

Mark Twain's satire, "Advice to Youth"

Question Worksheet

ANSWERS

- 1) Who is the target audience? **The target audience is the youth.**
- 2) Why is obeying the best policy, in Twain's opinion? **Twain believed that obeying is the best policy because if children don't behave, their parents will make them do it regardless.**
- 3) What superstition (common belief) do parents have according to Twain? **The belief that most parents have is that think that they know better than their children.**
- 4) How does Twain instruct the youth to avoid violence? **Twain instructs the youth to avoid violence by actually enforcing it upon someone, and then regretting it and apologizing for acting in such an uncivil way. He concludes his advice by saying to actually not retaliate in a violent way – leave the violence for the mad men of the world.**
- 5) Why is lying bad according to Twain? **Lying is bad according to Twain because you will nearly always get caught (especially if you are not good at lying). Once you are caught in a lie, you will always be perceived and judged as a bad and impure person.**
- 6) How is lying a great art according to Twain? **Lying is a great art because you can manipulate others into believing what you want them to believe. The art of lying is composed of careful planning, that will last a lifetime.**
- 7) What is Twain's advice to youth about lying? **Begin the art of lying now at an early age in order to practice and live a life full of beautifully crafted lies and to maximize the profits that may be reaped from lying. This is irony here—he doesn't really want the youth to get good at lying.**

- 8) Twain provides an anecdote about firearms. Is this funny or not? To a certain extent he does use humor to lighten the serious tone of guns. In the anecdote he begins by saying that there is no harm in pointing an unloaded gun at a relative, since no harm can be done (even though that is a very careless, crazy action to carry out). He then depicts a comical battle scene in which boys point unloaded guns at the enemy (women).
- 9) Why shouldn't youth handle firearms, according to Twain? Youth should not handle firearms because of their carelessness in handling them and for the sorrow and suffering that it brings upon the innocent.
- 10) What is his advice about reading? His advice about reading is that the young should begin to read great works at an early age.
- 11) What is the result of building one's character, according to Twain? The result of building one's character is to act accordingly and play by the rules so that you will resemble everybody else.