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| **STATEMENT** | **POSITION BEFORE READING TWAIN** | **POSITION AFTER READING TWAIN** | **EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT FINAL OPINION (To be completed last)** |
| People’s opinions/beliefs are arrived at logically through a careful examination of the facts. | AGREE DISAGREE | AGREE DISAGREE |  |
| Most people have no original thoughts and only follow social trends |  |  |  |
| Public opinion is usually right; in other words, what most people believe is morally correct and for the best of all of society |  |  |  |
| My political beliefs (whether fully developed or not) are a result of looking at both sides of issues |  |  |  |
| Compromise is important even if the person with whom I’m compromising is someone that believes something different than I |  |  |  |

“Corn-Pone Opinions” by Mark Twain

Fifty years ago, when I was a boy of fifteen and helping to inhabit a Missourian village on the banks of the Mississippi, I had a friend whose society was very dear to me because I was forbidden by my mother to partake of it. He was a gay and **impudent** and satirical and delightful young black man--a slave--who daily preached sermons from the top of his master's woodpile, with me for sole audience. He imitated the **pulpit** style of the several clergymen of the village, and did it well, and 5 with fine passion and energy. To me he was a wonder. I believed he was the greatest **orator** in the United States and would someday be heard from. But it did not happen; in the distribution of rewards he was over-looked. It is the way, in this world. [ . . . ]

One of his texts was this:

"You tell me [where] a man gits his corn-pone\*, en I'll tell you what his 'pinions is."

10 I can never forget it. It was deeply impressed upon me. By my mother. Not upon my memory, but elsewhere. She had slipped in upon me while I was absorbed and not watching. The black **philosopher**'s idea was that a man is not independent, and cannot afford views which might interfere with his bread and butter. If he would prosper, he must train with the majority; in matters of large moment, like politics and religion, he must think and feel with the bulk of his neighbors, or suffer damage in his social standing and in his business [income]. He must restrict himself to corn-pone 15 opinions-at least on the surface. He must get his opinions from other people; he must reason out none for himself; he must have no first-hand views.

I think Jerry was right, in the main, but I think he did not go far enough.

1. It was his idea that a man conforms to the majority view of his locality by calculation and intention. This happens, but I think it is not the rule.

20 2. It was his idea that there is such a thing as a first-hand opinion; an original opinion; an opinion which is coldly reasoned out in a man's head, by a searching analysis of the facts involved, with the heart **unconsulted**, and the jury room closed against outside influences. It may be that such an opinion has been born somewhere, at some time or other, but I suppose it got away before they could catch it and stuff it and put it in the museum.

I am persuaded that a coldly-thought-out and independent verdict upon a fashion in clothes, or manners, or literature, or 25 politics, or religion, or any other matter that is projected into the field of our notice and interest, is a most rare thing- if it has indeed ever existed.

A new thing in costume appears--the flaring hoop skirt, for example--and the passersby are shocked, and the **irreverent** laugh. Six months later everybody is **reconciled**; the fashion has established itself; it is admired, now, and no one laughs. Public opinion resented it before, public opinion accepts it now, and is happy in it Why? Was the resentment reasoned out? 30 Was the acceptance work? It is our nature to conform; it is a force which not many can successfully resist. [ . . . ]

The hoopskirt\* runs its course and disappears. Nobody reasons about it. One woman abandons the fashions; her neighbor notices this and follows her lead; this influences the next woman; and so on and so on, and presently the skirt has vanished out of the world, no one knows how nor why; or cares for that matter. It will come again, by and by, and in due course will go again. [ . . . ]

35 Our [customs and fashions] change from time to time, but the changes are not reasoned out; we merely notice and conform. We are not reasoned out; we merely notice and conform. We are creatures of outside influences, as a rule we do not think, we only imitate. We cannot invent standards that will stick; what we mistake for standards are only fashions, and **perishable**. We may continue to admire them, but we drop the use of them. [ . . . ]

The outside influences are always pouring in upon us, and we are always obeying their orders and accepting their verdicts. 40 [ . . . ] Morals, religions, politics, get their following from surrounding influences and atmospheres, almost entirely; not from study, not from thinking. [ . . . ] Mohammedans\* are Mohammedans because they are born and reared among that **sect**, not because they have thought it out and can furnish sound reasons for being Mohammedans; we know why Catholics are Catholics; why Presbyterians are Presbyterians; why Baptists are Baptists; why Mormons are Mormons\*; why thieves are thieves; why monarchists are monarchists; why Republicans are Republicans and Democrats, Democrats. We know it is a 45 matter of association and sympathy, not reasoning and examination; that hardly a man in the world has an opinion upon morals, politics, or religion which he got otherwise than through his associations and sympathies. Broadly speaking, there are none but corn-pone opinions. [ . . . ]

