

The New Hundred-Year-Old Book

Did you hear about Mark Twain's new book? It's number three on the *New York Times* Hardcover Nonfiction Bestseller List, just behind George W. Bush's memoir, *Decision Points*, and ahead of other bestsellers by Keith Richards, Glenn Beck, Jon Stewart, Sarah Palin, and Jay-Z. In his new book, the author of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* tells of own adventures, in *Autobiography of Mark Twain, Volume 1* (volumes two and three haven't been published yet).

Although Twain is often called one of America's greatest writers, literary appreciation is only part of why it's a bestseller. A lot of the excitement is from hype, and most of that hype is from Twain. Saying his autobiography was too shocking and scandalous for his own time, he ordered it could only be published 100 years after he died—that is, in 2010. Everyone who's read it now says this order was more promotion than precaution, but Twain's trick worked. Not only is his book a bestseller, but all of BCPL's copies are checked out, and more people are in line to read them.

If you're one of the people waiting for a copy, there are lots of other books about Mark Twain at our library to keep you busy in the meantime. Even before his autobiography, Twain liked to write about himself. Out of the library's copies of his works, four of them—*Life on the Mississippi*, *Roughing It*, *The Innocents Abroad*, and *Following the Equator*—are about Twain, by Twain. If you want to get a more objective account of his life, you can read one of the thirty books other people have written about him.

He's made some appearances in science fiction and fantasy stories, too. In *Fables and Reflections*, the sixth volume in the graphic novel series *Sandman* (by writer Neil Gaiman, and various artists), Twain is a character in the story "Three Septembers and a January". The story is set in the late 1800s, in California, during the Gold Rush, the same place and time period Twain described in *Roughing It*. He also made his way into a couple episodes of the TV show *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. In the two-parter, "Time's Arrow", Mark Twain (much older than he was in "Three Septembers and a January") travels to the twenty-third century, where people are still reading his books.

Will Mark Twain be famous two centuries from now? As far as we know, he doesn't have another autobiography, with more promised shocking secrets, to be published in 200 years, so his fame will depend partly on the quality of his books, but also on people still finding the man himself as fascinating as they do now. For the present, however, you can read all about him (and books by him) here at BCPL.

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