

## Field House Museum's September School Days Program

### Literary Works of Eugene Field



Grade Levels: 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>

Estimated Time: One Class Period

Topic: Journalism

#### Show-Me Standards

##### **Communication Arts**

1. Speaking and writing standard English (including grammar, usage, punctuation, spelling, capitalization)
3. Reading and evaluating nonfiction works and material (such as biographies, newspapers, technical manuals)
4. Writing formally (such as reports, narratives, essays) and informally (such as outlines, notes)
5. Participating in formal and informal presentations and discussions of issues and ideas

#### Objectives

1. To engage children with the art of journalism and help them to understand the importance of the profession.
2. Further improve students' writing, reading, and research abilities.
3. Improve students' ability to read non-fiction material and be able to analyze and evaluate it.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Introduction

The Field House Museum is a historic house and museum in St. Louis, Missouri that was the home of Roswell and Eugene Field. Roswell was a key attorney in the historic Dred Scott case. Eugene was Roswell's oldest living son and he went on to be a noted children's poet and journalist. The Field House Museum honors the memory of both men through collections and exhibits.

This packet reflects educational information and activities from the institution's Museum School Days. The focus of the September program is to educate students on literature through the examples of Eugene Field's works. Eugene wrote both fictional works, such as his poetry, and non-fiction works, such as his newspaper articles.

Newspapers and journalists are important in today's society as well as when Eugene was alive. The history of newspapers goes all the way back to 1468 when Guttenberg invented the printing press, which made it possible to mass produce a literary work or works to inform the public. The first newspapers did not start appearing until the 1600s. These papers separated themselves from other works by being published on a regular basis, and reporting on things such as local events.

Eugene Field worked as a journalist for many years and, with several different papers. He started his journey into journalism at the *St. Louis Evening Journal* and later became the city editor, an editor that deals with local daily news. In 1875 Field moved to St. Joseph, Mo, and became the city editor of the *St. Joseph Gazette*. A year and a half later Field returned to St. Louis to become an editorial paragraphist for the *St. Louis Journal* and the *St. Louis Times-Journal*. He then became the manager and editor of the *Kansas City Times* until he moved to Denver to be a dual editor and writer for the *Denver Tribune*. Field was later offered a job at the *Chicago Daily News*, where he began his popular column, "Sharps and Flats." Eugene was also the corresponding secretary for the Missouri Press Association for two years.

During his time as a journalist, Eugene wrote about many different things, especially during his time in Chicago. There he had a personal column, "Sharps and Flats", where he wrote about almost anything he wanted to. Personal columns are usually used for individuals or private businesses to print personal ads or notes. One of the many things Eugene wrote about were reviews about dramas, plays, poetry, or other works of literature. This review of *William Dean Howell's Early Verse* comes from his column.

**Directions:**

In this piece, Eugene is reviewing an anthology, or a collection of poems, focusing on William Howell's poems within the larger work. Read Eugene's review of Howell's poems within the larger *The Poets and Poetry of the West with the Biographical and Critical Notices* and answer the questions below. Take notes while you are reading about anything you find interesting and your favorite poem by Mr. Howell.

Eugene Fields Review of *William Dean Howell's Early Verse*

"It has become our rare fortune to become possessed of a volume printed at Columbus, Ohio, in 1860, under the auspices of one William T. Coggeshall. This book is entitled "The Poets and Poetry of the West with Biographical and Critical Notices." We think that the compilers of "The History of American Poetry," Mr. E. C. Stedman and Miss Ellen M. Hutchinson, ought to have a copy of this book, and we have asked the indefatigable Mr. Sizer (who is truly one of the most learned and most ingenious of Chicago bibliophiles) to hunt us up an extra copy for our Eastern friends.

"William D. Howells," says "Poets and Poetry of the West," "was born in Martinsville, Belmont Country, Ohio, in the year 1837. His father being a printer and publisher, he learned the printing business in the paternal office at Hamilton, Butler County, whither his parents moved in 1840. Mr. Howells has been recognized as a writer about six years. He has been editorially connected with the Cincinnati *Gazette* and with the *Ohio State Journal* and has contributed poems to the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine and to the *Saturday Press*, New York, and is now a regular correspondent of the *Ohio Farmer*." The only misstatement in this biography is that concerning Mr. Howells's present employment. Mr. Howells is now in Europe but not as the correspondent of *Ohio Farmer*; he is connected with a pictorial magazine published in New York City. However, we may overlook the inaccuracy of the biographer as to this particular, since the information he had at hand was necessarily limited.

