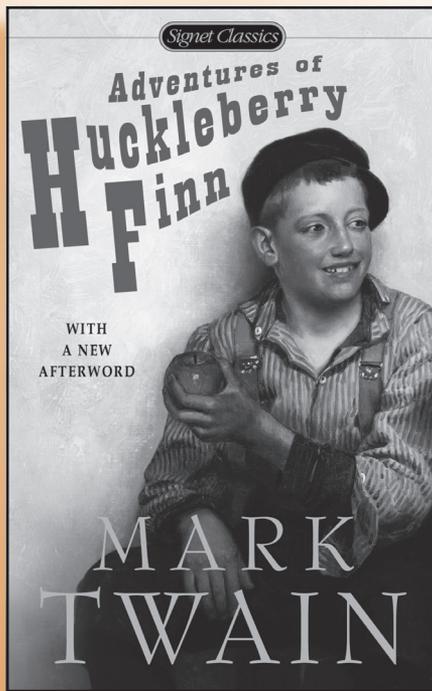


*Signet Classics*

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE SIGNET CLASSICS EDITION OF

MARK TWAIN'S

# ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN



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## INTRODUCTION

A study of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is an adventure in understanding changes in America itself. The book, at the center of American geography and consciousness, asks readers to reexamine definitions of "civilization" and freedom, right and wrong, social responsibility and inhumanity. Published in 1885, the novel recounts those pre-civil war days when the controversy over slavery, with designated slave and Free states, disfigured the face of America and its view of itself as a land of the free. Both geographically and otherwise, the story is an examination of life at the center: the center of America's premiere river, the Mississippi in the middle of the geographical United States, with slave states below, free states above, which is the route toward freedom and escape for Huck and Jim; the center of one of the foremost conflicts on American soil, slavery, which soon results in a civil war; the center of the coming of age of both a young man and a nation that struggle to understand redefinitions of nationhood and freedom, right and wrong; and the center of a shift from Romanticism to Realism in art and letters that would provide for a new way for Americans to express—and re-create—themselves.

The novel offers an excellent example of American picaresque fiction and meaningful use of dialect, although this dialect may be difficult reading for students for whom English is not a first language. Although the final chapters of the book seem rushed and rife with coincidence, the young picaro, Huck Finn, renders the story readable, convincing, and provocative. The work itself offers the reader so much more than a sequel to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and the humor for which Twain is known; for in Huckleberry Finn's voice—a voice as black as it is white and as poor and uneducated as it is honest—we are placed at the center of several controversies, both those within the novel and those of censorship that have surrounded the book since its publication.

Often considered Twain's masterpiece, it is not surprising perhaps that it took him some eight years to complete the manuscript, from 1876 to 1884, a period in which he wrote and published eight other works, including *A Tramp Abroad*, *The Prince and the Pauper*, and *Life on the Mississippi*, all of which contribute to the realism of characters and prose within *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. While the novel is not an easy one to teach or to read, it is a profoundly important work in American letters, calling for a sophisticated level of understanding of the difference between Huck's narrative voice and Twain's use of that voice. As Shelley Fishkin suggests in "Teaching Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*," "Mark Twain's consciousness and awareness is larger than that of any of the characters of the novel... Huck is too innocent and ignorant to understand what's wrong with his society and what's right about his own transgressive behavior. Twain, on the other hand, knows the score." Ralph Ellison, referenced in Fishkin's article, agrees that some critics of the novel confuse the narrator with the author. Regardless of its detractors, the novel has stirred controversy since 1885, both as a commentary on American race relations, class divisions, and violence, and as an examination of humanity's social responsibility attendant in its pursuit of freedom. Because it brings to the classroom discussions of race, conformity, slavery, freedom, autonomy and authority, and so much more, students and teachers must prepare to be open about these subjects and consider strategies to encourage honest and respectful debate. Despite censorship, the book has been published in over 100 editions in more than 53 languages around the world as both an American classic and a study of moral dilemmas facing all humankind.

## ABOUT THIS TEACHER'S GUIDE

This guide has three primary sections to aid the teaching of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: Pre-Reading, During the Reading, and After Reading the Novel. Pre-reading activities are designed to engage students with contexts, ideas, and themes necessary to their understanding of the text. A portion of the pre-reading suggestions include developing contexts for understanding the novel: historical, literary, musical, and artistic. Teachers may wish to discuss the novel's dialect and censorship issues that surround it, so that students may be attuned to the language of the text. During Reading information and activities offer summaries, questions, quotations, and activities for each block of chapters. Teachers may use the questions and quotations for whole-class or small-group discussions, for individual writing, or group activities. After-Reading offers culminating activities to help students and teachers examine themes and larger questions presented by the novel as a whole, including projects, such as the use of films of *Huck Finn* and research activities teaching critical approaches to literature, an activity that raises the level of inquiry for all readings within the curriculum. Extended reading suggestions are embedded within the projects as a guide for teachers and more advanced students who would like to read more about this novel's place in the American literary canon.

## LIST OF CHARACTERS

**Huck Finn**, the hero, picaro, and narrator of the work, is a motherless boy, abused and kidnapped by his drunken father until he fakes his own death and runs away. It is Huck's vision through which readers will see other characters and events of the novel and his resolution to the moral dilemmas with which he is faced.

**Jim**, Miss Watson's slave, runs away when he learns that he will be sold South and separated from his family. His goal is to journey up the Ohio River to free states where he will work and save money to purchase the freedom of his wife and family. Despite his plans to steal himself, Jim becomes Huck's friend and parent figure on their adventures, and Huck resolves to go to hell rather than betray his friend's trust.

**Tom Sawyer**, Huck's boyhood friend and foil, gives Huck access to complicated adventures found within the Romantic novels he reads and tries to recreate in his own lies and pretend adventures.

**Widow Douglas**, the adoptive mother of Huck Finn, hopes to house, feed, teach, love, and educate him, effectively undoing the abuse and harsh upbringing of Pap Finn. Her method of parenting stands in sharp contrast to Pap's and offers Huck a choice of lifestyles.

**Miss Watson**, sister of Widow Douglas and owner of Jim, teaches Huck about religion and how to spell. Her teachings go largely unheeded.

**Pap Finn**, Huck's drunken father, kidnaps his son to procure his \$6000, a sum safeguarded by Judge Thatcher. He teaches that religion and education can ruin a man by 'civilizing' him, thereby interfering with his freedom. Still, Pap is not a free man himself, clear captive of alcohol, ignorance, prejudice, poverty, and violence.

**Judge Thatcher** takes charge of Huck's money to keep Pap from stealing it from him.

**Judith Loftus**, a minor character, catches Huck when, dressed as a girl, he tries to find out information. Her kindness in feeding him and teaching him to dress and behave as a girl makes a profound impression on him.

**The Shepherdsons**, the family whose feud with the Grangerfords causes Huck to question the sanity of fighting for generations about something no one can remember.

**Harney**, Sophia Grangerford's love, runs away with her, leading to a bloodbath.

**The Grangerfords** take in Huck when his raft crashes near their home. They feed and clothe him and introduce him to their life of advantage and senseless violence.

**Buck**, the youngest Grangerford, is about Huck's age and becomes his friend. Huck witnesses Buck's desire to kill a Shepherdson and his death at their hands.

**Emmeline**, the Grangerfords' dead daughter, is very much present in their family via her paintings and poetry about dead people. Huck is inspired to write something for her but discovers his limitations.

**Sophia**, the most beautiful of the Grangerford daughters, uses Huck to exchange a message with Harney Shepherdson about their elopement.

**The King**, the older of the two con-men who take refuge on the raft, insists that he must be treated like a king, effectively making slaves of both Huck and Jim. Among the cons he perpetrates is pretending to be Peter Wilks' brother, Harvey, to abscond with the family's wealth and property. His evil deeds, not the least of which is selling Jim, catch up with him, and he is tarred and feathered with the Duke.

**The Duke**, younger than the King, convinces Huck and Jim that he is a duke who deserves royal treatment. More crafty, scheming, and educated than the King, he introduces the King to stage acting as a means to swindle others and pretends to be the deaf and dumb brother of Peter Wilks.

**Colonel Sherburn**, a well-dressed, articulate, and respected member of his town, shoots a drunken Boggs down in full daylight for shouting at him in the streets. When the town seeks revenge for the murder, Sherburn calls them cowards and animals—not men—who would shoot him in the back or lynch him with hoods on, but not face him.

**Boggs**, drunken brunt of the locals' jibes, accuses Colonel Sherburn of swindling him and is shot by Sherburn. Huck is struck by both the low and mean character of the locals and by the definition of manhood that Sherburn exemplifies.

**Peter Wilks**, at his death, leaves his estate to his daughters and his two brothers from England.

**Mary Jane**, nineteen-year-old daughter of Peter Wilks, is Huck's favorite girl for her beauty, sweetness, and toughness. Although she trusts the King and Duke's lies and gives them her father's money, Huck pities her plight and tells her that the two are conning her family.

**Susan and Joanner**, aged fifteen and fourteen, are the younger daughters of Peter Wilks. The youngest has a harelip but is given to doing good works in the community.

**Harvey and William Wilks**, Peter's two brothers, have traveled from Sheffield, England to see their brother, only to learn that he has died and imposters have assumed their own identities to claim his estate. William is a deaf mute.

**Aunt Sally and Uncle Silas Phelps** own the property where Jim is being held. Aunt Sally is Tom's aunt, making it convenient for the two boys to live with her while plotting the escape of Jim.

## SYNOPSIS OF THE NOVEL

The novel begins where *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* concludes, with Tom and Huck Finn each receiving \$6000 from the treasure they found which will be the source of many of Huck's problems. Miss Watson and Widow Douglas's desire that Huck be clean, well-fed, clothed, and schooled become code for Pap that he is becoming "sivilized," the result of education and religion. Money leads his father to kidnap and abuse him in an effort to drink away his windfall.

Huck approaches each of these problems with his native wit. He runs away to Jackson's Island where he meets another runaway, Jim, Miss Watson's slave who is running to freedom in fear of being separated from his family and sold south. As they raft toward freedom, Huck questions what is commonly accepted as right and wrong in the world and chooses to align himself with friendship, kindness, love, and freedom.

