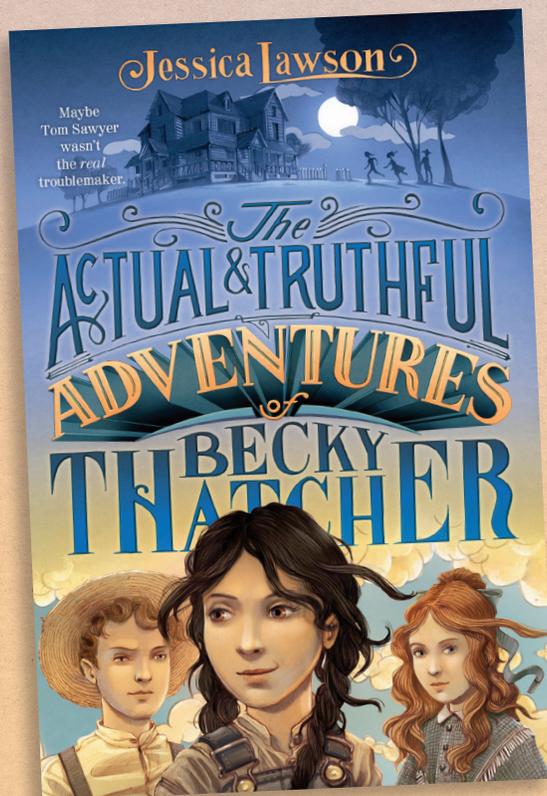


A Common Core Curriculum Guide to

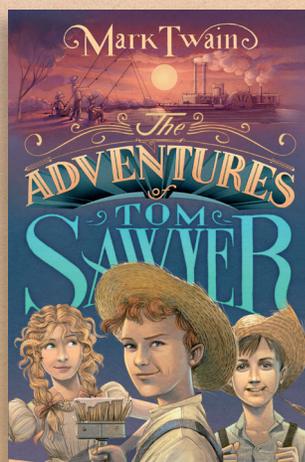
# *The* ACTUAL & TRUTHFUL ADVENTURES of BECKY THATCHER

by Jessica Lawson



*and*

*The* ADVENTURES TOM SAWYER  
*The* ADVENTURES HUCKLEBERRY FINN  
By Mark Twain



Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers

# The Actual and Truthful Adventures of Becky Thatcher

by Jessica Lawson

Meet the irrepressible Becky Thatcher. She's a small-town girl in 1860 Missouri who loves a good adventure, especially if it means sneaking out of the house at night. Scary things like witches and dead cats don't bother her. She's ready for any danger, although witnessing a crime in a cemetery at midnight leads to even more trouble than Becky expects. You may have met a prim and proper Becky Thatcher in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, but this one is much more fun and a great storyteller to boot.

## PRE-DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How is storytelling like lying? What kind of narrative and plot create an exciting story?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### SETTING

The questions below correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4-7.1)

1. This story has a strong sense of time and place. Give details from the book about St. Petersburg and the different parts of it that Becky frequents. What makes it similar to, and different from, where you live?
2. Describe Becky's house and what life is like there, including meals. What does Miss Ada do and how does Becky interact with her? What does Becky's mother do at home? How about her father?

### CHARACTERS

The questions below correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4-7.1, 3)

3. Describe Becky's friendship with Amy Lawrence. Why do they become friends? How are they similar to each other and how are they different? What do they do together? How does their friendship change during the story?
4. Compare Sid and Tom Sawyer. What do they have in common? Describe ways in which they are different. Do either of them change during the book? How? Which of the two do you like best and why?
5. Describe Becky's relationship with Sid. Give examples of what they do together. How does she feel about him, and does that change? How does Becky feel about Tom, and why? Does their relationship change during the book?
6. Describe Sam Clemens, what he does, and what he's like. How are he and Becky alike? Why do you think the author included him as a character?
7. What does Becky believe about Widow Douglas early on? How do her beliefs change, and why? Describe what Widow Douglas is really like, drawing from evidence in the story. What's her relationship with Sam Clemens?

