

Instructor's Guide for

THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN

by Mark Twain

Biographical Note:

Samuel Langhorne Clemens, writing under the pen name Mark Twain: American (1835-1910). *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was first published in 1884.

Summary

Set in St. Petersburg, Missouri, in the mid-1800s, the story is told in first-person by Huckleberry Finn, a thirteen (or fourteen)-year-old boy who first appears in Twain's previous book, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

The story begins with Huck explaining recent events in his life. After acquiring a small fortune, he is taken in by the well-intentioned Widow Douglas and her stern sister, Miss Watson. Despite Huck's love of the outdoors and his hatred of school, the two women insist on trying to "civilize" him with manners, religion, and education. Feeling stifled and unhappy, Huck longs for escape.

One day, Huck's abusive and long-absent father, Pap, kidnaps him in an attempt to get his son's new fortune. To get away, Huck fakes his own murder and secretly flees to nearby Jackson Island. There he discovers Jim, Miss Watson's runaway slave. Jim explains to Huck that he ran away to avoid being separated from his family and "sold down the river" in New Orleans. Glad to be together, the two begin a long journey by raft on the Mississippi River. Hiding by day and traveling at night, Huck and Jim become close friends—and they encounter a variety of adventures.

First, they discover a dead body in a house being swept along by the river. Next, Huck tries to help a thief who is being abandoned on a dangerous shipwreck. Later Huck and Jim rescue two con men from an angry mob. After being saved, the two cons betray their helpers by selling Jim back into slavery for forty dollars.

Unwilling to leave his friend, Huck decides to break the laws of the pro-slave South and attempt to free Jim from slavery. Huck searches and finds Jim in captivity at a farm owned by Tom Sawyer's relatives. To help Jim escape, Huck convinces the farm owners that he is Tom Sawyer. But a short while later, Tom arrives at the farm and nearly ruins Huck's plan. Huck quickly and secretly explains the situation to Tom, who agrees to help.

Together the two boys devise a complex scheme to free Jim. The plan—made overly difficult by Tom—fails. Tom gets shot and seriously wounded. Refusing to leave the injured boy, Jim gives up his one chance at freedom.

Only when Tom recovers—and his aunt Polly arrives at the Phelps farm—does the truth emerge. Then the boys reveal their identity and their intentions to free Jim. Tom also reveals that Miss Watson granted Jim his freedom. The book ends with Jim free, Tom hoping to travel "out West," and Huck learning that Tom's aunt wants to adopt him.

COMPREHENSION SKILL QUESTIONS

Main Ideas

1. A central idea in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is that
 - a. slavery was an unjust and hurtful institution.
 - b. people should always follow society's rules.
 - c. people should spend as much time as they can in nature or the outdoors.
 - d. a formal education is more valuable than common sense.
2. The main idea of the excerpt below is
 - a. Huck and Jim are not superstitious people.
 - b. Huck respects Jim's views about the dead man.
 - c. Huck thinks Jim is not a very smart person.
 - d. Huck disagrees with Jim's behavior toward the dead man.

He [Jim] said it [talking about the dead man] would fetch bad luck, and the man's ghost might come and haunt us. He said a man that warn't buried was more likely to go haunting around than one that was planted and comfortable. That sounded reasonable, so I didn't say no more.

3. The main idea of the excerpt below is that Huck
 - a. has started cursing again.
 - b. spends much of his time being lazy.
 - c. likes being free of society's rules and expectations.
 - d. faces physical abuse in his new home in the woods.

Soon I was used to being where I was, and liked it—all but the beatings. It was kind of lazy and jolly to lay around comfortable all day, smoking and fishing, no books or study. Two months or more run along, and my clothes got to be all rags and dirt. I didn't see how I'd ever got to like it at the widows where you have to wash, eat on a plate, comb your hair, go to bed regular, get up regular, always be bothering over a book, and have Miss Watson pecking at you all the time. I didn't want to go back no more. I had stopped cussing because the widow didn't like it, but now I took to it again because Pap had no objections. All around, it was pretty good times up there in the woods.

Supporting Details

4. Who agrees to hold Huck's fortune at the beginning of the novel?
 - a. Silas Phelps
 - b. Miss Watson
 - c. Tom Sawyer
 - d. Judge Thatcher
5. When Huck and Jim first meet on Jackson Island, Jim thinks
 - a. Huck is going to try to take him back into slavery.
 - b. Huck is angry that Jim has run away.
 - c. Huck is a ghost who has come to harm him.
 - d. Huck is hurt from the beatings he has endured from Pap.