Among their adventures with wrecked ships, murderers, heavy fog, slave hunters, and accidents, the two encounter cruelty, trickery, violence, and hardship along the Mississippi River. Huck is taken in by the Grangerfords, well-to-do plantation owners who actively feud with the Shepherdsons, leading to the deaths of many of their men and boys. Jim is cared for by the family's slaves until they can reunite and head toward their next and most disturbing liaison—with the Duke and the King, two con-men who use them as they go from town to town scheming people out of their money. Huck's ultimate escape from these rascals comes at the price of Jim's being sold by the King and held captive at the Phelps farm, coincidentally the home of Tom Sawyer's aunt. Tom and Huck then conspire to rescue Jim, who has already been freed by Miss Watson at her death. Since Jim is free, Huck's Pap is dead, and Aunt Sally has plans to adopt Huck, the boys determine to head for Indian Territory lest they be "sivilized" further.

Huck and Jim's adventures are rife with life lessons, various with the hope for freedom, the pain and loss of missed opportunities, the memories of family and friends, the cruelty they've witnessed, and the moral dilemmas they encounter. And yet among these trials, they meet with kindness among strangers, the comfort of life on a raft, lovely days and nights of long conversations, the redemption of real friendship, and the healing beauty of nature itself on the river.

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## TEACHING HUCK FINN

### PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

These activities are designed to strengthen students' knowledge of 19th century American history, literature, art, and music, while deepening their understandings of literary genres, elements of fiction, and tenets of Romanticism, Realism, and Regionalism, especially as they relate to *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Teachers should choose activities that best suit their own goals for student learning.

#### I. BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

To immerse students in the setting of the novel, add music and art to your historical and literary curriculum. They will enhance the level of inquiry you achieve with your students and their own competence to engage meaningfully with the text.

#### HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THE SLAVE NARRATIVE

This novel is grounded firmly at the center of American geography and consciousness, making it necessary for readers to understand something of the pre-Civil War slavery controversy, free and slave states, and the Mississippi River's division of East from West and North from South, a primary conduit for people and goods. Students of this novel will benefit from reading slave narratives, especially of those who escaped slavery via waterways: Frederick Douglass, Linda Brent/Harriet Jacobs, and Olaudah Equiano, all of which are found in Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s *Classic American Slave Narratives*. These oral histories offer a basis on which to consider Jim's portrayal in *Huck Finn*, as well as the attitudes and life styles that surrounded slavery.

Students should be able to visualize and locate on a map where the events of the novel take place. Ask students to consult a map of the United States, preferably one of the early 1830's, showing which states are Slave and Free, which states border the Mississippi River, and the place names of rivers that will provide Jim his escape to freedom. This initial examination of geography will help students to chart the movement of the escapees in the novel. Teachers can find suitable maps at these web sites: [www.sonofthesouth.net/slavery/slave-maps/map-free-slave-states.htm](http://www.sonofthesouth.net/slavery/slave-maps/map-free-slave-states.htm) and <http://www.learner.org/biographyofamerica/prog10/maps/>.

Ask students to use slave narratives, the websites below, and their history texts to research these issues of American slavery: (a) the effect of enslavement on Africans and their descendants, (b) how slaves sustained a sense of selfhood and cultural identity in slave-master relationships, (c) how slavery affected white people, even non-slave-owning, (d) how slave laws changed over time, especially just before the Civil War, (e) the aspects of slavery emphasized by abolitionists and freed slaves in their narratives, and (f) how a free or slave state was determined. Also encourage students to ask their own questions about this important issue in American life and to answer those questions using textual evidence. Among dozens of websites that offer worthwhile historical contexts are these:

**National Humanities Center's Toolbox Library:  
Primary Resources in US History and Literature:**  
<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/index.htm>

**NHC's TeacherServe, Freedom's Story, links to 19th Century Issues:**  
[www.nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nineteen.htm](http://www.nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nineteen.htm)

**Timeline of African-American History:**  
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/aap/timeline.html>

**History Matters, archives and narratives:**  
<http://historymatters.gmu.edu>

**North American Slave Narratives and Images:**  
<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/>

**The Slave Narrative:**  
<http://www.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/slave.htm>

Small groups may best research and share findings and report back to their classmates. Ask each group to ground questions in one or more of the suggested slave narratives.

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT: 19TH CENTURY REFORMS**

Ask students to research 19th century reforms in small groups: abolition, women's suffrage, utopian societies, prison and asylum reform, educational reform, and political reform. Use the song, "A Hundred Years Hence" (c.1850) to introduce the reforms (words by Frances Gage; music by John Hutchinson). Each group will focus on the goals and outcomes of their particular reform. Links to works, writers, and reforms can be found on Brief Timelines of American Literature and Events: <http://www.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/1840.htm>

Ask students to read Elizabeth Cady Stanton's "Declaration of Sentiments" from *History of Woman Suffrage* (Seneca Falls convention on women's rights, 1848) and Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I a Woman?" (from her speech at a woman's rights convention in Akron, Ohio in 1852), both readily available on the web. While both works deal with the women's movement in the United States, Truth's status as slave complicates the issue. Discuss: If Truth's argument results in her being treated as a woman, then enslaved males must be accorded status as men. How will this recognition confront existing laws? Considering that women in *Huck Finn* are widowed, spinsters, or unmarried—women who introduce troubled boys to religion, education, and civilization—ask students to describe the role of women during the reform movements and in the novel.

## **CREATING CONTEXT THROUGH WORKS OF ART**

Consider using art that represents Huck Finn and Jim and that attaches to broader themes of civilization, social responsibility, conformity, and freedom/ enslavement. Make a power point slide show of these art prints for your students to analyze before reading the novel. Play one of the "water" slave songs below while you view the slides, and discuss the importance of the river and boats in the art and the songs, as well as in the pre-Civil War history and slave narratives.

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**Thomas Hart Benton's 1936 mural, "A Social History of the State of Missouri"**

<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/railton/huckfinn/benton.html>

Ask students to examine the mural for scenes that tell the story of Missouri's state history. Which theme(s) is most broadly depicted in this work?

**George Caleb Bingham's "Fur Traders Descending the Missouri" (1845)**

[http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ho/10/na/ho\\_33.61.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ho/10/na/ho_33.61.htm)

Ask students to consider occupations that are part of river life, in 1845 and now. Compare the economic reward to the danger of the job.

**Norman Rockwell's 1940 Illustration, "Jim and the Hairball"**

<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/railton/huckfinn/jimill07.html>;

see *Representing Jim, 1885-1985*

**E.W. Kemble's Original Illustrations of Huckleberry Finn with commentary**

<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/twain/huckfinn.html>; also see Mark Twain in His Times link. Rockwell and Kemble illustrate scenes from the novel itself. What biases do these illustrators exhibit in their depictions of Jim, Huck, and characters from the novel? Would any of these illustrations be considered racist or stereotypical by today's standards? How is art used in these illustrations to inform readers beyond the written word?

**John Gast's "American Progress or Manifest Destiny" (1872)**

[http://cpr.org/Museum/Ephemera/American\\_Progress.html](http://cpr.org/Museum/Ephemera/American_Progress.html)

One mark of civilization is social, political, and cultural advancement. In this painting, what or who represents progress? Who is not progressing in the work? What is the plight of those who are deemed uncivilized?

## CREATING CONTEXT THROUGH MUSIC

Ask students to do small projects exploring one or more of the songs below or discuss the lyrics and intentions of the song as a whole class. Some of the slave songs have dual interpretations, with purposefully subversive elements in them that suggest ways of running away successfully, as well as being spiritually aware. Note that more than a few use water images and crossing of rivers to "promised lands"—here either heaven or Free states. Minstrelsy, racist though it may be to us now, was among the first musical forms to humanize slaves. Abolition songs, often high-brow and quite involved poetically and musically, seek to inspire Abolitionist zeal and pity for those in slavery and will remind students of the laws governing both slaves and those who helped to free them. Post a map of the pre-Civil War United States in your classroom so that students can clearly see the network of rivers, free and slave states, and open territories that are a part of the period they study.

### 1. Spirituals and Slave Songs

Each of these songs gives some insight into the lives, treatment, and hopes of slaves. While "Follow the Drinking Gourd" refers to gourds used for drinking water in the fields, it also refers to the Big Dipper and gives directions for escape and finding one's way across the Ohio River to Free states. Other songs, though called spirituals, refer not only to achieving freedom through faith and death, but dually through running away.

Slave life left too many motherless (or fatherless) in separations of families, making these songs often mournful. Students should examine both the lyrics and texts of these works in connection with Jim's and other slaves' plight in *Huck Finn*. (Note that Huck is a motherless child himself).

"Follow the Drinking Gourd"

"Deep River"

"Michael Row the Boat Ashore"

"Wade in the Water" (contains river imagery)

"Many Thousand Gone" (or "No More Auction Block for Me")

"Run Mourner Run"

"Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen"

"Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child"

## 2. Minstrel Songs

Note that the "shows" concocted by the King and Duke are reminiscent of low comedy and variety shows like minstrelsy: jokes, dances, soliloquies from other plays, and songs. In small groups, have students research Dan Emmet, Stephen Foster, Thomas "Daddy" Rice, Dan Bryant's Minstrels and others who popularized the form.

Which of these songs are now state anthems? How have the words changed over time? What "picture" of slavery and plantation life is painted by the songs? Study the texts of the songs, but also the rewritings of some of these songs and their uses over time. How do these songs humanize slaves, despite their racist wording?

Stephen Foster's "Massa's In De Cold Ground," "Old Folks at Home," and "Old Kentucky Home"

Dan Emmet's "Dixieland"

## 3. Abolition Songs

After reading the words of these songs, ask students to discern which were performed for abolition meetings in the parlors of movement leaders and which were more easily sung as marching songs. (Note that Huck is troubled by the prospect of being an abolitionist and what people in his slave state of Missouri will think of him should he help a slave escape).

"The Grave of the Slave"

"The Fugitive's Song"

"Get Off the Track!"

"Lincoln & Liberty"

"John Brown's Body"/ "Battle Hymn of the Republic" (recorded on *Tippecanoe and Tyler Too: a Collection of American Political Marches, Songs, and Dirges*, Chestnut Brass Company and Friends, 1992).

