

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (Unabridged)

by
Mark Twain

Book Information

Mark Twain, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer
(Unabridged)

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Book Level: 8.1

Interest Level: MG+

Tom Sawyer, a mischievous 19th-century boy in a Mississippi River town, and his friends, Huck Finn and Becky Thatcher, run away from home, witness a murder, and find treasure in a cave.

Topics: Classics, Classics (All); Common Core State Standards Appendix B Titles, CCSS Grade Band 6-8; Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship; Series, Puffin Classics; Series, Scholastic Classics; U.S. States/Regions, Missouri; 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

Main Characters

Aunt Polly the sister of Tom's mother; Tom's guardian

Becky Thatcher Tom's new girlfriend

Ben Rogers a boy who Tom tricks into whitewashing a fence

Huckleberry Finn the abandoned son of a drunkard, who lives a seemingly carefree life

Injun Joe a dangerous, unscrupulous man

Joe Harper Tom's friend, who shares in many of Tom's adventures

Judge and Mrs. Thatcher Becky's parents

Mary Tom's cousin

Mr. Dobbins the village schoolmaster

Muff Potter a weak town drunk

Sidney Tom's half-brother

Tom Sawyer the principal character of the story, who is an imaginative, mischievous boy

Widow Douglas the woman who takes Huck into her home

Vocabulary

expectorate to spit

hogshead a large cask

temperance the principle or practice of abstinence from alcohol

Synopsis

Tom Sawyer is a boy living in St. Petersburg, Missouri, a small village on the Mississippi River about twenty years before the Civil War. Tom's mother is dead, and he lives with his Aunt Polly, his cousin Mary, and his half-brother Sidney. Aunt Polly does her best to raise Tom properly, but she is no match for his keen wit.

After Aunt Polly discovers that Tom went swimming instead of going to school, she punishes him by making him whitewash the fence on Saturday. Tom uses applied psychology to get the other boys to do the work for him and to pay for the privilege.

On the way home from a game of war with his friend Joe Harper, Tom sees Becky Thatcher for the first time and immediately falls in love with her. Their relationship is rocky at first, until Tom completely wins her heart by taking her punishment in school.

Tom and Huckleberry Finn make plans to take a dead cat to the cemetery at midnight as a way to cure warts. While there, they witness Injun Joe murdering Dr. Robinson. The terrified boys take an oath never to reveal what they have seen. They later break this oath at the trial because Muff Potter is unjustly accused of the murder. Injun Joe escapes through a window.

Tom, Joe, and Huck decide to become pirates and set up camp on Jackson's Island in the Mississippi. The boys realize that their families think they have drowned. Tom sneaks home intending to leave a note for Aunt Polly, but he changes his mind when he overhears them planning the boys' funeral. The church service is interrupted when the "deceased"

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boys walk down the aisle at their own funeral.

While hunting for hidden treasure, Tom and Huck explore an abandoned house. Two men arrive, and the boys are trapped upstairs. They recognize one of the men as Injun Joe in disguise. Injun Joe and his accomplice have a box of silver coins. By chance, they also dig up a treasure of gold that had been buried by someone else. The boys are terrified but decide to follow the men to find out where they will hide the treasure. They find Injun Joe hiding out in the Temperance Tavern with a large supply of whiskey. Huck continues watching the tavern.

Meanwhile, Tom and Becky go on a picnic with a group of children. They become lost in McDougal's Cave. That same night, Huck follows the two men and overhears their plans to hurt the Widow Douglas. He tells the widow's neighbor, Mr. Jones, of the plot, and he and his sons frighten the pair away.

Search parties are formed to find Tom and Becky, but the children are not found. Tom continues trying to find a way out of the cave. At one point, he catches a glimpse of Injun Joe in the cave. Tom finally discovers a way out of the cave.

Two weeks later, Tom learns that the mouth of the cave has been sealed. Tom then tells that he had seen Injun Joe in the cave. They open the door and find Injun Joe's dead body just inside the opening. His partner had already been found dead in the river.

Later, Tom and Huck go back to the cave and find the treasure Injun Joe had hidden there. Huck goes to live with the Widow Douglas, which he finds almost unbearable. He agrees to stay in return for membership in the robber gang that Tom is organizing.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

When someone wronged Tom, he often thought about how they would feel if he were dead. Have you ever thought this way? What event led you to think this way?

Students may describe a time when they felt they were unjustly punished or when they felt no one cared about them.

Literary Analysis

Cite at least four examples from the book that show the superstitions of Tom or his family and friends. What are some superstitions that people believe today?

Students may cite the following or other examples: remedies for curing warts in chapter six; a method for finding lost marbles in chapter eight; a stray dog howling means someone would die, chapter ten; a body would bleed when the murderer was near, chapter eleven; a green worm on a person means he would receive a new suit of clothes, chapter fourteen; a charm of rattlesnake rattles prevents cramps, chapter sixteen. Students may mention walking under a ladder or breaking a mirror bringing bad luck as present-day superstitions.

Inferential Comprehension

Huck agrees to live with the Widow Douglas so he can be a part of Tom's gang of robbers. Do you think he will continue living with the Widow Douglas? Why or why not?

Huck may find it very difficult to live with her consistently, since he is so used to being on his own. He is not used to the rigidity of school and rules.

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Constructing Meaning

When Tom goes to investigate the taverns in town to see if Injun Joe has a room, Tom tells Huck to stay behind because he doesn't want to be seen with him. Explain why Tom doesn't want to be seen in public with Huck.

Some possible explanations include: Tom doesn't want his aunt to find out; Huck is not a reputable character in town; Tom doesn't want his reputation tarnished.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist/Cultural Factors *The*

Adventures of Tom Sawyer portrays myths and stereotypes people had about minorities during that time period. Have students find examples of racial prejudices in the book. Discuss how the book may have been different if it had been written in the present time.

Understanding the Author's Craft The story is told in the third person by a narrator. Have the students choose a scene and rewrite it from the point of view of one of the characters. One example might be to retell the adventure in the cave from Tom or Becky's point of view.

Comparing and Contrasting Students might enjoy watching a movie based on the book. A class discussion could be held to talk about the differences between the movie and the book. Students may also enjoy reading more of Twain's works, especially *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Responding to Literature The people in the story ascribe to many strange remedies and believe in many superstitions. The students may find it interesting to create their own cures for certain ailments. After writing them down, they could share them with the rest of the class.