6. Jim and Huck manage to escape the wrecked steamship by
 - a. swimming out into the Mississippi in the cover of darkness.
 - b. stealing the boat of the gangsters who were on the shipwreck.
 - c. agreeing to help Turner get away from Bill.
 - d. floating on a piece of debris that was drifting in the water.
7. On the night that Tom and Huck attempt to free Jim,
 - a. Tom gets caught by Mr. and Mrs. Phelps.
 - b. Huck admits the truth to the Phelps family.
 - c. Jim escapes on a raft.
 - d. Tom gets shot in the leg.

Conclusions

8. We can infer from the passage below that
 - a. Jim and Huck do not like each other's company.
 - b. Jim and Huck enjoy the river and each other's company.
 - c. The Mississippi River was always a dangerous place for Huck and Jim.
 - d. Huck is eager to get off the raft and live in a house of his own.

Sometimes we had the whole river to ourselves for the longest time. Yonder, across the water, was the banks and islands—and maybe a spark, which was a candle in a cabin window. Sometimes we'd see a spark or two on the water, on a raft or skiff. And maybe we'd hear a fiddle tune or a song coming over from one of the crafts.

It's lovely to live on a raft. We had the sky up there, all speckled with stars. We laid on our backs and looked up at them. We discussed whether they was made or only happened. Jim reckoned they was made, but I reckoned they just happened.

9. The passage below suggests that Huck
 - a. thinks tarring and feathering is an effective punishment.
 - b. believes Blodgett and Bridgewater deserve to be tarred and feathered.
 - c. feels that Blodgett and Bridgewater are innocent.
 - d. feels the treatment of Blodgett and Bridgewater has been too harsh.

“That is, I *knowed* it was Blodgett and Bridgewater. They was all over tar and feathers and didn't look like nothing human. They looked like a couple of monstrous plumes. They was rascals, but it made me sick to see it. People can be awful cruel to each other.”

10. We can infer from this passage that
 - a. Jim is hurt by the joke Huck played on him.
 - b. Jim never really liked Huck.
 - c. Jim thinks Huck's joke was funny.
 - d. Jim expected Huck to treat him cruelly.

Jim looked at the trash, then at me, then back at the trash. After a while, he looked at me steady without a hint of a smile. “What's all dis? I'll tell you what all dis is. When I got all wore out wid work an' wid callin' for you, an' went to sleep, my heart was almost broke 'cause I thought you was lost. I didn' care no mo' what become o' me an' de raft. When I wake up an' find you back all safe an' soun', de tears come—I was so thankful. But all you was thinkin' was how you could make a fool of me wid a lie.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. At several points in the novel, Huck indicates that he feels Tom Sawyer is smarter and wiser than he is. Do you agree with Huck? In what ways are the two boys “smart” or “dumb”? Explain your answer, using instances from the book.
2. How does Huck and Jim’s relationship change over the course of this novel? Using specific instances from the story, describe the changes you see in the way Jim and Huck regard each other.
3. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has been banned in some schools. What, in your opinion, are some of the reasons why teachers and administrators might think the novel is inappropriate? Do you agree or disagree that it should be banned? Explain.

GUIDED PARAGRAPH ASSIGNMENT

Write a paragraph in which you provide supporting evidence to back up the following point:

Point: In the novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck makes three major decisions which change his life.

How to Proceed:

Here are the steps to take in writing your paragraph.

1. Decide on the three key decisions Huck makes. List them here:

2. Freewrite for five minutes or so about the three decisions Huck makes. Don't worry about spelling, punctuation, or grammar—just write down whatever comes into your head.
3. Next, glance over your freewriting. You may want to return to the story to gather more information about Huck's key decisions and the impact they had. Add more supporting details.
4. Now write a rough draft of your paragraph. The box below shows how you can organize your paragraph.

Huck Finn's Decisions

In the novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck makes three major decisions which change his life. Huck's first major decision is _____. (Add supporting details.)

A second major decision that Huck makes is _____. (Add supporting details.)

A final major decision of Huck's is _____. (Add supporting details.)

Hint: Be sure to use transitions to help organize your paragraph. Transitions include such words and expressions as *in the first place*, *also*, and *finally*. Transitions are word signals that make clear to the reader where each new part of your paragraph begins.

5. Set the paragraph aside for a while so you can take a fresh look at it later. See if you have provided enough supporting details to back up your point that Huck makes three major decisions which change his life. See if you can add more details or even better details. Rewrite the paper, trying to make your support as convincing as possible.
6. Now it's very important to read your paper aloud. Chances are that you will find grammar or punctuation mistakes at every spot where your paper does not read smoothly and clearly. Make the corrections needed so that all of your sentences read smoothly. If necessary, write a final draft before handing in your paper.