In small groups, have students select songs from the musical traditions above, research the background of the song, its composer, its purpose and use, and play a recording or perform it for the class. If it has an historical track record (like "Dixie" or "John Brown's Body"), share the other versions you may find. Ask students to research the number of rewritings and uses of "John Brown's Body."

Are current performers still engaged with these songs? Find modern recordings of your song or its versions (“Sometimes I Feel...” has been recorded by Richie Havens and Hootie and the Blowfish; several slave songs and spirituals have been recorded by Sweet Honey in the Rock; some of Stephen Foster’s songs are now state songs). Brave and talented students may wish to perform these songs for classmates. Try a sing-along in class.

Music Web Sites:

At these sites, find collections of music, historical and literary works, and lesson plans that incorporate these resources.

**From the American Collection:**

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/smhtml/smessay1.html>

**Titles in alphabetical order:**

<http://ingeb.org/catus.html>

**For historical, literary, and musical information, use American Memory Collections:**

[www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov) and <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/99/twain/intro.html>

#### 4. Modern Musical Connections to *Huckleberry Finn*

Teachers may prefer to play one or more songs while students enter and exit classes to set the mood for open discussion of the novel and its contexts. Consider these more modern pieces with which students may be familiar:

**“Old Man River” (from *Show Boat*):**

[www.stlyrics.com/lyrics/showboat/olmanriver.htm](http://www.stlyrics.com/lyrics/showboat/olmanriver.htm)

**“Moon River” (from *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*):**

[www.reelclassics.com/Movies/Tiffanys/moonriver-lyrics.htm](http://www.reelclassics.com/Movies/Tiffanys/moonriver-lyrics.htm)

**“Big River” (the musical version of *Huck Finn*, with 18 songs):**

[www.stlyrics.com/b/bigriver.htm](http://www.stlyrics.com/b/bigriver.htm)

### UNDERSTANDING LITERARY CONTEXT AND AUTHOR’S BACKGROUND

1. While every piece of writing can be read in isolation and may well stand on its own merits, readers become more informed and competent by acquiring an understanding of the period during which the writer lives and the events that precede and influence an author. Students can better understand what makes *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* a masterpiece by reading another novel dealing with the subject of slavery written before the civil war, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Critics of *Huck Finn* (see Jane Smiley’s “Say It Ain’t So, Huck”) have suggested that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is a better novel about slavery. (available online at <http://www.readbookonline.net/books/Stowe/32/>). While it is Romantic and so successful that Lincoln attributes the Civil War to the sentiments it aroused in its readers, it lacks the complexity of Twain’s work. As a companion or alternative to *Huck Finn*, students will readily see the distinctions between Romantic and Realistic fiction and judge for themselves the better work. Ask students: How can fictional writing arouse sympathies toward political and social action? Do modern novels have this effect? Name short stories, novels, or films that have brought about or contributed to social

movements. To assist with this, students can consult the Best Timeline of American Literature and Events (1880-1889): [www.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/1880.htm](http://www.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/1880.htm).

2. The struggle between ideals and realities helped shape American intellectual life and literature in many periods. The political, scientific, social reforms of the 19th century resulted in changes in the vision with which writers created literature and art as well. The early part of the century saw Rationalism give way to Romanticism and its offshoot, Transcendent-alism; the latter part of the century, especially during and after the Civil War, saw a rise in Realism and Regionalism, when writers examined life as it was actually lived and to record what they saw around them.

How did each of these reform movements use, and therefore contribute to, changes in literature and the arts? Ask students to use the following websites to chart the tenets of each literary movement. During their reading of the novel, ask them to use these charts to distinguish elements of each movement within the work (In *Huck Finn*, elements of all three literary and intellectual movements can be found).

**Romanticism in American Literature: “Gothic, Novel, and Romance”**

<http://www.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/novel.htm>

**Realism in American Literature**

<http://www.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/realism.htm>

**Regionalism and Local Color Fiction 1865-1895**

<http://www.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/lcolor.html>

### 3. Mark Twain's Biography

Students can read Twain's biography at: <http://www.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/twain.htm> or the teacher can provide a timeline or brief summary, such as the one below.

Since writers write about what they know, often incorporating parts of their own lives into the characters, setting, and plot of their novels, after reading this short biography, ask students to anticipate which of Twain's life events and habits of character might also be used in his character Huck Finn. Ask students: What has Twain freed if he is “the Lincoln of our literature”?

Born Samuel Langhorne Clemens on November 30, 1835 in Florida, Missouri, the Clemens family moved to Hannibal, Missouri when Sam was 4. This home would be the site of considerable tragedies for the family which would serve Twain in his future writings: the deaths of a younger sister and brother, his father's death of pneumonia when Clemens was twelve years old. In Hannibal, he would also witness the ill treatment of slaves, the violent behavior of both civilized and uncivilized people, the economic disparity among these frontier settlers, the religious zeal and hypocrisy coexisting in communities, river culture along the Mississippi—replete with spring floods and death and life-giving jobs and food. Although Twain moved frequently and ranged widely in the world, it was his upbringing on the Mississippi River that played perhaps the most important role in developing his understanding about the power of imagination and of friendship in harsh circumstances.

After his father's death, Sam joined his brother Orion at the *Hannibal Journal* newspaper,

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where he honed his writing skills and learned typesetting. These skills led to his move to St. Louis and a job as typesetter at the *St. Louis Evening News* and from there East to New York City and Philadelphia. Although he traveled widely in America and Europe, he returned at age 24 to the Mississippi, where he received his pilot's license as a river boat pilot, a profession he incorporated into his novels, indeed into his very pen name, Mark Twain, which he first used as a writer for the *Nevada Territorial Enterprise*. Although he enjoyed a fortunate life with his wife Olivia Langdon and his family, the early deaths of his four children would later lead to depression and anxiety. His extensive travels abroad, as well as the gold rush, westward movement, Indian wars, Civil War, and frontier life all made their way into his writings—some 53 works published from 1867 to 1909, only a year before his death in Connecticut at age 75. In his works are the characteristic humor, realistic dialect, local color, satire, and humanitarian themes, whether in *Roughing It* (1872), *Prince and the Pauper* (1882), *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and its sequels, or his masterpiece, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885). This latter work, begun in 1876, was not completed until 1884, with significant revision (some 1,700 changes) over that period, a fact revealed when the manuscript's first half was discovered in 1990 in a Hollywood attic.

While his early life sported no great attention to education, Twain would be awarded two honorary doctorate degrees from Yale and University of Missouri before his death. His fidelity to thought and learning rather than “education” rings clearly throughout Huck Finn's adventures, as Huck makes countless references to “thinking about things” and “studying over it and wishing I knewed,” all while avoiding school and civilizing, except to spite his father. Twain's humanizes native intelligence and articulation in an abused and orphaned boy who is seeking to learn right from wrong in his world. This portrayal of Huck as native son caused the novel to be called America's “first indigenous literary masterpiece,” William Dean Howells to call Twain “the Lincoln of our literature,” and Ernest Hemingway to write, “All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*.”

## ANTICIPATING ISSUES OF CENSORSHIP

Since its publication, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has been under fire as objectionable, not always for the same reasons. Some objections have stemmed from the overt violence and cruelty present in the text; some have originated in the companionship of a black slave and a white teenager; some have been offended that Southerners have been depicted as ignorant or backwater; but most frequently in the modern period, objections to racist words found in the text have led schools to suppress reading of the novel.

Discussion: Because the use of the word “nigger” in *Huckleberry Finn* may be very offensive to your students, it is a good idea to approach this issue directly with the class. Show students the PBS documentary video *Born to Trouble: Adventures of Huck Finn* (2001) which explores the controversy surrounding the novel. In one scene, a high school English teacher explains why she does not say the word “nigger” aloud in class while teaching the novel. The video is accompanied by a teaching guide authored by Katherine Schulten that gives an in-depth discussion of the history of this word and the effect on students encountering it in the novel. Teaching tips suggested in the guide include the teacher's being honest with her own feelings about teaching the novel and giving students

an initial opportunity to free write about their feelings about the word and reading the novel. Instructions for ordering the Huck Finn Coursepack including the documentary and teaching guide can be found online at: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/cultureshock/teachers/huck/generalresources.html>.

The following activities will engage students in discussion of stereotyping and the use of language to dominate and degrade people.

1. To lead students to think about the impact of language and how it can be used as weapon and controlling device, ask students to respond to the following statements, rating each statement using the following guide:

- 4 beside a statement with which they strongly agree**
- 3 if they agree somewhat**
- 2 if they disagree**
- 1 if they disagree strongly.**

1. Some words are so offensive that they should never be used to tell a story.
2. The names we use for others are not important.
3. The saying, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me” is true.
4. Members of an ethnic group can refer to themselves in language that would be inappropriate for others to use.

Ask students to choose one of the statements with which they agree or disagree the most, and free write about their point of view and why they believe as they do. Discuss their reactions as a group, asking students to begin with statements to which they have the strongest reactions—either positively or negatively. Encourage students to compare their points of view and to give concrete examples about why they feel as they do.

2. Ask your students to explain the meaning of stereotype and then to list some common stereotypes that are used to describe teens/young adults like themselves. Put this list on the board and then ask students to sort the list into three categories: positive, neutral, and negative labels. Discuss as a group: What do you notice about these labels? In what situations are they used? What impact do these labels have on the students? Why do they like or dislike these labels?

Use this activity to prepare students to read *Huckleberry Finn* in which stereotypes and racist language are used to name Jim and other Blacks. After students understand this concept of stereotyping and how language is used to reinforce stereotypes, have students read a selection from one of the slave narratives, such as Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Signet Classics, 2000) or the opening of *A Lesson Before Dying* by Ernest Gaines (Random House, 1993) in which a black man is called a “hog” who is not worth the state's expense to put to death.

What do slave narratives show about the individuality and humanity of the person telling her/his story? How does the act of telling his/her story empower the teller? How is language used to denigrate and control individuals as shown in the novel *A Lesson Before Dying*?

