

Guided Imagery on Mark Twain's **PUDD'NHEAD WILSON**

*(Using Penguin Classics 2004 edition with
Chronology and Further Reading)*



Purpose of Strategy:

Guided Imagery can be used to encourage creativity, originality, and description in writing, to develop a visual basis while reading, and to build and stretch background knowledge. Consequently, this strategy uses literal or figurative images to conjure mental pictures, emotions, or physical sensations that will connect the student to his or her learning experience. For Pudd'nhead Wilson, we can take the idea of suspense, or guilt, or slavery, or identity, and find a passage that will help student's have a clearer understanding of one of these concepts. When the class reaches a point in the book where characters are experiencing these concepts, guided imagery can help them comprehend the novel and feel more at ease writing about these subjects, already having experienced a connection.

Step One: Building the Dream

First inform students that you are going to read them a story about identity and that it is not meant to be scary but reflective. There will be a point in the story with a blank, politely ask them to fill in their names. Tell them that they are free to close their eyes, get in a comfortable position, and breathe slowly. Tell them to relax all of their muscles, starting from their head, all the way down to their toes. Play soft classical music in the background as you recall the story in an inviting, soothing voice.

Step Two: Read the Prompt

Walking through a crowd of what seems like a thousand people, you struggle to make yourself stand out, hoping someone will see you, someone will know you. Your white shirt looks the same as those streaming past you today and you think of the many multi-colored shirts still sitting in your closet that you could have worn instead. You wish you were taller. "Maybe I should have worn my tennis shoes today...they have thicker soles," you whisper quietly to yourself.

As you shuffle forward, you catch pieces of others' conversations. "Did you see the way he sunk that thing over Brown's head without any effort?"... "The chocolate bar is sorely underappreciated"... "Yeah. She's my best friend." All of the disconnected conversation starts to blur and fill your ears with a soft but inescapable hum. Why are you here? Where did your thoughts go?

Overwhelmed by the never-ending mass of people, you start to feel lost. In a crowd so big, it's easy to feel so small. It's almost like you have no identity. Who am I really? Where was I supposed to be going? Before you submit to the nudge of the close bodies around you pushing you to follow the masses idea of what destination is, you hear a voice call out your name "Hey - _____!" Was that your name? YOUR name?

You look around to see 3 of your friends standing high above the crowd on the top steps of a building close by. "How did you find me," you exclaim.

“What do you mean, silly? You told us to meet here, remember? Man that is just like you to give us instructions and then forget your own instruction. You’re always leaving your head in the clouds. Get over, we missed you.”

Step Three: Writing

Tell students to wake up their muscles, open their eyes and jot down their ideas concerning these three questions (write them on the board or state them verbally).

1. Have you ever had a similar experience to this, wondering about identity, struggling to define?
2. Is it easy to lose yourself in the crowd’s idea of what defines you?
3. Does the crowd’s definition of you matter?

Keep the music playing. Give them about 15 minutes to complete their thoughts. Ask if anyone is willing to share their thoughts, and carry on the conversation of identity by talking about the things that influence society’s basis for other’s identities. Talk about how we define our own identity.

Assessment:

There are no required assessments for this strategy; it is a prereading technique, a way of opening up a vision for your students that connects what they are able to see with what they will read. You can, however, gauge understanding by observing ability to write and engage in class discussion.