

Chapter

9

Regionalism and Local Color



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Preparing to Read

The Lowest Animal

by Mark Twain

LITERARY SKILLS FOCUS: SATIRE: THE WEAPON OF LAUGHTER

Satire makes fun of the weaknesses of people or institutions in order to bring about change. Many writers of satire, called satirists, use **exaggeration**—overstating something to make it look silly. They may also use **irony**—stating the opposite of what is really meant. As you read Twain’s satire “The Lowest Animal,” look for examples of exaggeration and irony.

READING SKILLS FOCUS: RECOGNIZING A WRITER’S PURPOSE

A writer’s **purpose** is the reason he or she writes something. A writer’s purpose may be to describe, to inform, to narrate, to entertain, to analyze, or to persuade. Satirists use humorous exaggerations and irony to influence people to reexamine their ideas and values, or to develop new attitudes and perspectives.

Use the Skill As you read, use the chart below to list examples of exaggeration and irony in “The Lowest Animal.” In the second column, explain what you think Twain’s purpose is for each example.



Reading Standard 2.4 Make warranted and reasonable assertions about the author’s arguments by using elements of the text to defend and clarify interpretations.
3.1 Analyze characteristics of subgenres (e.g., satire, parody, allegory, pastoral) that are used in poetry, prose, plays, novels, short stories, essays, and other basic genres. **Grades 9-10 Review Reading Standard 3.12** Analyze the way in which a work of literature is related to the themes and issues of its historical period. (Historical approach)

Examples of exaggeration and irony	Twain’s purpose

Chapter

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Vocabulary Development

The Lowest Animal

SELECTION VOCABULARY

dispositions (DIHS PUH ZHISH UHNS) *n. pl.*: natural ways of acting or thinking.

We noticed that the teachers had pleasant dispositions as they cheerfully delivered the lesson to the class.

verified (VEHR UH FYD) *v.*: proved something to be true.

The science experiment verified their theory.

caliber (KAL UH BUHR) *n.*: quality or ability.

Their perfect test scores showed a high caliber of skill.

wantonly (WAHN TUHN LEE) *adv.*: carelessly, often with ill will.

Driving wantonly is dangerous and could lead to a crash.

transition (TRAN ZHISH UHN) *n.*: passage from one condition, form, or stage to another.

Her transition from high school to college was very easy.

avaricious (AV UH RIHSH UHS) *adj.*: greedy.

The thief's avaricious desire for money led to his arrest.

atrocious (UH TROH SHUHS) *adj.*: very evil, savage, or brutal.

The citizens hated the atrocious dictator.

WORD STUDY

DIRECTIONS: Write "Yes" if the vocabulary word is being used correctly in each sentence below. Write "No" if it is being used incorrectly, and rewrite the sentence so that the word is used correctly.

1. Because of her *avaricious* nature, she gave much of her income to different charities. _____

2. The witness *verified* that the masked man was the person who robbed the store. _____

3. My car's *transition* wasn't working properly, so I took it to the mechanic. _____

4. He *wantonly* threw the candy wrapper on the sidewalk in front of a sign that read "No littering." _____

THE LOWEST ANIMAL

by Mark Twain

BACKGROUND

The works of Mark Twain (1835–1910) are marked by a relaxed, humorous manner of observation. In the following essay, Twain satirizes human nature by describing some experiments he supposedly conducted at the London Zoological Gardens. Twain takes Charles Darwin’s theory that humans evolved from earlier ancestors, or “lower animals,” and turns it upside down.

Man is the Reasoning Animal. Such is the claim.

I have been studying the traits and dispositions of the “lower animals” (so-called) and contrasting them with the traits and dispositions of man. I find the result humiliating to me.

For it obliges me to renounce¹ my allegiance to the Darwinian theory of the Ascent of Man from the Lower Animals, since it now seems plain to me that that theory ought to be vacated in favor of a new and truer one, this new and truer one to be named the *Descent of Man from the Higher Animals*. **A**

10 In proceeding toward this unpleasant conclusion, I have not guessed or speculated or conjectured, but have used what is commonly called the scientific method.² That is to say, I have subjected every postulate³ that presented itself to the crucial test of actual experiment and have adopted it or rejected it according to the result. Thus, I verified and established each step of my

1. **renounce:** give up; reject.
2. **scientific method:** research method in which a theory is tested by careful, documented experiments.
3. **postulate** (PAHS CHUH LIHT): assumption.

