**Mark Twain and Jane Austen**

When Mark Twain was traveling on his lecture circuit, he was asked by a budding writer how to make characters seem real. Twain answered, “Don’t say ‘The old lady screamed.’ Just bring her on and let her scream.” In other words, Twain was advocating writing dramatically, showing the story as much as possible through dialogue, instead of just telling the events. Austen does the same thing.

Interestingly, Twain was notorious for making disparaging remarks about Jane Austen. He once said, “Every time I read *Pride and Prejudice*, I want to dig her up and hit her over the head with her own shin bone.” It’s funny, but think about that statement. **Every time** he reads it? How many times has he read the book, and if he hates it so much, why does he keep reading it?

What do you think? Does Austen do a good job showing rather than telling? Is it possible that Twain actually liked Austen? Some believe that he only criticized her to annoy his friend William Dean Howells, who praised Austen’s writing skills frequently and enthusiastically.

Talk with a partner about this question and be prepared to explain your thoughts to the class.