3. Although Twain is writing in the 19th century, the use of the “n-word” was not common. The “n-word” was used when an individual wanted to exert power over, degrade, offend, and control another person or slave. Ask the class to speculate as to why Twain would use this highly offensive word in his text. What would he be trying to convey about a character, or person, who used this inflammatory and offensive word choice? Ask students to think about contemporary films in which taboo words are used in great profusion. What is the purpose of using these words? What do the writers want to convey about the characters and the world view in which they are acting?

## UNDERSTANDING TWAIN'S USE OF DIALECT

Twain develops both the character of Huck Finn and other characters in the novel by using both dialect (local, regional language) and point of view. This use of regional dialect and local color contributes to the novel's being a Realistic work, rather than a Romantic one, representing a shift in 19th century fiction and a remarkable device in character development. Since the novel is told solely by Huck Finn, Twain reproduces not only Huck's unlettered, unsophisticated, and regional speech patterns, but he also, through Huck, varies the speech of others whom Huck recalls for the reader, each with his or her own contributing factors affecting speech: intellect and educational level, sophistication and socio-economic level, race, and gender. These factors are easily analyzed by readers who examine grammar, vocabulary, speech patterns, but all of the speakers of the novel are siphoned through the voice and point of view of Huck Finn, who narrates the novel. Huck's rendition of the speech patterns of other characters not only develops them as characters, but also sets his own speech apart from them and distinguishes him as a reliable narrator and imitator of others.

To better understand the dialect used in the novel, small groups should examine Huck's initial speech patterns in Chapter One, charting under these three headings: Grammar, Vocabulary, and Speech Patterns/Idioms. Discuss: How does Huck's dialect differ from Standard English? What does Huck's speech suggest about his intelligence and education? Do these patterns reveal him to be a reliable narrator for the novel? What would be the effect on the reader if all the characters in the novel spoke Standard English?

In telling the story, Huck proves himself a talented actor who mimics others' speech patterns. In groups, have students examine the speech of the characters below, noting the differences in this character's speech and social station and Huck's own dialect and social standing. Students who read and act well may read these speeches aloud to the class to get a further feel and “ear” for the shifts in dialect.

Judith Loftus, Missouri housewife, pp. 65-67

Colonel Sherburn, Arkansas gentry, pp. 145-146

Jim, runaway slave, p. 154

Arkansas loafers, p. 139

Discuss with students: How many different American dialects can you name? Where did these dialects come from? Do people judge one another based on language habits? Do you have a dialect? Do you change your speech patterns at times? When is it important for you to use Standard English and when is it appropriate for you to use dialect? Is one dialect better than another? Why or why not?

The PBS television series, *Do you speak American?* (2005), and its companion text by Robert MacNeil and William Cran offer a great deal of insight into American dialects and how regional linguistic shifts reflect changes in American life. For information about this resource, go to this web site: <http://www.pbs.org/speak/>.

## INITIAL EXPLORATION OF THEMES

Exploring several key themes before they read the novel can prepare students to read at a deeper level and will create an atmosphere of inquiry; of open response and discussion that may lead them to deepen their understanding of the novel.

### Coming of Age: Huck's Search for Identity

This theme focuses on the transition of the adolescent from carefree childhood to responsible adulthood. Generally, because young adults' search for identity can lead to isolation, confusion, and rebellion, this theme emphasizes psychological growth or maturity. While adolescents may seek independence and freedom to explore the unknown world around them, they are simultaneously dependent on adults in their lives for security, for economic and emotional support. Adolescents seek peer support as they struggle for independence, the freedom to discover themselves and their capabilities.

Select a novel or film most of your students know in which the main adolescent character changes in the course of the story (*To Kill a Mockingbird*, *My Antonia*, *Star Wars*, a Harry Potter novel, *A Separate Peace*, a recent teen movie). As a group, list the traits that characterize the protagonist from the beginning of the story and how he/she has changed by the end of the novel or film. When does the character begin to change and why?

As the character matures and grows up, how does his or her identity change? What stages or phases did the character pass through on the way to his new, or more mature, identity? Ask students if they believe that all young people go through similar stages in the maturation process.

### Social Responsibility; Conformity and Civilization

These two themes, though distinct, engage Huck Finn from the outset when the Widow Douglas and Miss Watson seek to guide Huck's development as a proper citizen with schooling, wholesome living, and religion, all of which Pap counters by teaching ignorance, abuse of self and others, and instinctive but uncivilized behaviors. Tom Sawyer tries to teach Huck how to live based upon his own readings of Romance fiction, lessons largely lost on practical-minded Huck. Interestingly, Huck learns about social responsibility, when and how to conform, and a truer meaning of being civilized from Jim, a runaway slave, and from negative examples of those who hurt others.

1. The "Golden Rule" is central to teachings in all major world religions. Ask students: What principles of living are suggested within this rule? What behaviors do we owe to our fellow beings? What challenges does social responsibility pose for us? Do moral guides such as the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule force conformity in a community or do they help a society free itself from fear and crime?
  2. Ask students to make a chart listing simple ways they have been taught to conform (forming lines, raising hands, wearing clothes, using inside and outside voices, saying thank you and please), who taught them this behavior, and the reasons for these teachings. Discuss whether these acts of conformity have been good or bad for society.
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3. Ask students to focus on ways of conforming that they consider bad for them and for their society (voting as another person says, mindless imitation of others in dress and behavior, memorization without meaningful learning, feuding) and the reasons for these behaviors. Under what conditions are social rules for conformity an abuse to its citizens? Do such rules create a civilized society?
4. As a class define civilization. Discuss: What behaviors would a civilized person and society exhibit? What factors would cause a person (like Huck Finn and Pap) to reject civilization in favor of freedom? Why do people still “drop out” of school and society? Can a person ever escape social responsibility, conformity, and civilization?

### **Friendship and Betrayal**

1. Without an initial act of friendship or promise, betrayal would be non-existent. After all, how can one betray a person or society he has not acknowledged and cares nothing about? The very act of betrayal suggests that in a world of friends and enemies, one has delivered the former to the latter. While Huck is still learning to be a friend, he plays pranks on Jim that are hurtful. Likewise, when Huck and Jim have helped the King and Duke, the pair abuse and take advantage of them, ultimately selling Jim. Ask students to write a short paragraph about what friendship means in their lives. Which is more important: to be a friend or to have a friend? (Ask them to choose one or the other, although they will agree that both are important, and list their reasons for their choice). Discuss: How does one go about learning to be a friend?
2. Ask students when they have experienced betrayal, either their own or someone else's betrayal of them. What feelings did they have at the time? What lesson did they learn?
3. All betrayals are not of people, but can also be of principles. Ask students if they have broken or betrayed one of their own strongly-held beliefs.

### **Freedom and Enslavement**

1. Any work set in the American South in the 1830's involving a runaway slave and a white boy must perforce be about enslavement and freedom. Both Jim and Huck define and redefine what it means to be free, even as they encounter scores of kinds of slavery, from alcoholism and ignorance to racism and economic want. Ask students to define freedom with examples of what each type of freedom will do in their lives (for example, not depending on others for a ride=having one's own car). Discuss: Are there occasions when freedoms involve enslavements, (for example, having one's own car/freedom=paying for gas, insurance, tires and having to work for those things)?
2. Ask students to make a chart with two columns: My Freedoms and My Slavery. In each column, they should write ways in which they are free and ways in which they consider themselves enslaved. Do they feel enslaved by others or by their own traits and choices? Suggest that they clarify this on the charts. Ask that they fold their papers down the middle to reveal only one of these columns. In small groups, trade papers and discuss ways in which group members can free themselves from their enslavements. (Running away should not be an option here).

### Anticipation Guide: True-False Discussion Starters

As a Pre-reading Exercise, ask students to mark the statements below as either True or False before reading *Huckleberry Finn*. Survey the class to see how students answered and why. After completing the novel, ask students to indicate how they believe the author and his narrator, Huck Finn would answer the questions, and mark again their post-reading answers. (You may also have students select their favorite character from the novel rather than Huck). Did students change their answers to any of the questions? Why?

PRE	AUTHOR	NARR	POST	
_____	_____	_____	_____	1. A good education makes a good person.
_____	_____	_____	_____	2. It is better to follow laws, even if we don't agree with all of them.
_____	_____	_____	_____	3. Children should obey and respect adults.
_____	_____	_____	_____	4. The ability to read and write is the most important skill a person can learn in life.
_____	_____	_____	_____	5. An adolescent's behavior is influenced by friends more than anything else.
_____	_____	_____	_____	6. An adolescent's attitudes are influenced by parents more than anything else.
_____	_____	_____	_____	7. A person must "play the game" to survive.
_____	_____	_____	_____	8. "Game playing" is dishonest.
_____	_____	_____	_____	9. Cruelty begets cruelty and kindness begets kindness.
_____	_____	_____	_____	10. When bad things happen to a person, he/she has done something to cause them.

### DURING READING ACTIVITIES

The following summaries, prompts, discussion questions, and activities should encourage deeper analysis of themes and ideas already considered in pre-reading. Other activities are designed to introduce new vocabulary or literary concepts, as spring-boards for deeper research, as hands-on activities for various learning styles, and as starters for journal entries, free writing, and writing across the curriculum. Quotations may be used for short writings or discussions, but also to offer students passages that may lead to understanding of characters and themes.

### CHAPTER SUMMARIES AND NOVEL PROGRESSION

#### USING THE INTRODUCTION BY PADGETT POWELL

Powell begins by suggesting that he does not believe in introductions, and then lists three pages of commentary about Mark Twain and his work, quotations from the writer

himself and from other writers and readers. Students may find references to other writers and works in the American canon daunting if they have not read or heard of these writers. But the sheer volume of discussion about Twain's—and *Huck Finn's*—place in American letters may prove a convenient springboard for classroom discussion after students have completed the novel. Ask students to read the Introduction and write down three points made by Powell that seem true or are interesting to them. Next, write down one assertion by the author that is difficult to understand.

## STUDYING THE CULTURE OF THE RIVER

### 1. Mapping the Novel

Have students continue research into the slavery conflict before the Civil War. On a map of Slave and Free states along the Mississippi River, have students chart Huck and Jim's path along the river with each chapter and episode of the adventures and predict Twain's choices as the two head further south. Do a brief study as to the positions of states along the Mississippi regarding slavery and why these states might argue the need for slavery or for abolition. Find references in the novel to the Underground Railroad, runaways and bounty hunters, Freedmen, and the "business," economics, and politics of slavery. Return to the Dynamic of Oppression in Pre-reading. Chart which of these methods of oppression (so often recounted in slave narratives) are used within the novel.

