**The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County Reading Guide**

**Title**: The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County

**Author**: Mark Twain

**Setting**: a small, dilapidated mining camp called Angel's Camp, located in Calaveras County, California. The story takes place during the mid-19th century, specifically around the time of the California Gold Rush.

**Summary**: “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” is as characteristic of humor as “The Raven” is of horror. In fact, it’s the piece that launched Twain to literary fame; he published it first in a newspaper in 1865, and it was an overnight success. It was republished in newspapers worldwide, and it established Twain as a talented humorist. This particular piece is a story within a story. It tells the story of the story of the jumping frog—who told the story, how that story was told, why it was told, and when and where it was told. It also clearly conveys the story’s effect on the people who hear it. And, like all stories that have such an effect, the story continues to be told.

**Major Characters:**

**1. The Narrator:** A person who visits Simon Wheeler at the request of a friend to inquire about Leonidas W. Smiley. The narrator is skeptical and finds himself trapped in Wheeler's long-winded story about Jim Smiley.

**2. Simon Wheeler:** An earnest storyteller who recounts the tale of Jim Smiley. He is described as good-natured and simple, and he tells his story with a monotonous, yet sincere tone.

**3. Jim Smiley:** The protagonist of Wheeler's story, known for his compulsive betting habits. He bets on anything and everything, from horse races to the jumping abilities of his pet frog, Dan'l Webster.

**4. Dan'l Webster:** Jim Smiley's highly trained frog, which he uses to win bets. The frog is central to the climax of the story when it is sabotaged by a stranger.

**5. The Stranger:** An unnamed character who tricks Jim Smiley by filling Dan'l Webster with quail shot, making the frog unable to jump and thereby winning the bet.

**Themes:**

* **Deception and Trickery:** The central theme of the story is deception, exemplified by the stranger who outwits Jim Smiley by sabotaging his frog. This theme underscores the cleverness and cunning that can emerge in seemingly straightforward situations.
* **Human Nature and Folly:** Twain delves into the quirks and absurdities of human nature through Jim Smiley's compulsive gambling and the gullibility of the characters. The narrative humorously critiques human tendencies towards greed and competitiveness.
* **Storytelling and Exaggeration:** The story is a tribute to the art of storytelling, with Simon Wheeler's exaggerated and detailed recounting of events. This theme emphasizes the power of oral tradition and the embellishments that often accompany it.
* **Irony:** The story is steeped in irony, particularly in the way Jim Smiley, who is usually the trickster, becomes the victim of a trick. This reversal adds a layer of humor and highlights the unpredictability of life.

**Review Questions**: Answering the following questions will increase your comprehension of the short story. Respond to these questions by writing the answers in your notebook. *Some of the questions require you to express an opinion or describe your reaction to events in the short story. In these instances, there is no right or wrong answer, and your responses will vary.* The answers to factual questions are included in this reading guide.

1. Based on the initial description of Simon Wheeler and his storytelling style, what do you think will happen when he starts telling the story of Jim Smiley?
2. What does the quote "Well, I'll risk two-and-a-half that she don't, any way" tell the reader about Jim Smiley's character?
3. What does the story suggest about human nature and the tendency to gamble or take risks? Do you think that it is in our human nature to take risks? Explain your thinking.
4. Consider the quote, "He never smiled, he never frowned, he never changed his voice from the gentle-flowing key to which he tuned the initial sentence." What does this reveal about Simon Wheeler’s storytelling?
5. How does the frame narrative (the story within a story) impact your understanding of the main plot? Why do you think Twain chose this style?
6. Twain used a few literary techniques to convey the character of the storyteller and the humor of the jumping frog story. Choose the technique you think made the biggest impact, include the technique, where in the story you saw it being used, the impact it had, and why you selected it.
7. Why did Twain use dialect to characterize the storyteller, and what is its effect on the reader?
8. Twain is known for his humor. Which part of the story did you find the most amusing and why? How does Twain use humor to convey his message? Include at least one quote to support your thinking.

**Answers to Review Questions:**

1. \*Answers will vary
2. This quote shows that Smiley is a gambler who will bet on anything, even something as serious as someone’s health. It reveals that he's compulsive about betting and doesn't really think about whether his bets are appropriate. His first instinct to place a bet, even when it involves someone’s well-being, highlights how obsessed he is with gambling.
3. \*Answers will vary
4. The quote shows that Simon Wheeler's way of telling stories is really steady and doesn't change much. He speaks in a monotone, which might make his stories seem boring to some people. This also suggests that Wheeler is serious about his storytelling and doesn’t feel the need to spice it up with dramatic expressions or changes in his voice. His calm and composed way of narrating is quite different from the funny and exaggerated story he’s actually telling.
5. \*Answers will vary
6. \*Answers will vary
7. I think the author used dialect to make the storyteller feel more real and to bring out the local flavor of the story. Using regional dialect pulls the reader into the setting of Angel’s Camp and gives a clear picture of the characters' backgrounds and personalities. It makes the reader feel more connected to the time and place of the story. Plus, it adds a touch of humor and charm.\*Answers will vary
8. \*Answers will vary