I think that in the majority of cases it is **unconscious** and not **calculated**; that it is born of the human being's natural **yearning** to stand well with his fellows and have their inspiring approval and praise--a yearning which is commonly so 50 strong and so insistent that it cannot be resisted, and must have its way. [ . . . ]

Men think they think upon great political questions. [ . . . ] [B]ut they are drawn from a partial view of the matter in hand and are of no particular value. They swarm with their party\*, they feel with their party, they are happy in their party’s approval; and where the party leads they will follow, whether for right and honor, or through blood and dirt and a mush of **mutilated** morals. [ . . . ]

55 Half of our people passionately believe in high tariff\*, the other half believe otherwise. Does this mean study and examination, or only feeling? The latter\*, I think. I have deeply studied that question, too--and didn't arrive. We all do no end of feeling, and we mistake it for thinking. And out of it we get an **aggregation** which we consider a **boon**. Its name is public opinion. It is held in reverence. It settles everything. Some think it the voice of God.

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| corn-pone (9): A savory type of cornbread that was a cheap staple in the diet of many poor Southerners during Twain’s time. As an adjective, it has come to mean “simple” or “downhome” or even “country” (derogatory). | hoopskirt (31): You know. Like one of those old-fashioned skirts women wore in the 19th century. Like this: Image result for hoop skirt 19th century | Mohammedans (41): People of the Muslim faith. NOTE: This is not used derogatorily. |
| Catholics . . . Mormoms (42-44): Twain lists several different divisions of Christianity here | party (52): i.e., a political party  tariff (55): A form of tax. Twain references here a political debate that occurred during the writing of this essay. | latter (56): In a set, “latter” refers to the last thing listed. So here Twain means that people believe in the tariff because of feeling and not because of careful examination. |

PROMPT: In a well-constructed essay, analyze the techniques Twain uses to convey his view on personal beliefs.

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| PROMPT | In a well-constructed essay, analyze the techniques Twain uses to convey his view on personal beliefs. |
| INTRO: State the author’s name and the title of the text somewhere in your intro. Be sure that you *clearly* answer the prompt and avoid just restating it. | In “Corn-Pone Opinions,” Twain examines the social factors that influence how and why people arrive at the beliefs they do. No belief is exempt from Twain’s scathing satirical attack. He gives equal time to fashion trends, religious beliefs and political opinions. Twain finally arrives at this conclusion: The majority of opinions and beliefs are not made through honest thought but by the desire to be safe and accepted. |
| BP 1: This should be a Toulmin-constructed paragraph that supports the overall thesis. This paragraph should begin not with a stated fact but with an interpretation of the text. Read through the following paragraph and break it down for the Toulmin Model. Once you have done that, rewrite the grounds section of the paragraph to better incorporate the quotes taken from Twain’s text. | Twain ridicules the idea that religious beliefs reveal who a person truly is. These beliefs, according to Twain, are a result of chance and geography and are not, therefore, actual beliefs. Twain states that “[m]orals, religions, politics, get their following from surrounding influences and atmospheres, almost entirely; not from study, not from thinking.” This shows the reader that people don’t really have beliefs but instead are conforming to their surroundings. He also says that “Mohammedans are Mohammedans because they are born and reared among that sect, not because they have thought it out and can furnish sound reasons for being Mohammedans; we know why Catholics are Catholics; why Presbyterians are Presbyterians; why Baptists are Baptists; why Mormons are Mormons.” This shows that Twain doesn’t trust any religious belief. Twain’s criticism is not that the religions themselves are false, but that people take it for granted that these beliefs define them. They never explore why they actually believe what they do. |

STUDENT BP2:

CLAIM: Twain further supports his point that people forgo original thought in order to be accepted with this example of fashion trends.

GROUNDS: Trends such as these appear to have no true reason for being popular. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Summarize Twain’s use of **narration** in the first 16 lines. Why does he tell this story? What is he trying to prove?
2. How does Twain describe Jerry (the slave Twain says preached to him when he was younger)? What does the **description** tell you about Jerry?
3. Explain Twain’s use of **exemplification** with the hoopskirt. What is he trying to prove?
4. Twain lists several sects of religion in lines 40-43. Are these **examples** varied enough to prove whatever point Twain is trying to prove? What is he trying to prove?
5. According to Twain, what are the **causes** that make us conformists in our opinions, that force us to develop “corn-pone opinions”?
6. Do you agree with Twain? Explain.