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American Short Story

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“Jumping Frog” Justifications and Analysis

All of the short stories that we have covered thus far in this course have stood out to me as unique and impressive, stylistically and tonally. Choosing a singular story to adapt was difficult, but after much thought I decided that the most immersive story this semester was Mark Twain’s “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County”, as it applied itself to my own sense of dry humor and sarcasm. The short story was not as thematically intense as some other stories we have read this semester, and the ridiculousness of Twain’s plot made it clear to me that a children’s book adaptation would be not only tonally similar to a children’s story, but also a fun way for adults to engage with a story to tell their young kids. Specifically, I plan on creating a touch-and feel book which includes textures like feathers, fur, and more. The animals described in the story, although a bit exaggerated, would be a great way to educate children in the age range of 0-4 about the animal kingdom as well, while teaching them the feel and texture of animals which they may have never seen or touched in person. I aim to introduce audiences, young and old, to Twain’s brilliant writing, focusing on maintaining the humor and child-like folktale in the original text.

Choosing a children’s story for this adaptation seemed very natural and logical to me. Some of my favorite books as a young child were the touch-and-feel books, where I got to experience new sensations while my parents read to me. I thought that the vivid animalic imagery Mark Twain employs in “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” would

lend itself to this genre incredibly well. By adapting the short story into a touch-and-feel children's book, I hope to use a physical medium as well as illustrations in order to put my own personal spin and interpretation of the look of the animals in the story. In this sense, I plan on using the same animals mentioned in the original story, including the birds, mare, bulldog, cats, cow, and titular frog. This will, I feel, afford me a myriad of different textures to put into the book for kids to enjoy, learning how different animals may feel. The touch-and-feel book will not only educate toddlers on names of animals and what they look like, it will entertain them by appealing to their sensory-based learning. Other adaptation mediums were tempting, but I found that personally, the whimsical and silly nature of the story would be best-suited for young children.

Of course, as my adaptation's target audience is such small kids, some aspects of Twain's original story necessitate changes. The first, and perhaps most different, change will be the dialectical style and phonetic spelling. Simply put, this would not lend itself to a touch-and-feel baby book. My intention for this story was to offer a new sensory experience for babies. The beauty of Twain's local color style is important to his original work, but falls flat on ears who do not understand speech in the first place. Kids around the top of the age range may be confused by the spellings, and I do not wish to mislead them on correct reading and writing habits.

Additionally, for my sub-audience of parents, I do not want the book to be hard to read aloud to their children. If they wish to adopt an accent as they read, I would prefer that to be their choice rather than what is written. The setting will not play a particularly large part within my children's book, as it will be primarily focused on the animal characters. Because of this, the dialect, and in fact most of the dialogue, will not be included within the story. It is true that Twain's style is

unique in part due to this stylistic choice, however it would not be true to my genre to emulate his spelling.

The actual content of “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” will be at least partially present in my adaptation, in contrast to the Twain dialectical dialogue being cut. What drew me into the short story in the first place was the narrative, with its colorful characters and vivid imagery. Thus, I plan on including some plot points from the original story in the book. However, as MasterClass suggests, baby books should be around 300 words (“How to Write”), so serious editing is needed. The bare bones of the story will be included in a way that small children could potentially understand, but the frame narrative concerning Simon Wheeler will be excluded completely. The most important inclusion, naturally, will be of the animals. I plan on letting the illustrations and textures in my book be the main attraction, and that is a bulk of the original story. However, the actual descriptions may become tweaked in the final version, as I do not believe it would be appropriate for young children to read about Andrew Jackson being a dogfighter. The most genuine adaptation, in my opinion, focuses on what the original does—which in this case, are the animals as larger-than-life characters. In my adaptation, I plan on letting them speak for themselves, personifying them for the readers.

Along those same lines, Twain’s short story goes to considerable lengths to exaggerate the description of the animals, picturing them as near caricatures in order to introduce humor into the story. I find this to be appropriate in the sense that it will be entertaining for my target audience. One of MasterClass’ considerations for children’s stories is to forget a moral lesson and focus on the enjoyment of the reader (“How to Write”). As previously stated, some imagery that may be disturbing to kids, such as dogfighting, will be excluded. The actual descriptions, however, although shortened and kid-friendly, will be faithful to the original. As Banazeer and

Gunasekaran propose, “Mark Twain believed that comedy largely hinges on societal manners, ideas, and prejudices. Each person possesses unique characteristics, oddities, and eccentricities by which others identify and classify them” (9935). The characters in my story, the animals, will be largely defined by one or two very eccentric traits. For example, I plan on depicting Smiley’s “fifteen- minute nag” mare (Twain 2), to be sneezing while running. In this sense, I hope to introduce Twain’s ridiculous animals and his sense of humor into my own adaptation. The illustrations will be cartoon-style in order to both entertain children as well as to allow for these caricatures without being frightening to the audience. My interpretation of these animals will be based on the original, but it is inevitable that personal style and drawing ability will be factors in the fidelity of the final project.

In conclusion, Twain’s “Jumping Frog” is a story that I believe children and their parents alike will find humor, an interesting narrative, and new experiences within my adaptation. Creating a touch-and-feel book as a resource for toddler-aged kids and babies with this story in mind will not only be a novel and fun adaptation, but one which I hope teens and adults can look back on and find interest in the original story with. The parents reading to their kids and helping them experience new things will also likely find joy and a new experience while incorporating classic literature and intriguing short stories into their lives and the lives of their young ones. Overall, some creative liberties must be taken into consideration, as is the case with any other adaptation project, but this is one which I personally believe will pay off for my audiences.

Annotated Bibliography

Banu, G. Banazeer, and S. Gunasekaran. "Mark Twain's Humor: A Study Of Situational And Character-Centric Techniques." *Library of Progress-Library Science, Information Technology & Computer*, vol. 44, no. 3, July 2024, pp. 9928–9942. EBSCOhost, research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=50eb3e92-42d5-3c81-961a-29f7550dcf46.

This peer-reviewed academic article focuses on Mark Twain's humor. The researchers dive into his situational as well as character humor in his works. They comment on what makes Twain's style funny, which I plan on utilizing in my own text. I believe that their analysis of character humor will be valuable, as I plan on personifying the animals to a degree similar to a human character. Additionally, one of my goals is to include humor that will make adults be drawn to the book as well as young children. I hope to preserve some of Twain's dry humor while still making the book appropriate for the upper side of the age range, kids who can understand what is being read to them.

"How to Write a Children's Book - 2024." *MasterClass*, 30 Aug. 2021, ["How to Write a Children's Book - 2024." MasterClass, 30 Aug. 2021, www.masterclass.com/articles/how-to-write-a-childrens-book#4IzzDe3R7XkPH4pw8bGqX8](https://www.masterclass.com/articles/how-to-write-a-childrens-book#4IzzDe3R7XkPH4pw8bGqX8).

MasterClass is a website which offers writers advice and guidance on niche aspects of their writing. This page specifically focuses on how to write books for young audiences, including the different age ranges and writing tips that will make books marketable and

enjoyable for kids. They reference famous authors within the genre as their inspiration. This is an essential resource for my adaptation project, as having no experience with writing for children prior to this makes tips and tricks invaluable. Crafting an evocative and novel experience for young audiences is the intention, so turning to a page like this which draws on experience and expertise has aided me in deciding the length, style, and other logistics in this process.

Twain, Mark. “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County.” *The Celebrated*

***Jumping Frog of Calaveras County and Other Sketches*, edited by Angel Price, 1996.**