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A VOCABULARY

Word Study

Descent is a noun, related to the verb *descend*, which means “come down.”

Descent is the opposite of *ascent*, which means “upward movement; rise.”

Explain what you think Twain means by “the Descent of Man from the Higher Animals.”

A VOCABULARY

Selection Vocabulary

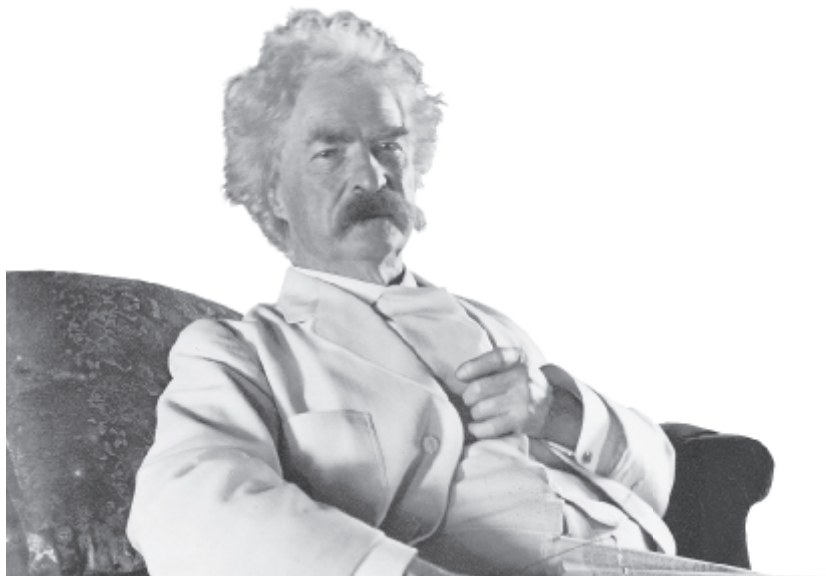
Verified (line 14) is the past tense form of the word *verify*. To *verify* something means to prove it. How could you verify the meaning of a word?

B LITERARY FOCUS

Satire often begins by sounding straightforward and serious. The satirical message begins to come through as the information gets less believable. What elements of Twain's opening paragraphs make it seem like a serious study?

C LANGUAGE COACH

Circle the stressed syllable in each of the following words: *exhibits*, *variations*, *preferences*, *procession*. Use a dictionary if you need help.



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course in its turn before advancing to the next. **A** These experiments were made in the London Zoological Gardens and covered many months of painstaking and fatiguing work. **B**

Before particularizing any of the experiments, I wish to state one or two things which seem to more properly belong in this place than further along. This in the interest of clearness. The massed experiments established to my satisfaction certain generalizations, to wit:

1. That the human race is of one distinct species. It exhibits slight variations—in color, stature, mental caliber, and so on—due to climate, environment, and so forth; but it is a species by itself and not to be confounded with any other.

2. That the quadrupeds⁴ are a distinct family, also. This family exhibits variations—in color, size, food preferences, and so on; but it is a family by itself.

3. That the other families—the birds, the fishes, the insects, the reptiles, etc.—are more or less distinct, also. They are in the procession. They are links in the chain which stretches down from the higher animals to man at the bottom. **C**

Some of my experiments were quite curious. In the course of my reading, I had come across a case where, many years ago,

4. **quadrupeds**: four-footed animals.

some hunters on our Great Plains organized a buffalo hunt for the entertainment of an English earl—that, and to provide some fresh meat for his larder.⁵ They had charming sport. They killed seventy-two of those great animals and ate part of one of them and left the seventy-one to rot. In order to determine the difference between an anaconda⁶ and an earl—if any—I caused seven young calves to be turned into the anaconda’s cage. The grateful reptile immediately crushed one of them and swallowed it, then lay back satisfied. It showed no further interest in the calves and no disposition to harm them. I tried this experiment with other anacondas, always with the same result. The fact stood proven that the difference between an earl and an anaconda is that the earl is cruel and the anaconda isn’t; and that the earl wantonly destroys what he has no use for, but the anaconda doesn’t. This seemed to suggest that the anaconda was not descended from the earl. It also seemed to suggest that the earl was descended from the anaconda, and had lost a good deal in the transition. **D**

I was aware that many men who have accumulated more millions of money than they can ever use have shown a rabid hunger for more, and have not scrupled⁷ to cheat the ignorant and the helpless out of their poor servings in order to partially appease⁸ that appetite. I furnished a hundred different kinds of wild and tame animals the opportunity to accumulate vast stores of food, but none of them would do it. The squirrels and bees and certain birds made accumulations, but stopped when they had gathered a winter’s supply and could not be persuaded to add to it either honestly or by chicane.⁹ In order to bolster up a tottering reputation, the ant pretended to store up supplies, but I was not deceived. I know the ant. These experiments convinced me that there is this difference between man and the higher animals: He is avaricious and miserly, they are not. **E F**

5. **larder:** supply of food or place where food supplies are kept.

