

Mark Twain, Volume 1

Language

Past tenses, biographies, starting sentences

Level

Elementary (equivalent to CEF level A2)

Comment

This lesson is about the American author Mark Twain, whose autobiography has been published on the centenary of his death. November 30 2010 also marks 175 years since his birth. You can extend this activity by asking students to write a journal, a biography or even an autobiography.

How to use the lesson

- 1 Write the following names on the board: George W. Bush, Cleopatra, Mark Twain. What can students tell you about the people? In pairs or small groups, students try to answer the question: *What do they have in common?* Invite some students to share their answer with the rest of the class. Give students copies of the worksheet and ask them to read the first paragraph to find the answer. They then do exercise 1, completing the names and titles by finding them in the article. Check answers.
- 2 Ask students to read through the text again and then check through the list of names and titles. Can the students tell you what the names and titles refer to? For example, *Decision Points* is the title of George W. Bush's memoir.
- 3 In pairs, students complete the sentences using the words in the box. If you think these words are new to the students, do the exercise together and check that students understand the difference between them.
- 4 Students decide if the sentences are true or false and correct the false sentences, writing their answers on a piece of paper. Check answers.
- 5 In pairs, students match the sentence halves. They should do this exercise without referring back to the article. Check answers. In a monolingual class, invite students to translate the phrases that start the sentences.
- 6 Students answer the questions in pairs or small groups. Invite some students to share their answers with the rest of the class.
- 7 As an optional activity, ask students to write one of the following:
 - a one-page biography of someone they respect (possibly one of the authors from exercise 6 question 4)
 - an autobiography about their lives so far
 - a journal entry for two days in their lives.

Students should use at least three of the phrases from exercise 5 to start sentences in their writing.

Answer key

1

- 1 *Decision Points*.
- 2 *Autobiography of Mark Twain*.
- 3 Charles Dickens.
- 4 *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*
- 5 The Mississippi River
- 6 Samuel Langhorne Clemens
- 7 University of California Press

2 Possible answers

- 1 The moments when George W. Bush, the former president of the USA, had to make up his mind about something important.
- 2 Mark Twain's account of his own life.
- 3 One of the most important British novelists of the 19th century.
- 4 The title of one of Mark Twain's novels.
- 5 One of the longest rivers in America and the area where Mark Twain grew up.
- 6 Mark Twain's real name.
- 7 The publishing company who published Mark Twain's autobiography.

3

- 1 biography
- 2 autobiography
- 3 memoir
- 4 journal
- 5 diary

4

- 1 F. He doesn't think any of them has an original title.
- 2 F. It's the centenary of his death.
- 3 F. He also wrote many articles, essays, poems, and short stories.
- 4 F. It was based on one of his childhood friends.
- 5 T.
- 6 F. They thought it would only sell a few thousand copies.

5

- 1 c 2 b 3 a 4 f 5 d 6 e

6 Students' own answers.

Related websites

The following websites might be useful, for either yourself or your students.

www.thisismarktwain.com (autobiography website)

<http://nyti.ms/h4FSUX> (New York Times Best-Seller List)

<http://www.marktwainhouse.org/> (Mark Twain house and museum)