2. The Mississippi River is a major character in this novel, and a dynamic one. Not only does it give life (and death) to humans and living things along it, but it also is a much traveled highway through the United States. Have students do a web search about life on the Mississippi River, including research about (a) the types of conveyance that traveled along the river, especially those named in *Huck Finn*, and draw or make models for classmates, with the purpose of each; (b) the types of jobs available to people along the river with some statistics as to those employing the most people; (c) flora and fauna in and around the river and seasonal weather patterns on the river, including flooding, explaining how weather, plants, and animals named in the novel contribute to the story itself.

## CHAPTERS 1-5: STATUS QUO AND CONFORMITY: CIVILIZING HUCK

These five chapters introduce Huck Finn and those who impact his life and seek to shape him: Tom Sawyer, Jim, Pap, Judge Thatcher, the Widow Douglas, and Miss Watson. The main purpose of the first paragraph is to pick up where *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* left off, introducing the details that will impact this new improved Huck Finn: the \$6000 treasure, his adoption by the Widow, and his preference for freedom, even at the cost of respectability.

## QUESTIONS

1. How and why does Twain establish Huck's voice as storyteller? What do we learn about Huck from what he reveals of other characters' assessments of him?
  2. Make two columns, listing Huck's clear likes and dislikes as he reveals them in these chapters. What things does he have trouble understanding?
  3. What are Huck's feelings about his adoption by the Widow Douglas and her sister, Miss Watson? As a motherless boy, does he need their influence?
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4. Huck's upbringing is at issue in the book. What has he been taught that forms his core self? What do other characters want to teach him and how do they wish to change him?
5. These chapters establish components of Huck's self that others hope to influence: his emotions, his intelligence, his fiscal responsibility, his spirituality, his social self, and his physical health and habits. To what and whom does Huck conform and when/how does he reject conformity in these chapters?
6. The titles of the chapters are in third person, while the text itself is in the first person voice of Huck Finn. What does this literary device suggest about the argument that Huck and Twain are one and the same?

## QUOTATIONS

1. "Then she told me about the bad place, and I said I wished I was there...I couldn't see no advantage in going where she was going, so I made up my mind I wouldn't try for it" (12-13).
2. "Why, blame it all, we've *got* to do it. Don't I tell you it's in the books? Do you want to go to doing different from what's in the books, and get things all muddled up?" (18).
3. "I went and told the widow about it, and she said the thing a body could get by praying for it was 'spiritual gifts.' This was too many for me, but she told me...I must help other people, and do everything for other people, and look out for them all the time, and never think about myself...I went out in the woods and turned it over in my mind a long time..." (20).
4. "Pap he hadn't been seen for more than a year, and that was comfortable for me; I didn't want to see him no more. He used to always whale me when he was sober and could get his hands on me; though I used to take to the woods most of the time when he was around" (21).
5. "I liked the old ways best, but I was getting so I liked the new ones, too, a little bit" (24).
6. "The judge...said he reckoned a body could reform the old man with a shotgun, maybe, but he didn't know no other way" (31).

## ACTIVITIES

1. Define *picaro* and picaresque fiction. (Teachers may remind students of trickster stories or cartoons like Bugs Bunny who is such a flawed hero). From these initial chapters, ask students to determine who is the *picaro* of the story and the character's habits that support their theory. Ask students to write in their journals about a time they smooth-talked their way out of a sticky situation or that they were able to use their intelligence to get an advantage. Ask them to discuss: Are you a *picaro*?
  2. Setting is important in establishing a novel and a narrator's voice. Ask students to consider how elements of place are revealed in the opening chapters. How do these elements help develop the voice and characters of Huck, Tom, Jim, and others?
  3. Read the scene introducing Jim. Discuss: Is Jim stereotyped? What is Huck and Tom's assumption about Jim before they get to know him?
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## CHAPTERS 6-11: ESCAPE AND THE WEALTH OF SELF

Huck differentiates himself from Pap by attending school to spite his father and revealing how little money matters to him. Huck's daily life and his relationship with Pap are explored in these chapters when he is kidnapped and forced to endure Pap's physical abuse and world view, filled with prejudice, alcoholism, racism, violence, and anti-government sentiment. While Huck feels comfortable with parts of this lifestyle, he clearly rejects other facets and plans his escape—both from Pap and from other civilizers. In planning and faking his own death, Huck remarks that Tom Sawyer would have added fancy touches to this plan, clear foreshadowing of Tom's contributions to Jim's rescue in the final chapters of the book. Tom's and Huck's definitions of adventure are distinct here, as Tom's are book-inspired, elaborate and imaginative, and Huck's are life-driven, reflecting a real and frightening experience.

Huck's finding Jim on Jackson's Island and aligning himself with him, despite his revulsion at being an abolitionist, begins the adventures in earnest. He immediately puts his imagination and necessity to good use in stealing useful items from a floating house, dressing like a girl and going ashore to learn if they (actually Jim) are being chased, and escaping before slave catchers can arrive. Huck embraces his alliance with Jim when he says, "They're after us!" We learn that Huck has native intelligence and a gift for remembering what will help him survive. He shows considerable descriptive powers as he describes a storm on the Mississippi, revealing both his romantic grasp of nature and his preference for the life away from shore. His curiosity as to the identity of the dead man in the house further underscores this event for readers who will remember it in the final chapter when Jim tells Huck it was Pap.

Close reading can offer readers knowledge about the plight of other runaways in society. Judith Loftus figures Huck for an apprentice who has run away from a cruel master, a situation for which she clearly has sympathy.

### QUESTIONS

1. What sort of person does Huck reveal his father to be? What is Huck's relationship with his father?
2. Why does Huck stage his own murder rather than simply running away? What repercussions could this choice have on those who care about him?
3. What are Huck's feelings about the river and living closely with nature?
4. Why does Huck tell Jim he won't turn him in, when he is so frankly opposed to abolition? What does this reveal about Huck's character?
5. Huck and Jim are runaways seeking freedom. In two columns, list the reasons and differences in their motivation to escape.

### QUOTATIONS

1. "I didn't want to go to school much before, but I reckoned I'd go now to spite pap" (31).
  2. "Thinks I, what is the country a-coming to? It was 'lection day, and I was just about to go and vote myself if I warn't too drunk to get there; but when they told me there was a state in this country where they'd let that nigger vote, I drew out. I says I'll never vote ag'in" (35).
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3. “I did wish Tom Sawyer was there; I knowed he would take an interest in this kind of business, and throw in the fancy touches” (41).
4. “[S]omebody prayed that this bread would find me, and here it has gone and done it...there’s something in it when a body like the widow or the parson prays, but it don’t work for me and I reckon it don’t work for only just the right kind” (45).
5. “People would call me a low-down Abolitionist and despise me for keeping mum—but that don’t make no difference. I ain’t a-going to tell” (50).
6. “I’s rich now, come to look at it. I owns myself, en I’s wuth eight hund’d dollars” (54).

## ACTIVITIES

1. Define irony and satire. Ask students to work in pairs or small groups to list as many ironies and objects of satire as they can in the chapters thus far. With each point on your list, state in one sentence its main message. Show an episode of *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy*, or another example of pop cultural satire that students might relate to. Discuss: How do comedians and TV programs today use irony and satire to deliver serious messages with humor?
2. Although Huck paints himself as a blockhead—unsure of himself and easily led by others, he has a great deal of ingenuity. Ask students to list ways in which he proves his ingenuity.

## CHAPTERS 12-18: BONDING OVER INHUMANITY

Huck and Jim’s adventures on the river are brought into contrast with those on land in these chapters. On the river, they discover murderers on a sinking steamboat, are separated in a rough current and fog, encounter slave hunters, miss their exit to Cairo and freedom, and are run down by a riverboat. On land, they wash up separately, Huck among the Grangerfords, Arkansas farmers who are feuding with a neighboring wealthy family, the Shepherdsons, and Jim in the swamp nearby, cared for by their slaves. The prosperity, religiosity, and senseless hatred of the families make a profound impression on Huck who unwittingly participates in Harney Shepherdson’s elopement with Sophia Grangerford, igniting violence between the families. Huck is present as his friend Buck is murdered, and reports that he dreams of this event (post traumatic stress disorder). In searching for the raft, he finds Jim and the reunion attests to their friendship. The final paragraph of Chapter 18 clarifies the differences in their relationship on the raft and on the land. On the raft, they discuss Solomon’s wisdom, harems, French language, and their family memories. Huck suffers pangs of conscience in aiding a runaway and abuses Jim saying, “[You] can’t learn a nigger to argue” (84); in fact, Jim has argued well and defeated Huck. Still they argue as near equals and friends, as fathers and sons perhaps, until they arrive on land. Then Jim is relegated to life as a slave, and Huck fabricates his way into the family life of plantation owners.

Within these chapters, Jim fathers Huck and they mutually take care of one another. Their definitions of family are at odds with the feuding families’ views. Being “free and safe,” having tasty food, talking and enjoying the company of another person, and being far from the “cramped up and smothery” attitudes on land are the ingredients of home

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to Huck and Jim: “We said there warn’t no home like a raft, after all...You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft” (117). Ironically, Jim is less free daily, headed South and farther from free states.

## QUESTIONS

1. How does the episode with the murderers and the attempt to save them develop Huck’s sense of morality? What is his current code? From whom or what has he developed this code thus far?
2. What role does Huck play in discussions with Jim? What has Huck learned in school, from reading, or from Tom Sawyer that he has retained and found useful? How and when does Huck compliment and denigrate Jim?
3. What lessons from Pap does Huck remember and evaluate during his moral dilemmas with Jim?
4. How do both Grangerfords and Shepherdsons exhibit religious hypocrisy? Explain Twain’s use of the families’ feuding as satire of Civil War mentality.
5. The families follow their own code of behavior, unable to remember the original court case and the reason for the feud. Discuss feuds and frontier justice as they impact Huck’s growing sense of right and wrong.
6. Discuss Jim’s interactions with the Grangerford slaves, including his assessment of their abilities. What do these slaves know about the underground railroad and ways for runaways to elude capture?