### PLOT

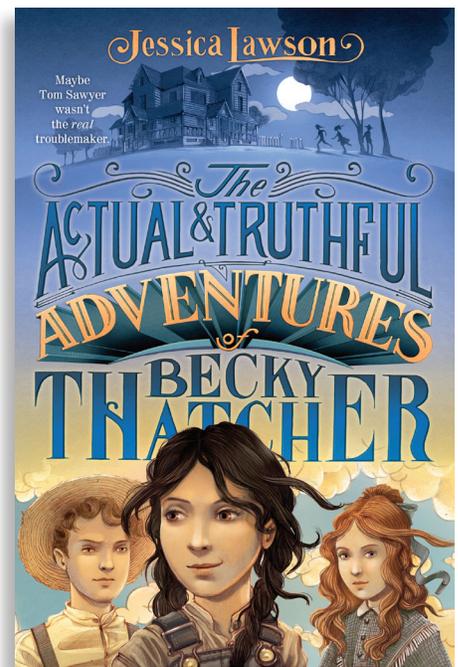
The questions below correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4-7.3) (RL.5-6.5)

8. Summarize the opening scene of the book. What does it tell you about Becky's character and her situation? Use details to explain what this scene foreshadows about the rest of the book.
9. How does the bet about stealing from Widow Douglas propel the plot? What problems and actions does it lead to? Describe how the bet gets resolved.
10. Becky and her peers share a lot of superstitions. Describe some of them. What role do the superstitions play in moving the plot along? What purpose do the superstitions serve in characters' lives? Do any of the superstitions seem to be true beliefs? Are some of them false? Explain your reasoning.

### THEMES

The questions below correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4-7.2)

11. Everyone in Becky's household is grieving over the death of her brother Jon. How does each of them—Becky, her mother, her father, and Miss Ada—deal with their grief? Give examples of how her mother's grief affects Becky.
12. Becky is a risk taker and often shows courage. Find examples of dangers that she is willing to face. How do her choices differ from what her parents want her to do?
13. Discuss the topic of truth and lying in this novel. In chapter 5, Becky explains her views on lying. Do you agree with her? Why or why not? She lies in chapters 9 and 14. Why does she do it? Do you think those lies are justified? Both Becky and Sam Clemens equate storytelling with lying. What do they mean? Why do you think the word *truthful* is in the book's title?



## USE OF LANGUAGE

The questions below correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–7.4)

14. As a narrator, Becky loves a good simile. Make a list of similes that she uses and divide them into categories. For example, many of her expressions concern food, such as “different as cookies and collards,” “red as a ripe apple,” and “like cream on peaches.” Do the categories fit well with the setting? What do the similes add to the story and the reader’s enjoyment of it?

15. Take a close look at the chapter titles. Pick a few that you especially like and discuss what they foreshadow about the chapters they head.

## ACTIVITIES

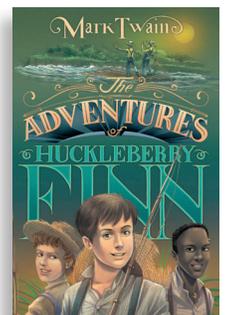
### A SURVEY OF SUPERSTITIONS

As a class, list on a whiteboard or flipchart as many superstitions from the novel as you can find. Discuss if any students know and believe in these superstitions. Next, brainstorm superstitions that students have, such as knocking on wood, fearing Friday the Thirteenth, or not walking under a ladder. Then have students collect superstitions from their families, asking relatives if they believe any of the superstitions in the novel or from the class list; students should take notes on their family superstitions. Have students make a large chart of the different superstitions, with three columns: the novel, the class, and families. Have them put a hash mark next to a superstition for each person who believes in it. Finally, have a classroom discussion about superstitions and why they are so widespread.

### A DARN GOOD YARN

When Sam Clemens acts as a substitute teacher, he suggests writing a story together. Read his comment to the class: “We can go fishing. Or climb mountains or go dancing or play poker with elephants. We’re gonna come up with a story and it can have as many adventures as you want.” In groups of two or three, have students write a very short story in simple language about two or three kids having an adventure. The story should include some dialogue. Then have them rewrite it in a folksy narrative voice like that of Becky Thatcher, including some similes and metaphors that echo the language she uses. Have the students consult the book during their rewriting. When they have polished their stories, have each group read theirs aloud to the class, taking the different parts.

The following discussion questions compare *The Actual & Truthful Adventures of Becky Thatcher* with *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### SETTING

The questions below correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.5–7.1)

1. The Mississippi River plays an important role in all three books. Discuss how that role is similar and different in the books. What does the river symbolize to the characters? How do you think the author, Mark Twain, or the character Sam Clemens feels about the river?
2. All three books take place sometime in the mid-1800s. What are major differences between those times and the present in transportation, technology, social structure, and other broad areas of life? Give examples from the book. Find examples, too, of aspects of life in the books that are similar to life now.

