Satire is a type of writing that ridicules people’s flaws or society’s flaws in order to try to improve conditions. Satire is not just about making fun of problems; satire aims to identify problems that can be improved.

Satire often exaggerates problems and uses verbal irony where the author says one thing but means something else just like when we use sarcasm.

Exercise 1: As you read the following satire from Mark Twain, identify 5 terms to define using the context and answer the 6 questions in the text.

“The Lowest Animal” Mark Twain

Some of my experiments were quite curious. In the course of my reading, I had come across a case where, many years ago, some hunters on our Great Plains organized a buffalo hunt for the entertainment of ad English early—that, and to provide some fresh meat for his dinners. They had charming sport. They killed seventy-two of those great animals and ate part of one of them and left the seventy-one to rot. In order to determine the difference between an anaconda and an earl—if any—I caused seven young calves to be turned into the anaconda’s cage. The grateful reptile immediately crushed one of them and swallowed it, then lay back satisfied. It showed no further interest in the calves and no disposition to harm them. I tried this experiment with other anacondas, always with the same result. The fact stood proven that the difference between an earl and an anaconda is that the earl is cruel and the anaconda isn’t; and that the earl wantonly destroys what he has no use for, but the anaconda doesn’t. This seemed to suggest that the anaconda was not descended from the earl. It also seemed to suggest that the earl was descended from the anaconda, and had lost a good deal in the transition.

1. An earl is a title of royalty given by a king, similar to a duke, count, or prince. According to Twain, what does the experiment with the earl and anaconda prove?

I was aware that many men who have accumulated more millions of money than they can ever use have shown a rabid hunger for more, and have scrupled to cheat the ignorant and the helpless out of their poor servings in order to partially appease that appetite. I furnished a hundred different kinds of wild and tame animals the opportunity to accumulate vast stores of food, but none of them would do it. the squirrels and bees and certain birds made accumulations, but stopped when they had gathered a winters supply and could not be persuaded to add to it either honestly or by chicannery. In order to bolster up a tottering reputation, the ant pretended to store up supplies, but I was not deceived. I know the ant. These experiments convinced me that there is this difference between man and the higher animals: He is avaricious and miserly, they are not.

2. Why does Twain discuss how much food animals store up for winter?
In the course of my experiments, I convinced myself that among the animals man is the only one that harbors insults and injuries, broods over them, waits till a chance offers, then takes revenge. The passion of revenge is unknown to the higher animals.

Roosters keep a group of females, but it is by consent of their concubines; therefore no wrong is done. Men keep harems, but it is by brute force, privileged by atrocious laws which the other sex was allowed no hand in making. In this matter man occupies a far lower place than the rooster.

Cats are loose in their morals, but not consciously so. Man, in his descent from the cat, has brought the cat’s looseness with him but has left the unconsciousness behind—the saving grace which excuses the cat. The cat is innocent, man is not.

Indecency, vulgarity, obscenity—these are strictly confined to man; he invented them. Among the higher animals there is not a trace of them. They hide nothing; they are not ashamed. Man, with his soiled mind, covers himself. He will not even enter a drawing room with his breast and back naked, so alive are he and his mates to indecent suggestion. Man is the Animal that Laughs. But so does the monkey, as Mr. Darwin pointed out, and so does the Australian bird that is called the laughing jackass. No—Man is the Animal that Blushes. He is the only one that does it—or has occasion to.

3. Twain repeats his main idea, that man is a lower animal. What claim does he make here?

At the head of this article we see how “Three monks were burnt to death” a few days ago and a prior was “put to death with atrocious cruelty.” Do we inquire into the details? No; or we should find out that the prior was subjected to unprintable mutilations. Man—when he is a North American Indian—gouges out his prisoner’s eyes; when he is King John, with a nephew to render untroublesome, he uses a red-hot iron; when he is a religious zealot dealing with heretics in the Middle Ages, he skins his captive alive and scatters salt on his back; in the first Richard’s time, he shuts up a multitude of Jewish families in a tower and sets fire to it; in Columbus’s time he captures a family of Spanish Jews and—but that is not printable; in our day in England, a man is fined ten dollars for beating his mother nearly to death with a chair, and another man is fined forty dollars for having four pheasant eggs in his possession without being able to satisfactorily explain how he got them.

4. What does the bolded example show? Why do you think Twain includes it?

Of all the animals, man is the only one that is cruel. He is the only one that inflicts pain for the pleasure of doing it. It is a trait that is not known to the higher animals. The cat plays with the frightened mouse; but she has this excuse, that she does not know that the mouse is suffering. The cat is moderate—unhumanly moderate: She only scares the mouse, she does not hurt it; she doesn’t dig out its eyes, or tear off its skin, or drive splinters under its nails—man fashion;
when she is done playing with it, she makes a sudden meal of it and puts it out of its trouble.

Man is the Cruel Animal. He is alone in that distinction.

5. What specific trait of man is Twain ridiculing in this paragraph?

The higher animals engage in individual fights, but never in organized masses. Man is the only animal that deals in the atrocity of war. He is the only one that gathers his brethren about him and goes forth in cold blood and with calm pulse to exterminate his kind. He is the only animal that for sordid wages will march out, as Hessians did in the American Revolution, and as the boyish Prince Napoleon did in the Zulu war, and help to slaughter strangers of his own species who have done him no harm and with whom he has no quarrel.

Man is the only animal that robs his helpless fellow of his country--takes possession of it and drives him out of it or destroys him. Man has done this in all the ages. There is not an acre of ground on the globe that is in possession of its rightful owner, or that has not been taken away from owner after owner, cycle after cycle, by force and bloodshed.

6. Explain how this example supports Twain’s claim.

Man is the only Slave. And he is the only animal who enslaves. He has always been a slave in one form or another, and has always held other slaves in bondage under him in one way or another. In our day he is always some man’s slave for wages and does that man’s work; and this slave has other slaves under him for minor wages, and they do his work. The higher animals are the only ones who exclusively do their own work and provide their own living.

Definitions Based on Context:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Exercise 2: Compose a strong paragraph to explain why you agree or disagree with Twain. Are people much more civilized and caring than Twain claims? Or is Twain correct that people are often cruel and inhumane? Support your claim with examples.