## QUOTATIONS

1. “Pap always said it warn’t no harm to borrow things, if you was meaning to pay them back, sometime; but the widow said it warn’t anything but a soft name for stealing, and no decent body would do it” (70).
  2. “Now was the first time that I begun to worry about the men—I reckon I hadn’t had time to before. I begun to think how dreadful it was, even for murderers, to be in such a fix. I says to myself, there ain’t no telling but I might come to be a murderer myself yet, and then how would I like it?” (76).
  3. “Well, he was right; he was most always right; he had an uncommon level head for a nigger” (81).  
“I see it warn’t no use wasting words—you can’t learn a nigger to argue. So I quit” (84).
  4. “‘En all you wuz thinkin’ ‘bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie. Dat truck dah is trash; en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren’s en makes ‘em ashamed” (89).
  5. “It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger; but I done it, and I warn’t ever sorry for it afterward, neither” (89).
  6. “...I begun to get it through my head that he was most free—and who was to blame for it? Why, me...Conscience says to me, ‘What had poor Miss Watson done to you that you could see her nigger go off right under your eyes and never say one single word?’” (91).
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7. "I got aboard the raft, feeling bad and low, because I knowed very well I had done wrong, and I see it warn't no use for me to try to learn to do right; a body that don't get started right when he's little ain't got no show" (94).
8. "Well then, says I, what's the use you learning to do right when it's troublesome to do right and ain't no trouble to do wrong, and the wages is just the same?" (94).
9. "The men took their guns along, so did Buck, and kept them between their knees or stood them handy against the wall. The Shepherdsons done the same. It was pretty ornery preaching—all about brotherly love, and such-like tiresomeness; but everybody said it was a good sermon, and they all talked it over going home, and had such a powerful lot to say about faith and good works and free grace..." (111).
10. "I ain't a-going to tell all that happened—it would make me sick again if I was to do that. I wished I hadn't ever come ashore that night to see such things. I ain't ever going to get shut of them—lots of times I dream about them" (116).

## ACTIVITIES

1. A frequent habit of Huck's is to blame his failures on his upbringing. This is still popular with those who don't want to take responsibility for personal choices. Ask students to free write about a time when they blamed their parents for their mistakes. Huck and Jim consider what makes people behave as they do: nature (genetic or inborn traits) or nurture (environment or upbringing). Ask students: Which do you think has shaped you? How do you think Jim and Huck have been affected by both nature and nurture?
2. The elopement of Harney and Sophia is reminiscent of the plot of *Romeo and Juliet*. Ask students: What other characters and elements of this episode resemble Shakespeare's play? The feud has been called a satire of the Civil War as well. In a short writing, have students argue for or against the effectiveness of this satire.
3. In Quotation #8 above, Huck exhibits symptoms of what is now called PTSD, or post traumatic stress disorder. Have students argue for or against this diagnosis, considering how many deaths Huck has encountered by Chapter 18.

## CHAPTERS 19-31: LESSONS IN ASSISTANCE AND BETRAYAL

These chapters focus on the Duke and the King, two con-men who are rescued by Huck and Jim and who present some of the most troubling episodes within the adventures. Huck's romantic description of their life on the raft is followed closely by the collision with these runaway con-men who are being chased from the town for dental malpractice and a temperance movement con, respectively. The pair immediately begins to con one another and Jim and Huck by professing themselves a Duke of Bridgewater and the rightful king of France (the "late Dauphin"). They convince Huck and Jim to treat them as royals, in essence turning the two into their slaves and servants. While Huck's behavior toward them seems to convince Jim also, Huck is their willing servant for the sake of peace and camaraderie: "...what you want, above all things, on a raft, is for everybody to be satisfied, and feel right and kind towards the others" (125). Huck's early life with Pap, himself a fraud and lowlife, has taught Huck to recognize the type when he sees them but also to let them have their way. He himself knows how to lie for protection; he tells these

thieves that Jim is his slave but his papers were lost in a family tragedy rafting south. For this reason, they travel by night and sleep by day. The last paragraph of Chapter 19 explains a good deal about Huck's world view and ideas of family. It is troubling and worthy of discussion that for the remaining chapters given to travel with this pair of con men, Huck does not tell Jim they are frauds, much the same as Jim does not tell Huck that his father is dead.

Town after town, the Duke and King collaborate on performances, and hone their skills of deceit among people who at their best attend tent meetings and circuses for amusement and, at their worst, are entertained by cruelty, gang violence, and low humor. In one such town, Huck witnesses Colonel Sherburn's murder of Boggs and the subsequent attempt of the crowd to lynch him. Sherburn's commentary on mob justice, armies, Northerners and Southerners, and manhood makes an impression on Huck who is himself growing to manhood. Ultimately, the King and Duke claim to be the brothers of Peter Wilks, so that they can acquire his estate, a con that eats at Huck's conscience. Wilks' daughters befriend Huck, and he becomes enamored of the oldest and tells her of the plot to con her and where he has put the estate money held by the pair. He and Jim try to escape from these rogues, but are not quick enough. The Duke and King's final performance gets them tarred and feathered, but not before the King sells Jim.

While Huck knows these two are con men, Jim also realizes that they are "rapscallions," and our heroes wish to escape from their enslavement. Mistreated by these men, they comfort one another, coming to understand better the feelings and motivations of one another. Jim tells Huck the story of his daughter's deafness, causing Huck to reason that Jim was not just a slave, but a man—"white inside" and that they are family. Jim's morality and conscience teaches Huck how to be a good man and complicates his decision as to whether he will free Jim after his capture.

## QUESTIONS

1. Ask students: What is a "confidence" man, a.k.a. con man? What scams have you heard about in your own neighborhood or state? Did these frauds prey on the confidence of the people they conned? How do the King and the Duke play on the confidences of people to get their money? What do they have to know about the towns, local people, and human nature in order to perfect their scams?
  2. Though both men are criminal in their behavior, each is different in his understanding of and abuse of people. Make two columns and list the differences in the King and the Duke. How is one morally superior to the other? Which do you like least and why?
  3. Since Huck quickly understands the King and Duke are con men, why doesn't he confront them or tell Jim?
  4. How and by whom is Jim betrayed? Have other slaves been similarly treated by this character? How does Huck respond to Jim's capture?
  5. Twain is a master of satire and of irony. List ironic episodes in this section and explain how Twain uses them to affect readers.
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## QUOTATIONS

1. "Sometimes we'd have that whole river all to ourselves for the longest time...It's lovely to live on a raft. We had the sky up there, all speckled with stars, and we used to lay on our backs and look up at them, and discuss whether they was made or only just happened" (120).
2. "It didn't take me long to make up my mind that these liars warn't no kings nor dukes at all, but just low-down humbugs and frauds. But I never said nothing, never let on....If I never learnt nothing else out of pap, I learnt that the best way to get along with his kind of people is to let them have their own way" (125-6).
3. "'The pitifulest thing out is a mob; that's what an army is—a mob; they don't fight with courage that's born in them, but with courage that's borrowed from their mass, and from their officers. But a mob without any *man* at the head of it is *beneath* pitifulness....If any real lynching's going to be done it will be done in the dark, Southern fashion"' (145-6).
4. "What was the use to tell Jim these warn't real kings and dukes? It wouldn't 'a' done no good; and besides, it was just as I said: you couldn't tell them from the real kind" (153).
5. "I do believe he cared just as much for his people as white folks does for their'n. It don't seem natural, but I reckon it's so....He was a mighty good nigger, Jim was" (153).
6. "Well, if ever I struck anything like it, I'm a nigger. It was enough to make a body ashamed of the human race" (160).
7. "And when it comes to beauty—and goodness, too—she lays over them all...but I reckon I've thought of her a many and a many a million times, and of her saying she would pray for me; and if ever I'd 'a' thought it would do any good for me to pray for *her*; blamed if I wouldn't 'a' done it or bust" (186).
8. "...deep down in me I knowed it was a lie, and He knowed it. You can't pray a lie—I found that out....I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself: 'All right, then, I'll go to hell'—and tore it up" (206-7).

## ACTIVITIES

1. The plays and performances rehearsed and delivered by the King and Duke use Shakespearean works. Have students compare Hamlet's soliloquy by Shakespeare to the one Huck quotes from the Duke's memory. (Note that Twain's characters mix several Shakespearean plays together—*Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Romeo and Juliet*). Ask students: What are the differences in the meanings of the two? Have two students perform the two soliloquies in costume.
  2. Huck's fear of being civilized leads him to shuck the most basic of social expectations. As a class, ask students to list what they consider necessities for survival. (Class may mention food, housing, clothing, water, companionship, and so forth). Which things from the class list have been cut from Jim and Huck's lives on the river? (They go naked, they have little shelter, they eat what they catch or borrow, etc.) What does Twain imply about freedom and the pursuit of happiness when Huck and Jim discard the behaviors of polite society on the river?
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## CHAPTERS 32-43: THE RESCUE AND HAPPY ENDINGS: REALISM VS. ROMANTICISM, REALITY VS. IMAGINATION

The final segment of the novel is organized around Huck's desire to rescue Jim from the Phelps family farm, a desire soon controlled by the chance arrival of Tom Sawyer, the nephew of Mrs. Phelps. Since the opening chapters of the novel in which Tom organizes his playmates into bandits along the guidelines of his romantic reading material, mostly involving imagination and pretense, Huck has lived life on the river and come into his own. However, with the introduction of Tom, who calls himself Sid Sawyer, so that Huck may assume Tom's identity, the rescue of Jim is taken over by Tom, using *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *Arabian Nights*, and other novels to create "regulations" for rescuing prisoners from dungeons. This part of the adventures presents readers with a close comparison of real and imaginary, truth and fiction. Tom wishes to create Jim as a hero by putting him through unnecessary miseries, although those "complications" are a great deal of fun for Tom. Huck is rendered Tom's idiot, and Jim becomes slave to Tom's imagination. Twain's satire reveals the difference between Huck's real-life adventure surviving along the river, learning important lessons, and growing to manhood and Tom's book-driven, impractical imaginary adventures that still make him look and behave as a child. The real world wins in this contest, as Tom is shot, Jim acquires heroism by nursing him and assisting the doctor, and Huck proves his friendship to both by getting them the help they need even if he is punished.