### CHARACTERS

The questions below correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.5–7.1, 3)

3. Compare Becky Thatcher as a character in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* to what she’s like in *The Actual & Truthful Adventures of Becky Thatcher*. Give details to describe similarities and differences. Why do you think Jessica Lawson changed Becky so much? Which version of Becky would you like as a friend, and why?
4. How is Becky in *The Actual & Truthful Adventures of Becky Thatcher* like Tom Sawyer in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*? Give specific characteristics and actions that are similar. What do they both like? What do they both dislike? In what ways does society treat them differently because of their gender?
5. Compare Becky’s friendship with Amy to Tom’s friendship with Huck Finn in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. How are they the same? How are they different? What activities do both sets of friends share? How is Becky like Tom, and Amy like Huck? Use specific scenes and dialogue from the text in your discussion.
6. Give specific examples that compare how Tom and Sid act in *The Actual & Truthful Adventures of Becky Thatcher* to how they act in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Why do you think Jessica Lawson has made such significant changes from the Twain book?
7. What do you learn about Becky’s brother, Jon, in the Lawson book? Describe some of her memories of him and the

things she hears him saying in her head. Sam Clemens says he'll put Jon in a book, after which Becky tells him that her nickname for her brother was "Huckleberry." In what ways does Huck Finn in the two Twain books resemble Jon?

## PLOT

The questions below correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.5–6.6)

8. Compare the plots of the three books. Give examples of how *The Actual & Truthful Adventures of Becky Thatcher* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* are similar and different. In what ways is the plot of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* more complex than the other two books?

9. Who are the villains in all three books and what do they do? How do they drive the plot? Compare them, discussing who seems most evil and why. Why did Lawson create new villains, even though she used many of Twain's other characters?

## THEMES

The questions below correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.5–7.2)

10. Tom and Becky disobey a lot, and Huck breaks a lot of societal rules, but all three have their own code of ethics. Find passages where each of them thinks about right and wrong. What does each one believe makes a good person? How do they try to follow those beliefs?

11. Near the end of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Tom is trying to convince Huck to return to the Widow's and be more conventional. "Everybody does it that way," Tom says, to which Huck replies, "I ain't everybody." Discuss specific ways that both Huck and Becky reject conventional behavior.

## USE OF LANGUAGE

The questions below correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.5–7.4) (RL.4–7.6)

12. Huck Finn and Becky are first-person narrators. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* has a third-person narrator. Analyze the differences between the two types of narration, noting advantages and disadvantages of each in general and in these books. Describe the third-person narration in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Does the narrator ever address the reader directly? Review the definition of limited omniscient narrator and omniscient narrator, and discuss which type narrates *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

13. Consider the amount of dialogue in the Lawson book to the Twain books. Evaluate generally how many pages in Lawson have no dialogue compared to the Twain books. Compare the length of paragraphs, too. Which style is most similar to books you usually read? Find some other children's books from the 1800s, such as *Treasure Island* and Louisa May Alcott's books. How do they compare to the Lawson and Twain books? Which style do you prefer, and why?

## ACTIVITIES

### WILL THE REAL BECKY (OR TOM) PLEASE STAND UP?

Have students come up with a series of interview questions that they might ask someone their age whom they didn't know well in order to learn more about them, with the guideline that the person to be interviewed lived in the past. Once the questions are set, have students choose either Becky Thatcher or Tom Sawyer as their focus. If they choose Becky, they will use the questions to interview both the Becky from *The Actual & Truthful Adventures of Becky Thatcher* and the one from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. If they choose Tom Sawyer, they will interview the Tom Sawyer from *The Actual & Truthful Adventures of Becky Thatcher* and the one from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, or both. Post the interviews on a bulletin board or have students read them aloud to each other.

### CELEBRITY AUTHOR OF THE MONTH: MARK TWAIN

Because Mark Twain is one of the most fascinating American writers, he's easy to research in books and on the Internet. Create a bulletin board with Twain's name and possibly his photograph at the center. Then have students research him, looking for a specific area of interest such as his childhood, his work as a river pilot, his life out West, his work as a journalist, his brief attempt at mining, his public lectures, his marriage, his children, his homes, his other writings, and so on. Each student should write a short paragraph emphasizing an aspect of Twain to post on the bulletin board. Students should also find a quote from Twain and print it in large letters, perhaps decorated, to put on the board.

The excellent educational website Reading Rockets offers more ideas for author studies at [ReadingRockets.org/Books/AuthorStudy](http://ReadingRockets.org/Books/AuthorStudy). Useful websites about Mark Twain include the Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum ([MarkTwainMuseum.org/Index.php/education](http://MarkTwainMuseum.org/Index.php/education)), the Mark Twain House and Museum ([MarkTwainHouse.org/Index.php](http://MarkTwainHouse.org/Index.php)), and the PBS website in conjunction with a Ken Burns film about Twain ([PBS.org/MarkTwain/Index.html](http://PBS.org/MarkTwain/Index.html)).

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Guide written by Kathleen Odean, a former school librarian and Chair of the 2002 Newbery Award Committee. She gives professional development workshops on books for young people and is the author of *Great Books for Girls* and *Great Books About Things Kids Love*.

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