother had died in France. Miles learns that his father had died and that everyone, including his girlfriend, thinks he is dead. He fights with Arthur and he and Edward end up in prison.

**Chapters 13–15:** In front of the judge Arthur says that Miles had died in France, and that the man before him was not his brother. The judge believes him and gives him the house. Miles and Edward are released from prison and travel to London. They enter the Great Room where Tom is waiting for an important event. To solve the problem of their identities, Edward has written a question on a piece of paper, the answer to which only he, as prince, could know. The question is 'Where is the Great Seal?' Tom doesn't know but Edward does and this convinces everyone he is the real King. Everyone was happy: Edward

was a good king, Tom lived in Westminster palace, Miles married his love and Arthur gave him back the house, and no one saw John Canty again. Edward died when he was only fifteen and Tom returned to his mother's house and wrote the story *The Prince and the Pauper*.

## Background and themes

**Historical context:** The novel is set in sixteenth century England, when the wealth gap between the rich and poor was enormous. Royalty and lords and ladies had vast wealth, whereas the poor literally starved on the streets. There was very little social justice and virtually no social mobility.

**Appearance and reality:** The main characters are recognised only by what they are wearing, despite the fact they are from totally different backgrounds. By educating the character of Tom in Latin and French, Twain is showing us that the only real difference between the boys is their clothes and that intellectually they are equals, thus making the point that people are often judged on superficial criteria.

**Justice:** The bad people in the book, Arthur and John Canty end up with nothing, whereas Miles Hendon, Tom and Edward find happiness.

## Discussion activities

### Before reading

- Write:** Put the students in small groups and ask them to look at the cover. Ask them to write the answers to the following questions: *Is he a prince or a pauper? How old is he? What clothes is he wearing? Is he happy? Is he ugly? Do you know someone who looks like him?*

### Chapters 1–3

**While reading** (p. 2, after 'I can teach you these things.')

- Discuss:** Tom likes Latin and French. Ask the students to discuss in small groups which of the subjects they study at school they like/don't like and which are easy or difficult.

### After reading

- Role play:** Put the students in pairs. Student A is Tom and Student B is Edward. Ask them to act out a conversation about their different lives. Ask them to consider the following: *What food do they eat? Do they go to school? Do they work? Are their parents nice? What are they going to do in the future? Are they happy? Do they have any friends?*

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- 4 **Discuss:** Put the students in small groups and tell them they have a chance of changing places with anybody they like for a week. It could be somebody they know or a famous person. Ask them to give their reasons for choosing the person they want to be.

## Chapters 4–6

**While reading** (The picture of John Canty on p. 10.)

- 5 **Group work:** Put the students in groups of three or four and ask them to look at the picture. Ask them to think of as many words as they can to describe the man. The groups then read out their list and you put the words on the board. Make sure all the students understand all the words. The group with the longest list wins. Then add some of your own.

## After reading

- 6 **Write and ask:** Write 'Where was the king sitting?' on the board and elicit the answer. (In a very large chair next to the bed). Ask students to write another question about something in Chapters 4–6. Check their work as they do this. Now have students stand up and mingle, asking and answering each other's questions.

## Chapters 7–9

**While reading** (p. 17, after 'Tom started to enjoy it.')

- 7 **Pair work:** Tom is at a big party. Put the students in pairs to talk about a really good party that they have been to. Ask them to consider: *Why was it good? Where was the party? How many people came? What music did they play? What did you eat and drink there? Did you meet anybody interesting?* Then ask the class to plan an end of term party at your school.

## After reading

- 8 **Write and guess:** Put students in pairs and ask them to choose a short paragraph from Chapters 7–9. Tell them to write it again, making five changes to words in the text. Students then read out their paragraphs to the other students, who have to identify the changes.

## Chapters 10–12

### Before reading

- 9 **Write and predict:** Tom is going to be crowned king. In pairs, ask the students to predict how the story is going to end. Ask them to consider the following possibilities: *Will Tom really be king? Will Edward come back and be king or will he live as a pauper. What will happen to John Canty?*

**While reading** (p. 23, after 'And in Tom's sleep, his life was good and he had no problems.')

- 10 **Group work:** Tell the students that Tom is dreaming and that it is a nice dream. In small groups the students discuss a dream that they have had. Consider the following questions: *What happened? Was it unhappy or sad? Did you think about the same things when you were asleep before? Were you afraid? Did you tell anybody about it?*

## After reading

- 11 **Write and guess:** Write 'Hendon House had thirty servants' on the board. Elicit the mistake from the class (twenty). Now ask students to choose a sentence from Chapters 10–12 and rewrite it changing one word. Students mingle reading out their sentences so that the others can guess which word is wrong.
- 12 **Write:** Remind the students that they have read a description of Hendon House. Ask them to write a description of their own house.

## Chapters 13–15

### Before reading

- 13 **Role play:** Put the students in groups of four. Tell them that a judge is coming to decide who should have Hendon House. One student is the judge, one is Arthur, one is Miles and one is Edward. Encourage them to ask and answer questions.

**While reading** (p. 36, after 'He quickly wrote something down.')

- 14 **Guess:** Put the students in pairs and ask them to guess what question Edward wrote on the piece of paper. Consider the following possibilities: *A question about his family/his things/about the palace.*

## After reading

- 15 **Write:** Put students in pairs to write a short description of one of the main characters in the book. (Tom, Edward, John Canty, Miles Hendon). Students then read their description to the rest of the class.