Before he left the West Mr. Howells wrote a good deal of poetry; it was the genuine stuff. His was a true poetic nature, to which the beautiful surroundings of his quiet Ohio home appealed for tuneful response, and ne'er appealed in vain. "Poems of Two Friends," "Drifting Away," "Dead," "The Poet's Friends," "The Movers," "Summer Dead," and "The Bobolinks are Singing" will live among the last lingering remnants of Western literature. We mean this; we do not say it in the satirical sense in which Porson said of one of Southey's poems: "It will be read when Virgil and Homer are forgotten." And, by the way that nasty creature Byron stole this witticism for his "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" – stole it and spoiled it.

All the long August afternoon,  
The little, drowsy stream  
Whispers a melancholy tune,

As if it dreamed of June  
And whispered in its dream.

There is no wind to stir the leaves,  
The harsh leaves overhead;  
Only the querulous cricket grieves,  
And shrilling locust weaves  
A song of summer dead.

This is a beautiful picture; it is full of suggestion, of beautiful suggestion. The reference to leaves reminds us of a little novel recently written by Miss Amélie Rives. This novel begins with a description of weather, and in this description we read that the dry leaves were driven hither and thither by the incessant rain.

That the poet Howells is an admirer of Longfellow appears in the poems “Drifting Away” and “The Movers,” for the ancients spake truly when they argued that imitation is the sincerest admiration:

Parting was over at last, and all the good-bys had been spoken;  
Up the long hillside the white-tented wagon moved slowly, Bearing the mother and children while onward before  
them the father  
Trudged with his gun on his arm, and the faithful housedog beside him,  
Grave and sedate, as if knowing the sorrowful thoughts of his master.

The words “grave” and “sedate” appear to be favorites with the poet. They occur again in “The Poet’s Friends”:

The robin sings in the elm;  
The cattle stand beneath,  
Sedate and grave, with great brown eyes  
And fragrant meadow breath.

It seems that in the field of humor and of dialect our Howells once exploited a genius whose fire now inspires the best and most popular of Hoosier bards, viz., James Whitcomb Riley. To the *Ohio Farmer*, April 13, 1858, Mr. Howells contributed the following verses, entitled “Deep Rock”:

A fell’r may live till he reckins he knows p’etty much all wuth knowin’,  
But the longer he lives the more he finds that the world keeps a-go-in’  
Last week I went down to York state to visit my marr’d daughter,  
An’ ther I met up with a newfangled trick ‘at folks calls mineral water.

Was n’t a-feelin’ none to peart, sperrits was kind er droopin’;

Reekin a pint er tansy gin ‘u’d er fetched me round a whoopin’;  
But Lizzie allowed when folks were sick along in the spring they’d orter  
Doctor their livers with that ‘ere stuff’ at folks calls mineral water.

Harnsome liquor as ever flowed, an’ clear as the Miami River,  
But stronger’n a yoke er speckled steers when it tackles a fell’r’s liver  
Took one swig on ‘t –thess f’r fun, –then fer a day’nd a quarter  
Did n’t do much but loaf around tendin’ that mineral water.

Made all the home folks madder’n fire, specially Daughter Lizzie;  
Did n’t hev time fer vistin’ ‘em –water kep’ keepin’ me busy.  
Of all the –say, ef you’re feelin’ sick or under the weather sorter,  
Jest sen’ to town f’r a bottle or two of that nice, smooth mineral water.

Since Mr. Howells has left the West he has written very little verse. It is probable that in the noisy streets of Gotham he finds little inspiration to set the bird to singing in his heart. We remember to have heard the eminent John A. Cockerill say: “To the man fresh from the West, life in this great city is oppressive; the high buildings, the multitudes of people, even the very atmosphere weighs him down.” Yet we doubt not that ever and anon the poet Howells wanders in mind back to the pleasant rural scenes of yore, and that there then comes into his bosom that same yearning that forced from the gifted Ada Sweet the impassioned cry:

Oh for the trill of robin’s note  
And a whiff of the new-mown hay,  
And oh for a book in the quiet nook  
Of the barn where the dorkings lay!

