

Mark Twain: Setting the Mood in Tom Sawyer

Mark Twain's 1876 masterpiece *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is the story of Tom, an orphan boy living with his aunt in Missouri after mid 1800s. Tom is a little wild and full of mischief, but his friend, Huckleberry Finn, is more wild and more mischievous. In the passage below, Tom and Huck sneak out late at night to go to a graveyard in order to test a cure for Huck's warts on his hands.

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer Chapter IX

It was a graveyard of the old-fashioned Western kind. It was on a hill, about a mile and a half from the village. It had a crazy board fence around it, which leaned inward in places, and outward the rest of the time, but stood upright nowhere. Grass and weeds grew rank over the whole cemetery. All the old graves were sunken in, there was not a tombstone on the place; round-topped, worm-eaten boards staggered over the graves, leaning for support and finding none. "Sacred to the memory of" So-and-So had been painted on them once, but it could no longer have been read, on the most of them, now, even if there had been light.

A faint wind moaned through the trees, and Tom feared it might be the spirits of the dead, complaining at being disturbed. The boys talked little, and only under their breath, for the time and the place and the pervading solemnity and silence oppressed their spirits. They found the sharp new heap they were seeking, and ensconced themselves within the protection of three great elms that grew in a bunch within a few feet of the grave.

Then they waited in silence for what seemed a long time. The hooting of a distant owl was all the sound that troubled the dead stillness. Tom's reflections grew oppressive. He must force some talk.

Questions:

1. The graveyard that Twain describes is in a state of disrepair. Give a quotation from the passage that supports this.
2. The boys are fearful. What is a quotation from the passage that supports this?
3. Give an example of personification in the passage.
4. What does "reflections" mean in the passage?
5. Why does Tom feel he needs to "force some talk"?

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Questions:

Student's answers will vary; examples of correct answers:

1. The graveyard that Twain describes is in a state of disrepair. Give a quotation from the passage that supports this.

"All the old graves were sunken in"

2. The boys are fearful. What is a quotation from the passage that supports this?

"the pervading solemnity and silence oppressed their spirits"

3. Give an example of personification in the passage.

"worm-eaten boards staggered over the graves"

4. What does "reflections" mean in the passage?

thoughts

5. Why does Tom feel he needs to "force some talk"?

The silence made him afraid.