6. **anaconda:** long, heavy snake that crushes its prey.

7. **scrupled:** hesitated because of feelings of guilt.

8. **appease:** satisfy; pacify.

9. **chicane** (SHIH KAYN): clever deception; trickery.

D LITERARY FOCUS

How can you tell that Twain is using **satire** in this paragraph to make his point about humans?

E VOCABULARY

Selection Vocabulary

To be *avaricious* is to be greedy. Knowing this, what do you think the noun *avarice* means?

F READING FOCUS

Based on what you have read so far, what do you think is Twain’s **purpose** for writing?

A VOCABULARY

Selection Vocabulary

Use context clues to write a definition for *atrocious* below. Underline the context clues that helped you.

B QUICK CHECK

According to Twain, why is a cat innocent for doing the same thing a person might do?

In the course of my experiments, I convinced myself that among the animals man is the only one that harbors¹⁰ insults and injuries, broods over them, waits till a chance offers, then takes revenge. The passion of revenge is unknown to the higher animals.

70 Roosters keep harems,¹¹ but it is by consent of their concubines;¹² therefore no wrong is done. Men keep harems, but it is by brute force, privileged by atrocious laws which the other sex was allowed no hand in making. In this matter man occupies a far lower place than the rooster. **A**

Cats are loose in their morals, but not consciously so. Man, in his descent from the cat, has brought the cat's looseness with him but has left the unconsciousness behind—the saving grace which excuses the cat. The cat is innocent, man is not. **B**

80 Indecency, vulgarity, obscenity—these are strictly confined to man; he invented them. Among the higher animals there is no trace of them. They hide nothing; they are not ashamed. Man, with his soiled mind, covers himself. He will not even enter a drawing room with his breast and back naked, so alive are he and his mates to indecent suggestion. Man is the Animal that Laughs. But so does the monkey, as Mr. Darwin pointed out, and so does the Australian bird that is called the laughing jackass. No—Man is the Animal that Blushes. He is the only one that does it—or has occasion to.

90 At the head of this article we see how “three monks were burnt to death” a few days ago and a prior was “put to death with atrocious cruelty.” Do we inquire into the details? No; or we should find out that the prior was subjected to unprintable mutilations. Man—when he is a North American Indian—gouges out his prisoner's eyes; when he is King John,¹³ with a nephew to render untroublesome, he uses a red-hot iron; when he is a

10. **harbors:** clings to; nourishes.
11. **harems:** groups of females who mate and live with one male.
12. **concubines:** secondary wives.
13. **King John:** king of England from 1199 to 1216, known for seizing the throne from his nephew Arthur.

A VOCABULARY

Academic Vocabulary

How is Twain's description of the cat's behavior *relevant*, or related, to his purpose for writing?

B LITERARY FOCUS

Is this sentence an example of **exaggeration** or **irony**? Explain.

C READING FOCUS

Twain grew up before the Civil War in a state that allowed slavery. What might his **purpose** be for including this paragraph about slavery?

dig out its eyes, or tear off its skin, or drive splinters under its nails—man fashion; when she is done playing with it, she makes a sudden meal of it and puts it out of its trouble. Man is the Cruel Animal. He is alone in that distinction. **A**

120 The higher animals engage in individual fights, but never in organized masses. Man is the only animal that deals in that atrocity of atrocities, war. He is the only one that gathers his brethren about him and goes forth in cold blood and with calm pulse to exterminate his kind. He is the only animal that for sordid wages will march out, as the Hessians¹⁷ did in our Revolution, and as the boyish Prince Napoleon did in the Zulu war,¹⁸ and help to slaughter strangers of his own species who have done him no harm and with whom he has no quarrel.

