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A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court

Mark Twain · *1889 · original English text (Project Gutenberg #86). A preface on ungentle laws stands first; quote the narrative.*

It was in Warwick Castle that the narrator came across the curious stranger whom he is going to talk about. The stranger is an American, born and reared in Hartford, a Yankee of the Yankees, and practical. The hosted text is Twain's original English, Project Gutenberg #86. A preface on ungentle laws stands first; quote the story. For grades 8–12.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What happens when a practical Yankee takes sixth-century Arthur's court in hand, and how should a school read the satire to the end, including the terrible close, without treating the book as a joke only?

"It was in Warwick Castle that I came across the curious stranger whom I am going to talk about. He attracted me by three things: his candid simplicity, his marvelous familiarity with ancient armor"
A Word of Explanation

A stranger met in Warwick Castle tells how, after a blow in the head, he found himself in King Arthur's Britain. He is Hank Morgan, a Yankee of the Yankees, and he will try to remake that world by practical arts. The book satirizes chivalry and also modern confidence. The close, including the Battle of the Sand-Belt, is terrible. Teach the comedy and the judgment, for grades 8–12. Quote the narrative, not only the preface on ungentle laws.

KEY CHARACTERS

The stranger (the Yankee)
An American from Hartford, practical, who tells what happened to him in Arthur's Britain

The narrator at Warwick
The man who meets him in the castle and hears the tale

King Arthur's court
The knights and customs the Yankee will try to remake

A STRANGER IN WARWICK CASTLE

> *"It was in Warwick Castle that I came across the curious stranger whom I am going to talk about. He attracted me by three things: his candid simplicity, his marvelous familiarity with ancient armor"*
> A Word of Explanation

Grades 8–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01
Warwick Castle
A WORD OF EXPLANATION

The narrator meets a curious stranger in the tail of a herd being shown through the castle: candid, at home with ancient armor, and restful because he did all the talking.

- The first narrative sentence is exact. A preface on ungentle laws stands first; do not quote it as the opening of the tale.
- This is Twain, 1889, PG #86.
- The stranger's talk is the door into the sixth century.
- For grades 8–12.

> *"It was in Warwick Castle that I came across the curious stranger whom I am going to talk about. He attracted me by three things: his candid simplicity, his marvelous familiarity with ancient armor"*
> A Word of Explanation

02
A Yankee of the Yankees
THE STRANGER'S ACCOUNT

"I am an American. I was born and reared in Hartford, in the State of Connecticut—anyway, just over the river, in the country. So I am a Yankee of the Yankees—and practical." His father was a blacksmith; he himself has been a mechanic.

- The sentences are exact, including "reared" and "just over the river."
- Practical is his boast, and the book will test it.
- Do not invent a fuller name at the first meeting than the file gives there.
- Quote Twain, not a later film.

> *"I am an American. I was born and reared in Hartford, in the State of Connecticut--anyway, just over the river, in the country. So I am a Yankee of the"*
> The stranger's account

03
Arthur's Court
THE EARLY CHAPTERS

He wakes into a Britain of knights, of superstition, and of hard customs. He will use know-how as a kind of magic, and he will laugh at the court. The laugh is not the whole book.

- The preface has already said that the ungentle laws touched upon are historical in kind, though not all sixth-century. Do not ignore that note, and do not quote it as if it were the first sentence of the tale.
- Satire of chivalry is real here; so is the cruelty of the customs.
- Teach both the comedy and the injustice.
- 8–12.

> *"I am an American. I was born and reared in Hartford, in the State of Connecticut--anyway, just over the river, in the country. So I am a Yankee of the"*
> The stranger's account

04
A Modern Kingdom
THE MIDDLE

Schools, newspapers, factories, and new titles of progress appear under the Yankee's hand. The book is testing modern confidence as well as medieval folly.

- Do not read the book as a simple victory of the present over the past.
- Twain's satire cuts more than one way.
- Keep the tone of the book: comic, and increasingly grave.
- Quote this file.

> *"It was in Warwick Castle that I came across the curious stranger whom I am going to talk about. He attracted me by three things: his candid simplicity, his marvelous familiarity with ancient armor"*
> A Word of Explanation

05
The Sand-Belt
THE CLOSE

The Battle of the Sand-Belt is terrible. A school should finish the book and should not treat the last war as a cartoon. The practical man is not spared.

- Gravity. Do not put gore on the map, and do not skip the judgment.
- The book begins as a joke in a castle and does not end as one.
- Catalogue 8–12.
- Not a later film.

> *"It was in Warwick Castle that I came across the curious stranger whom I am going to talk about. He attracted me by three things: his candid simplicity, his marvelous familiarity with ancient armor"*
> A Word of Explanation

A Practical Man · Satire Two Ways · A Court Remade · Comedy, then Judgment · A Terrible Close

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 8–12

1. The narrative, after a preface, begins: "It was in Warwick Castle that I came across the curious stranger whom I am going to talk about." Do not quote the preface on ungentle laws as the opening of the tale.
2. Twain, 1889, PG #86. "I am an American. I was born and reared in Hartford... So I am a Yankee of the Yankees—and practical." For grades 8–12.
3. The book satirizes chivalry and also modern confidence. Do not read it as a simple victory of the present.
4. The Battle of the Sand-Belt is terrible. Finish the book. Gravity; no gore on the map.
5. Not a later film.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text (Project Gutenberg #86). A preface on ungentle laws stands first; quote the narrative., Project Gutenberg #86, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/twain-a-connecticut-yankee/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.