To the perusal of Mr. Stedman and his fair collaborateur we would commend this reference to our poet in a review printed the *New York Saturday Press* nearly thirty years ago: Mr. Howells is a man of genius, nevertheless. All along the chain of his thought play keen lighting jets of poetic passion, which illumine the dark places of human heart as lighting illumines the midnight sky.”

*Chicago Daily News*, Eugene Field, “Sharps and Flats,” May 19, 1888

### **Activity:**

Eugene Field had a lot of respect for Mr. Howell and his works and showed that throughout this review. He states that he wishes that the only problem he has with Mr. Howell’s work being in *The Poets and Poetry of the West with Biographical and Critical Notices* is that Howell is no

longer in the West, but East. Considering this, Eugene still believes that Howell's poetry was up to par and wishes that Howell would have written more after he moved to the East.

Now that you have read Eugene Field's review of *William Dean Howell's Early Verse*, think about how he reviewed Howell's Verse. Why did he choose to review it in the first place? What was his opinion on the works? What are some examples of when he states his opinions on Howell's works inside of the review? After you write your responses on a separate sheet of paper move on to the activity below.

### **Optional Activity:**

Now that you have read Eugene Field's review over a form of literature, read the review of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. Compare how this review is different than Eugene's review. Which review do you think is better written? Were you convinced by the reviews to read either William Dean Howell or J.K. Rowling's work, if so which one and why? Do you think that the more than 100-year gap in between the two reviews has affected how you react today, if so how? After reading the second review, write your answers on a separate sheet of paper. Then discuss with a small group why journalism and newspapers are important, even if it is just a review. Try to get a list of 3-4 reasons why newspapers are important and then share with the rest of the class.

### **The Scotsman's Review of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone***

"If you buy or borrow nothing else this summer for the young readers in your family, you must get hold of a copy of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* by JK Rowley (Bloomsbury, £ 4.99). This is a book which makes an unassailable stand for the power of fresh, inventive storytelling in the face of formula horror and sickly romance.

The story of the book's origins is a fairy tale all of its own. This first novel from an Edinburgh-based author has just received a six-figure advance in America. Yet it was written in snatches by an unemployed single mother. Joanne Rowling arrived in Edinburgh penniless following the break-up of her marriage. The book took shape as she scribbled feverishly in cafes as soon as her baby daughter dropped off to sleep in her pushchair. The fairy tale ending is now complete, with money and critical praise being showered on the adventures of young Harry. The sequel is already nearly completed.

In the first book, we hear of Harry's early years, which following the death of his parents have been spent in Dickensian misery at the hands of his horrible aunt and uncle. But help is at hand and despite all manner of obstacles, he soon finds himself on platform



nine-and-three-quarters at Waterloo Station, from which the train for Hogwarts School of Wizardry and Witchcraft departs.

What distinguishes this novel from so many other fantasies is its grip on reality. Harry is a hugely likeable child, kind but not wet, competitive but always compassionate. The scene in which he thwarts a bully's attempt to unseat him from his broomstick during an exacting game of Quidditch - a cross between lacrosse and hockey, played on land and in the air - will ring bells with the most level-headed of readers.

He has much to live up to. His parents were both respected and much loved. The wizard who killed them, an individual so ghastly that his name can never be uttered, remains at large and a constant threat, and there are deliciously tense and frightening moments. Rowling uses classic narrative devices with flair and originality and delivers a complex and demanding plot to create a hugely entertaining thriller. She is a first-rate writer for children.”

The Scotsman, “From the archives: The Scotsman reviews Harry Potter, 28 June 1997” June 27, 2016

### **Activity:**

Eugene loved poetry and enjoyed reading it. Write about something you enjoy, such as a movie or a book, and review it. Research the item you choose to review and write down when it was created, who created it, and how other reviewers like the item you have chosen. State why you enjoy it and at least one suggestion on how the creators could improve their work. What is your favorite part or scene from the item you are reviewing? Do you hope that the creator of the work you are reviewing continues to create more related to the work, such as a sequel? On a separate sheet of paper write 2 paragraphs answering these questions.