

The Homesick Connecticut Yankee

by Mark Twain from "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court "

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court is the story of Hank Morgan, a 19th century Connecticut man, who suffers a blow to the head and is transported back centuries to the time of King Arthur. Once there he has many adventures while he struggles to apply 19th century American ideas to medieval England.

In this passage, Hank has been named Arthur's chief minister. A chromo is a chromolithograph, or a type of color printing of a picture.

I was given the choicest suite of apartments in the castle, after the king's. They were aglow with loud-colored silken hangings, but the stone floors had nothing but rushes on them for a carpet, and they were misfit rushes at that, being not all of one breed. As for conveniences, properly speaking, there weren't any. I mean little conveniences; it is the little conveniences that make the real comfort of life. The big oaken chairs, graced with rude carvings, were well enough, but that was the stopping place. There was no soap, no matches, no looking-glass—except a metal one, about as powerful as a pail of water. And not a chromo. I had been used to chromos for years, and I saw now that without my suspecting it a passion for art had got worked into the fabric of my being, and was become a part of me.

It made me homesick to look around over this proud and gaudy but heartless barrenness and remember that in our house in East Hartford, all unpretending as it was, you couldn't go into a room but you would find an insurance-chromo, or at least a three-color God-Bless-Our-Home over the door; and in the parlor we had nine. But here, even in my grand room of state, there wasn't anything in the nature of a picture except a thing the size of a bedquilt, which was either woven or knitted (it had darned places in it), and nothing in it was the right color or the right shape; and as for proportions, even Raphael himself couldn't have botched them more formidably, after all his practice on those nightmares they call his "celebrated Hampton Court cartoons." Raphael was a bird. We had several of his chromos; one was his "Miraculous Draught of Fishes," where he puts in a miracle of his own—puts three men into a canoe which wouldn't have held a dog without upsetting. I always admired to study R.'s art, it was so fresh and unconventional.

Questions

1. What are “misfit rushes”?
2. Explain the simile “as powerful as a pail of water.”
3. What does Hank find wrong with Raphael’s “Miraculous Draught of Fishes”?
4. Hank seems to miss the “chromos” most of all. If you were transported back to King Arthur’s day, what would you miss most?

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. rushes
2. misfit
3. chromos
4. gaudy
5. botched
6. formidably
7. bird
8. unconventional

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

- 1) "the stone floors had nothing but **rushes** on them for a carpet"
a. furs or pelts b. thin rugs or mats c. sand; pebbles d. grass stems; reeds
- 2) "they were **misfit** rushes at that, being not all of one breed"
a. not fitting together; unusual b. ugly; unattractive c. poor size d. badly made
- 3) "had been used to **chromos** for years, and I saw now that without my suspecting it a passion for art"
a. stained glass window b. colored bowls c. colored pictures d. illustrated books
- 4) "It made me homesick to look around over this proud and **gaudy** but heartless barrenness"
a. comfortable or homey b. flashy; glaring c. noble or kingly d. sad; depressing
- 5) "Raphael himself couldn't have **botched** them more formidably"
a. painted or drawn b. bought or purchased c. described; explain d. messed up; ruined
- 6) "Raphael himself couldn't have botched them more **formidably**"
a. often or frequently b. carefully; correctly c. impressively or effectively d. officially; formally
- 7) "Raphael was a **bird**"
a. odd person; character b. animal with wings c. fancy dresser d. famous artist
- 8) "I always admired to study R.'s art, it was so fresh and **unconventional**"
a. cheap; affordable b. popular or fashionable c. original; different d. emotional or warm