Failing to grasp that Jim is a husband and father, the boys plan their next adventure in Indian Territory—away from "civilized" people and rules, and, in Huck's case, Aunt Sally's adoption. By the closing chapters of the novel, readers will recognize that although both Huck and Jim have been unwittingly free of their individual slaveries for some time, they are improved and humanized by their seeking freedom. Whether or not this pursuit has civilized them is another question.

### QUESTIONS

1. Ask students to define the words "adventure" and "heroism" as Huck would and as Tom would. Then compare each boy's idea of how Jim should be rescued, according to these definitions. Who is the hero of this novel, Huck or Jim? List ways in which each has proven his heroism.
2. Why does Tom Sawyer so readily agree to rescue Jim, when Huck has understood that Tom hates abolitionists? Is Tom changed by his effort to save Jim?
3. How are heart and conscience in conflict in Huck's seeing Jim as his friend and family, and as a slave? What details of their trip down the Mississippi does Huck recall that soften him towards Jim? How has Jim helped Huck be a better person?
4. Compare Pap and Jim as father figures to Huck. How has their treatment affected Huck's view of family? (Is Jim's mistreatment of his deaf daughter comparable to Pap's abuse of Huck?)
5. Several characters have kept secrets from others in the novel. Jim doesn't tell Huck he is free of Pap. Tom doesn't tell Jim he was freed on Miss Watson's death. Huck doesn't tell Jim that the King and Duke are scoundrels and conmen. How would these truths have changed the outcome of the novel and the characters themselves had they been revealed? Is keeping a secret the same as a lie in these cases?

**QUOTATIONS**

1. "I went right along, not fixing up any particular plan, but just trusting to Providence to put the right words in my mouth when the time come; for I'd noticed that Providence always did put the right words in my mouth if I left it alone" (212).
2. "You'll say it's dirty, low-down business; but what if it is? I'm low down; and I'm a-going to steal him, and I want you to keep mum and not let on. Will you?" (218).
3. "I was sorry for them poor pitiful rascals, it seemed like I couldn't ever feel any hardness against them any more in the world. It was a dreadful thing to see. Human beings *can* be awful cruel to one another" (223).
4. "Here was a boy that was respectable and well brung up; and had a character to lose; and folks at home that had characters; and he was bright and not leather-headed; and knowing and not ignorant; and not mean, but kind; and yet here he was, without anymore pride, or rightness, or feeling, than to stoop to this business, and make himself a shame, and his family a shame, before everybody. I *couldn't* understand it no way at all. It was outrageous, and I knowed I ought to just up and tell him so; and so be his true friend, and let him quit the thing right where he was and save himself" (225).
5. "Tom was in high spirits. He said it was the best fun he ever had in his life, and the most interlectual; and said if he only could see his way to it we would keep it up all the rest of our lives and leave Jim to our children to get out; for he believed Jim would come to like it better and better the more he got used to it" (239).
6. "I knowed he was white inside, and I reckoned he'd say what he did say—so it was all right now, and I told Tom I was a-going for a doctor" (263).
7. "...there ain't nothing more to write about, and I am rotten glad of it, because if I'd 'a' knowed what a trouble it was to make a book I wouldn't 'a' tackled it, and ain't a-going to no more" (279).
8. "But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before" (279).

**ACTIVITIES**

1. Ask students which characters are dynamic? Chart them and the ways in which they have changed during the novel. What has each character learned? How has Twain used them in the novel to change his readers?
  2. Critics have complained that the rescue at Phelps' farm is rife with coincidence and is overall problematic to the rest of the work. Ask students, what do you see as the problems this section presents to readers? Does this section change your view of the main characters' moral development? If so, how? How has Tom Sawyer's insistence on "regulations" for escape forced him into the role of colonizer, Huck into the role of agent of the colonizer, and Jim into the role of the colonized/oppressed?
  3. Since a central theme of the work is escape from "sivilization," ask students to discuss in what ways Jim and Huck have explored being uncivilized? Have the two avoided civilizing at the close of the novel? Have the two civilized one another? What part does the river play in this discussion? What point is Twain making about freedom?
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## AFTER READING ACTIVITIES

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After reading the novel, students are ready to discuss the novel's themes in greater depth, to research more deeply into connections between the novel and the world, and to engage in activities with critical theory, films, and other media. Ask students to refer to their journals, discussion notes, and lists from Pre-Reading and During Reading activities to create meaningful writings and research projects. The following activities and questions are designed to lead students back to the novel to make connections and to analyze more deeply. These questions may be used for class discussion, small group discussions, research projects, or as essay topics.

### DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

#### 1. Anticipation Guide

Return to the True/False Anticipation Guide and complete with students the after-reading portion of this exercise. Fold the pre-reading answers so that students cannot see their previous answers, then compare later answers to note changes in attitude. As a class or in small groups, discuss those statements that shifted for Huck during the novel and the factors that precipitated the changes. Which statements changed for students themselves? Ask students to select one statement which changed for them and free write about this shift for 10 minutes.

#### 2. Discussion Questions

Use these questions for discussion, reader response, or short essay. Students must support their theories from the novel's text. Many of the During-Reading questions also make good prompts for writing.

- (a) What purpose does Twain have in pairing Jim with Huck? In pairing the Duke with the King? In pairing Tom with Huck in the final chapters?
  - (b) How are disguises used in this novel? How are multiple identities/aliases useful to Twain's characters? In other Twain works?
  - (c) There are a number of accounts of thieves and dishonesty in the novel. Is there honor among these thieves? What is the purpose of these characters in the novel?
  - (d) Who are the villains of this novel? Why are they villains?
  - (e) Who are the heroes of this novel? What makes them heroic?
  - (f) What does Twain satirize in the novel? Why?
  - (g) Note that Hamlet's "To be or not to be" speech is used in the work though it is abused and mixed with other works. How does the use of this speech coincide with Huck and Jim's pursuits of self? Discuss Shakespeare's work and the events of the chapter in which the speech appears in *Huck Finn* to understand the dilemma on the raft.
  - (h) Agree or disagree that *Huck Finn* defines American literature and that all modern literature comes from *Huck Finn*, as Hemingway suggests.
  - (i) In what ways is Huck and Jim's story also the story of America?
  - (j) Return to the quotations in the During Reading section. Ask students to select for
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response their favorite quotation, one that they feel is most pivotal to understanding the novel and to discuss the theme this quotation helps to explain.

### **3. Themes**

Post the themes on card stock around the classroom where they are readable from any point. Then ask students to quietly select one of these themes to answer the question: What is this novel about? After selecting, they should be given 10 minutes to list reasons they feel their theme is the primary one. No talking during this time. At the end of the free writing time, ask students to rise and stand beneath the theme they are willing to defend. Give those students who are grouped beneath the themes 10 more minutes to collaborate on their argument to the class as to the most compelling theme in the novel, then open the discussion so each group can defend its theme. Now is also a good time to ask students if there are other themes they would defend. The question of what a text is really “about” compels students to think in terms of themes and deeper significance of a text. This same question can lead to excellent theses for papers.

### **4. Huck's Ten Commandments**

Ask students to list Huck Finn's attitudes and behaviors that change during the novel. In small groups, students list the three most important developments in Huck as he matures and learns to take responsibility for his choices. As a whole class, list Huck's Ten Commandments—beliefs he has come to understand as rules to live by. Discuss: Do these represent a genuine moral code that we should all embrace?

### **5. Economics**

From the outset of the novel, Huck and Tom are monetarily rich, although Huck is unable to use his money because of Pap. During the escape and adventure with Jim, he encounters people of every socio-economic level. Have students discuss these questions in small groups: How does he come to view wealth? How does Jim define wealth? How have money and the pursuit of wealth driven Huck's story along the Mississippi? List the characters and events that are shaped by economics. What does their journey teach them about valuing themselves and others? What is a man worth, finally, to Huck, to Jim, and to the 19th century world?

### **6. Character Development and Heroism**

Twain uses a motherless child of an abusive father, a teenager who lacks sophistication and is barely literate, as his narrator for these adventures. Although Huck is a picaro, willing to trick, borrow, and lie to assure his survival, he has little confidence in himself, lies, smokes, skips school, and is not entirely sold on living indoors and wearing clothes, much less clean ones. What an interesting choice for a narrator and hero! Ask students why Twain selects this character to tell his story. How would the story have been different if Jim had told the story, rather than Huck? Would you trust Jim's narration? What kinds of things can Huck do and know that Jim would not have been privy to because of his slave status? If the point of a novel is that the characters will encounter hardships that will change them for the better, what about Huck's makes for obvious opportunities to change? What in Jim? What in Tom?

### **7. Creative Approaches**

Suggest to students some of these creative ways to engage with the novel on a deeper level:

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- (a) Write an opening for the novel in the voice of Jim instead of Huck. How does this point of view differ from Twain's narrator? Have students read their opening paragraphs in small groups to one another. Select the best paragraphs to be performed by their writers or other students.
- (b) Remind students of the artistic contexts discussed before their reading and ask them to create their own artistic representations of their most compelling scenes from *Huck Finn*. They should title their work, attach the inspiring quotation/ scene from the novel, and write a short explanation of their art. Have a class contest to determine which work becomes cover art.
- (c) Huck Finn uses his considerable powers of description to make the river and the ease of life on the raft real for readers. Have students select one of the scenes (p. 55, 118-120, or others) and represent it visually, musically, or poetically. (Play "Moon River" for students after reading one of these descriptive passages).
- (d) In small groups, ask students to select scenes that they consider pivotal to Huck Finn's coming of age and prepare and act out this scene for their class. They should introduce their scene with the reasons for their selection and how Huck changes/ what he learns in the scene. Limit the time for each scene and allow no two groups to depict the same scene.

## GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS

1. Return to Pre-Reading Notes about Powell's introduction and read the paragraph to your students. Then, from Powell's introduction of the novel, ask students to select quotations from writers and sources with whom they agree (Hemingway, Howells, Smiley, Bellow and others) about Twain and Huck Finn. Then, in small groups, let students list their ideas about the quotation to share with the whole class:
  - (a) "The *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a successful gorilla if ever there was one on earth." (x)
  - (b) "Huckleberry Finn is Twain's Watergate." (xi)
  - (c) "By Twain's lights—the aesthetic by which he slays James Fenimore Cooper and his Deerslayer—to be judged inelegant by respectable people was the surest sign he was writing well." (xi)
  - (d) "Let us get the book out of the schools; it is too good for them. No good book should be done to what is done to books in schools." (xiv-xv)
  - (e) "Twain fathered a line that would run through Hemingway, Stein, Anderson, graze Fitzgerald, be disregarded by Faulkner, and be resumed by O'Connor, Bellow, Barthelme, Stone, Percy, Paley, Ozick, Joy Williams, Barry Hannah—by everyone paying attention." (xvii)
2. Send students to this website which offers quotations from critics of Huck Finn. Ask students to read these critics and select the one that is truest for them, and to write a defense of that critic's opinion.  
[www.wsu.edu/~campbell/damlit/huckquot.html](http://www.wsu.edu/~campbell/damlit/huckquot.html)

### 3. Critical Theory Project

This project is designed to teach students to read literature using various critical approaches, a project that will inform all the readings they complete for their classes. Padgett Powell professes to have “swallowed whole the tenets of New Criticism” (x), then explaining what he means by that approach to reading and rendering critical thinking about a work. Most students will be aware of Reader Response theory, having been asked to write reader responses in the past; nevertheless, as a whole class, discuss this theory and its expectations before researching alternative critical approaches.

In small groups, students should research one of the theories listed below, apply it to three or four key scenes in *Huck Finn*, and explain this critical approach to classmates in easy-to-understand language. Ask students to consider why Twain reveals the story as he does, what he wants readers to grasp of the complexities of his plot and characters, and what figurative means he employs to achieve this effect. Be guided by three questions: What important lesson is Twain teaching here? What strategy or methods is Twain using to make his point in this scene? What is the effect of what he does?

- (a) New Historicism
- (b) Deconstruction
- (c) Feminism
- (d) Psychoanalytic Theory
- (e) Formalism/New Criticism
- (f) Postcolonial Studies

Helpful Resources for Critical Theory Study:

Literary Criticism.

<http://www.literatureclassics.com/ancientpaths/litcrit.html>

(Excellent overview of multiple theories)

Postcolonial Studies.

<http://www.emory.edu/ENGLISH/Bahri/> (Special

emphasis on Postcolonial theorists/writers and Orientalism)

Cleary, Barbara A. and Mary C. Whittemore. “Gender Study Enriches Students’ Lives.” January 1999.

<http://www.jstor.org/pss/821585>

Greenlaw, Jim. “A Postcolonial Conception of the High School Multicultural Literature Curriculum.”

<http://www.saskschoolboards.ca/EducationServices/ResearchAndDevelopment/ResearchReports/StudentsDiverseNeeds/95-05.htm>

Murfin, Ross and Supriya Ray eds. *A Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s Press, 1998.

Richter, David. *Falling Into Theory*. 2nd ed. New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s Press, 2000.

#### 4. Censorship Project

Assign critical articles to small groups of students, after reading the novel. Each group should assume the role of their local school board, reviewing the novel for possible censorship. Each member of the class should write a short paragraph defining racism and censorship. Share in small groups. Then read the critical article and determine if the group agrees or disagrees with its thesis. The final decision of whether and how to censor the novel will be made by vote of the whole class, after each group explains its article to the larger group. Students may choose to restrict the novel's use to certain age groups, to library and individual use only, or to eliminate it from the school's classrooms and libraries. Groups may also decide whether they believe the book, the writer, or the characters are racist and Twain's intention of creating such characters. They should provide examples from the text to support their arguments.

Critical Articles:

Fishkin, Shelly Fisher. "Huck's Black Voice." *Wilson Quarterly* Autumn 1996.

Morrow, Lance. "In Praise of Huckleberry Finn." *Civilization*. Jan/Feb 1995.

Rabinovitz, Jonathan. "Huck Finn 101, or How to Teach Twain Without Fear" *Wilson Quarterly*. Autumn 1996.

Smiley, Jane. "Say It Ain't So, Huck: Second Thoughts on Mark Twain's 'masterpiece.'" *Harper's Magazine*. January 1996. [www.shs.issaquah.wednet.edu/teachers/olson/Say%20It%20Ain't%20So.htm](http://www.shs.issaquah.wednet.edu/teachers/olson/Say%20It%20Ain't%20So.htm)

Smith, David L. "Huck, Jim, and American Racial Discourse." *Huck Finn Among the Critics*. Ed. M. Thomas Inge. Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1985.

Sundquist, Eric J., ed. *Mark Twain: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994.

PBS Culture Shock: Students may use this site for definitions and further discussions of Censorship: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/cultureshock/whodecides/definitions.html>

#### 5. Extended Reading

- (a) Ask students to read or to view the film of Nat Hentoff's *The Day They Came to Arrest the Book* which focuses on *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and censorship controversy in a high school. (The 1987 film is directed by Gilbert Moses). Discuss guidelines for censorship: Who should decide what should be written, published, allowed in schools, libraries, and book stores?
- (b) Ask students to read a section of John Wallace's *Adventures of Huck Finn Adapted*, in which he eliminates "nigger" from the text entirely. Discuss the effect on Twain's text.
- (c) For advanced students, offer sections of Jon Clinch's novel, *Finn*, a re-imagining of the life and death of Pap Finn.
- (d) For further readings in context, suggest that students read Lee Smith's *The Last Girls*, based on a rafting trip inspired by Huckleberry Finn.

## 6. Student Response/Debate

In discussion or debate, ask students to answer these questions:

- (a) Is censorship necessary to help society embrace egalitarianism and to progress peacefully?
- (b) What are the problems inherent in First Amendment rights and individual freedoms? What are the limits to individual freedom?
- (c) If racism, sexism, ageism, and other biases exist in society and we are all part of society, do we (unwittingly perhaps) participate in these biases? What steps can we take to safeguard our actions and lifestyles from these 'isms? How can we live our lives in a truly fair-thinking way?
- (d) At what age or experience level should people be allowed to confront material and censor themselves?

## 7. Writing Prompts

- (a) You have been asked to write an introduction to a new edition of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* designed particularly for high school juniors. In this introduction, the publishers would like for you to explain what students of this learning level and age group can learn from this book, why they might like it and what facets of it they might dislike, or why, even if it disturbs them on some level, they might read it anyway. Remember your audience and the persuasive goal (you get a small royalty on every copy sold!).
- (b) As a scholar, you have been approached by the National Council of Teachers of English to contribute an essay to the organization's newsletter explaining to teachers of high school English ways in which they might present *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to their students so that the students understand and see relevance in it. They have asked you to focus on a particular aspect of the novel to give the teachers some concrete persuasive reasons and methods to use with their students. Remember your audience and your persuasive goal.

## STUDYING TWAIN'S RESEARCH AND PROCESS

From the introduction to this Teacher's Guide, read to your students the first sentence of paragraph three, about other manuscripts completed during the writing of *Huck Finn*.

1. Give students 20 minutes to list examples of how British (and European) life and literature have been incorporated into the characters and events in *Huck Finn*. Ask students to report the story line of these other novels completed during the writing of *Huck Finn*.
  2. Have students research Post-colonialism. Discuss: Why does Twain choose to bring European royalty into confrontation with Southern race, age, and gender issues in *Huck Finn*. Do the Duke, the King, the Wilks brothers, Jim, Huck, and Pap Finn think as colonists, colonizers, colonized, or colonialists? If you consider the King and Duke as the colonial powers and Jim and Huck the colonized, how are the powers able to gain control of the raft and of each town they visit? What forms of resistance do Huck and Jim try against their colonial control? Has colonialism itself created the need for *picares* and picaresque stories?
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## USING FILMS OF *HUCKLEBERRY FINN*

The novel has been made into film numerous times from 1920 to 1993. Let students compare these renditions of the novel once they have completed their discussions of the book. Show one or two scenes from several of these films to broaden the discussion of how and why the book's characters and themes have been altered and what each filmmaker's agenda is for his film. Students should chart their reactions to each film, selecting the one that best represents the novel and the writer's intentions as they see them. Below are a few of those available:

1920: A silent film directed by William Desmond Taylor

1975: Robert Taylor, director with Ron Howard and Antonio Fargas

1978: Jack Hively, director, with Brock Peters

1985: Peter Hunt, director, with Sam Williams and Patrick Day

1988: Paul Winfield and Jeff East play Jim and Huck

1993: Stephen Sommers, director, with Elijah Wood and Courtney Vance

(Teachers may purchase these films for their libraries at <http://shopping.yahoo.com/b:Huckleberry%20Finn%20Movies:96669884> or learn more about them at [www.imdb.com/](http://www.imdb.com/), the Internet Movie Database).

Activities for Students: (a) Cast a film version of the novel. Imagine the director/producer wants you to make recommendations on the actors and actresses. Include photos and descriptions of the stars and tell why each is "perfect" for the part. Write a letter convincing the producers of your selections. (b) Create a commercial for a film of *Huckleberry Finn*. Include no more than 3 scenes and craft the ad to make audiences want to see the film and to read the novel. The commercial should be no longer than 30 seconds.

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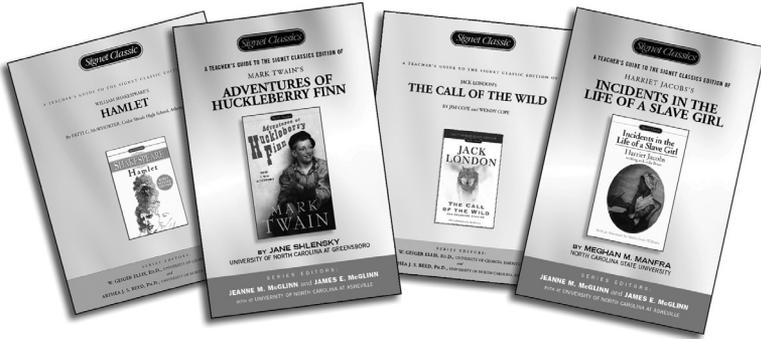
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