

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Unabridged)

by
Mark Twain

Book Information

Mark Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Unabridged)

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279 Pages

Book Level: 6.6

Interest Level: MG+

Huck Finn, the son of the town drunk, and Jim, an escaped slave, make a break for freedom down the vast Mississippi River on a raft. The plot contains profanity and racial slurs.

Topics: Adventure, Discovery/Exploration; Classics, Classics (All); Natural Environments, Rivers/Lakes/Ponds; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 9-12; Series, Puffin Classics; U.S. States/Regions, Mississippi; What Kids Are Reading, 2012, 100 Most Read Fiction, ATOS Book Levels 6.0-8.9; What Kids Are Reading, 2013, 100 Most Read Fiction, ATOS Book Levels 6.0-8.9; What Kids Are Reading, 2014, Grade 11: 20 Most Read Books Overall

Main Characters

Huck Finn a mischievous young boy being raised by a widow who tries to "sivilize" Huck, which he doesn't much like

Jim the runaway slave of Miss Watson

Miss Watson a friend of the Widow who also tries to help make Huck respectable

Pap Huck's drunken and brutal father

the Grangerfords a southern plantation family who takes Huck into their home for a time

the king and the duke two carpetbaggers who go from town to town swindling money out of people

the Phelps a kind family who take Huck in mistakenly thinking he is their nephew, Tom Sawyer

the Widow Douglas the woman who takes Huck in as her son and tries to "sivilize" him

the Wilkses a bereaved family waiting for their English uncles to come

Tom Sawyer Huck's imaginative and slightly naughty companion

Vocabulary

prevarication a deviation from the truth

providence divine guidance or care

rapscallion rascal, scamp, scoundrel

soliloquy a dramatic monologue that gives the illusion of being a series of unspoken reflections

Synopsis

Huck Finn is a young boy with no mother. He is being raised by the Widow Douglas, who tries to "sivilize" him. Huck's father is a nasty drunkard who shows up looking for Huck. He tries to claim he should get the money that Huck found, since he is Huck's father. While he battles for the money, he takes Huck up river and locks him in a cabin. For a while, Huck likes living wild again but soon decides he must get away from his father. Huck stages his own murder and sets off down the river in a canoe.

On an island near town he meets up with Miss Watson's runaway slave, Jim. Though Huck doesn't like the idea that he is helping Jim run away, he does not turn him in. As the two travel down the Mississippi River, they encounter many strange and dangerous situations. They have a close call with some gangsters on a sinking houseboat, and their raft is broken when a steamboat smashes into it. Huck finds himself in the home of a southern plantation owner, Colonel Grangerford. Huck stays there awhile until the feud between the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons heats up and many of the Grangerfords are killed.

Huck and Jim reunite and set off down the river again. They come across two men running for their lives. Huck takes them to their repaired raft and discovers they are con men who go town to town swindling money from the local people. At one point the men, the king and the duke, pretend to be the long-awaited English uncles of the Wilks girls.

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Eventually it is discovered that they are imposters and they escape. Huck and Jim believed they had rid themselves of the men only to find them right back on their raft.

The men end up turning Jim in as a runaway slave in order to collect some reward money. When Huck discovers what they've done, he heads out looking for Jim. In his search, Huck finds himself portraying his old friend Tom Sawyer in the home of Tom's relatives. When Tom shows up, he continues the charade and pretends to be Sid Sawyer. Staying with the Phelpses, Tom and Huck plan an elaborate scheme to free Jim. They eventually free Jim and get away from the Phelpses, but not before Tom is shot in the leg during their escape. Huck goes for help and the three end up right back at the Phelpses' where Huck learns that Jim is in fact free after all. Huck also learns he no longer has to worry about his pap coming for his money because he is dead.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

When Huck's father returns to try to claim Huck's money, the new judge thinks he can reform him. What does he do to try to help Huck's father and why doesn't it work?

He takes him into his home, gives him a bath and clean clothes to wear and lets him eat with his family. It didn't work because Huck's father wasn't ready for the change and didn't really want to give up his old ways. He was just trying to con the judge into giving him Huck's money.

Literary Analysis

A few times in the story Huck credits providence for helping him out. What is providence?

Providence is the divine care or guidance of God.

Inferential Comprehension

When Huck met the Grangerfords, he found himself in the middle of a feud. What is a feud and what was the difference between the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons?

A feud is a longstanding battle between two parties, in this case two families, that begins with one incident but is carried on long after the incident is over. About the only difference between the families was that they had different names and the Shepherdsons seemed to be more successful in the battles.

Constructing Meaning

In the strange incident that Huck witnessed where a man was shot in broad daylight on the main street of a town, the killer faced a mob of people seeking to apprehend him for the crime. The man was undaunted by the crowd and made them back off by telling them they should go home because a mob doesn't "fight with courage that's born in them, but with courage that's borrowed from their mass...." What did he mean by that?

The individuals in the group were acting braver while in the presence of others than they would if they were confronting him alone.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist/Cultural Factors

Throughout the story Huck struggled with the idea that he was somehow helping Jim run away from his master. This bothered him because he saw Jim as the property of Miss Watson much like a clock would be her property. This is just one example of the cultural influences of the time. Research this time in history and this part of the country. Find some of the other beliefs of the time. Write a report describing the cultural influences of this time and place. Perhaps compare them to other places in the United States at the same time.

Understanding Sequence Huck and Jim traveled a long way down the Mississippi River stopping at many different towns along the way. Recount

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their trip and try to locate the places they landed. Make a timeline of the things that happened to them as well as a map showing where their travels took them.

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning The Grangerfords' daughter, Emmeline, was adept at writing odes to people upon their death. An ode is a form of poetry written as a tribute to the dead person. Review the ode she wrote. Create an ode to a character in this story or write an ode about yourself or someone you know.

Understanding Hist/Cultural Factors The king and the duke were essentially con men who went from town to town trying to swindle people out of their money by using deceitful methods. Some of the activities they engaged in were named. They include holding temperance revival meetings, practicing phrenology, mesmerizing, missionarying, and divining. List all the activities they claim to do. Research these activities and define what they involved.