130 Man is the only animal that robs his helpless fellow of his country—takes possession of it and drives him out of it or destroys him. Man has done this in all the ages. There is not an acre of ground on the globe that is in possession of its rightful owner, or that has not been taken away from owner after owner, cycle after cycle, by force and bloodshed. **B**

140 Man is the only Slave. And he is the only animal who enslaves. He has always been a slave in one form or another, and has always held other slaves in bondage under him in one way or another. In our day he is always some man's slave for wages and does that man's work; and this slave has other slaves under him for minor wages, and they do *his* work. The higher animals are the only ones who exclusively do their own work and provide their own living. **C**

Man is the only Patriot. He sets himself apart in his own country, under his own flag, and sneers at the other nations, and keeps multitudinous uniformed assassins on hand at heavy expense to grab slices of other people's countries and keep *them* from grabbing slices of *his*. And in the intervals between

17. **Hessians** (HEHSH UHNZ): German soldiers who served for pay in the British army during the American Revolution.
18. **Prince Napoleon . . . Zulu war**: In search of adventure, Prince Napoleon, son of Napoleon III, joined the British campaign against Zululand (part of South Africa) in 1879.

campaigns, he washes the blood off his hands and works for “the universal brotherhood of man”—with his mouth.

Man is the Religious Animal. He is the only Religious Animal. He is the only animal that has the True Religion—
150 several of them. He is the only animal that loves his neighbor as himself, and cuts his throat if his theology isn’t straight. He has made a graveyard of the globe in trying his honest best to smooth his brother’s path to happiness and heaven. He was at it in the time of the Caesars, he was at it in Mahomet’s¹⁹ time, he was at it in the time of the Inquisition, he was at it in France a couple of centuries, he was at it in England in Mary’s day,²⁰ he has been at it ever since he first saw the light, he is at it today in Crete—he will be at it somewhere else tomorrow. The higher animals have no religion. And we are told that they are going to
160 be left out, in the hereafter. I wonder why. It seems questionable taste. **D**

Man is the Reasoning Animal. Such is the claim. I think it is open to dispute. Indeed, my experiments have proven to me that he is the Unreasoning Animal. Note his history, as sketched above. It seems plain to me that whatever he is, he is *not* a reasoning animal. His record is the fantastic record of a maniac. I consider that the strongest count against his intelligence is the fact that with that record back of him, he blandly sets himself up as the head animal of the lot; whereas by his own standards, he
170 is the bottom one.

In truth, man is incurably foolish. Simple things which the other animals easily learn he is incapable of learning. Among my experiments was this. In an hour I taught a cat and a dog to be friends. I put them in a cage. In another hour I taught them to be friends with a rabbit. In the course of two days I was able to add a fox, a goose, a squirrel, and some doves. Finally a monkey. They lived together in peace, even affectionately. **E**

19. **Mahomet’s:** Muhammad (c. 570–632) was an Arab prophet with whom Islam originated.

20. **in Mary’s day:** during the reign of Queen Mary (1553–1558), who was given the nickname “Bloody Mary” because she ordered the deaths of many Protestants.

D LITERARY FOCUS

Underline an example of **irony** in this paragraph. Why is this ironic?

E LITERARY FOCUS

Is the information in this paragraph an example of **exaggeration**? Why or why not?

Skills Practice

The Lowest Animal

USE AN EXAGGERATION TABLE

DIRECTIONS: In the table below, list three examples of **exaggeration** from “The Lowest Animal.” Then, explain what makes each one an example of exaggeration.

Examples of exaggeration	Explanation
1.	
2.	
3.	

Applying Your Skills

The Lowest Animal

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

DIRECTIONS: Match each vocabulary word with its synonym (word with the same or similar meaning).

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------|
| _____ 1. atrocious | a. traits |
| _____ 2. avaricious | b. capability |
| _____ 3. caliber | c. recklessly |
| _____ 4. dispositions | d. confirmed |
| _____ 5. transition | e. horrible |
| _____ 6. verified | f. selfish |
| _____ 7. wantonly | g. change |

LITERARY SKILLS FOCUS: SATIRE—THE WEAPON OF LAUGHTER

DIRECTIONS: Fill in the following chart with three examples of **irony** from “The Lowest Animal.”

Irony
1.
2.
3.

READING SKILLS FOCUS: RECOGNIZING A WRITER’S PURPOSE

DIRECTIONS: Write a brief statement telling what you think Twain’s overall **purpose** was for writing “The Lowest Animal.” Include examples from the text to support your argument.



Reading Standard 2.4, 3.1; Grades 9–10 Review Reading Standard 3.12
See page 177 for full text.