GUIDED ESSAY ASSIGNMENT

Below are the introductory and concluding paragraphs of an essay, along with the topic sentences of the three supporting paragraphs. The final sentence of the introductory paragraph (underlined below) is the *thesis*, or central point, of the essay.

Jim: A Man, Not a Slave

Introductory Paragraph

Mark Twain challenged the institution of slavery in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by showing that a slave, Jim, was as sensitive—and deserving of dignity—as any human being. Three key scenes from the novel show Jim’s deep humanity and prove Twain’s point that slavery is wrong.

Supporting Paragraph 1

Topic sentence: One powerful scene in which shows Jim’s dignity is on page 80, when Jim learns that Huck played a cruel joke on him. (*Add supporting details*)

Supporting Paragraph 2

Topic sentence: A second moving scene which shows Jim sensitivity and full humanity is on page 109 when he discusses his daughter ‘Lizabeth. (*Add supporting details*)

Supporting Paragraph 3

Topic sentence: Perhaps the most powerful scene in which Jim shows himself to be a full person is on page 153 when he gives up his freedom to help Tom. (*Add supporting details*)

Concluding Paragraph

Through these three key scenes, Mark Twain shows that Jim, a slave, was as sensitive, thoughtful and worthy of respect as any person. To treat Jim or any other innocent person as anything less, Twain shows, is a crime against humanity.

Assignment: Write the three supporting paragraphs needed to complete the essay.

How to Proceed:

1. Ask yourself what is revealed about Jim when he learns of Huck’s joke. What do Jim’s words indicate about his feelings and his character? What does Huck (and readers) learn about Jim in this scene? Reread the scene several times and jot down notes to answer these questions.
Then ask yourself similar questions about the other two scenes. Again, write notes to get as much detail as possible.
2. Now write a rough draft of each paragraph. Start each paragraph with one of the topic sentences given above. Provide plenty of details to back up each of your points.
3. Set the paragraphs aside for a while so that you can take a fresh look at them later. See if you have provided enough supporting details to support your thesis and each topic sentence.
4. Finally, it’s very important to read your paper aloud. Chances are that you will find grammar or punctuation mistakes at every spot where your paper does not read smoothly and clearly. Make the corrections needed so that all of your sentences read smoothly. If necessary, write a final draft before handing in your paper.

A BRIEF GUIDE TO WRITING

Remember that the two basic goals in writing are to **make a point** and to **support that point**. Here are steps to follow while working on your paper:

Step 1: Think about your topic by writing about it in one of three ways.

- *Freewrite for ten minutes.* Write whatever comes into your head about your subject. Don't worry about spelling or grammar. Just get down on paper all the information that occurs to you.
- *Make up a list of ideas and details that could go into your paper.* Pile these items up, one after another, like a shopping list, without worrying about putting them in any special order.
- *Write down a series of questions and answers about your topic.* Your questions can start with words like *what, why, how, when, and where.*

Step 2: Plan your paper with an informal outline.

- First of all, decide on and write out the point of your paper.
- Then list the supporting reasons, examples, or other details that will back up your point. Try to have two or three items of support.

Step 3: Use transitions.

Use your outline as a guide while writing the early drafts of your paper. Use transitions to introduce each of the separate supporting items (reasons, examples, or other details) you present to back up the point of your paper. Transitions include such words as *First of all, Secondly, Another reason* or *Another example*, and *Finally*.

Step 4: Always read your paper aloud.

Chances are you'll find grammar or punctuation mistakes at those places where the paper does not read smoothly and clearly. Make the corrections needed.

ADDITIONAL PARAGRAPH ASSIGNMENTS

1. At the end of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Jim reveals that the body he saw in the floating house was Huck's father. Knowing what you do about the two characters, why do you think Jim withheld this information from Huck? Was he wrong to do so?

Write a paragraph in which you defend or criticize Jim's decision. Use details from the book to support whatever position you take. Depending on the choice you make, the point of your paragraph would be something like this:

Point: Jim was wrong to hide news of Pap's death from Huck.

Or this:

Point: Jim was right to keep news of Pap's death a secret.

2. At several points in the novel, Huck describes feeling free and at peace while sailing on the raft in the middle of the Mississippi River. What place gives you this sense of freedom and peace? Write a paragraph describing a place or time when you felt this combination. Be sure to provide specific details, as Twain does, so readers will be able to visualize the place you describe and why it made you feel so free and relaxed. The topic sentence of your paragraph might be something like this:

Topic Sentence: The place where I feel most free and peaceful is_____.

ADDITIONAL ESSAY ASSIGNMENTS

1. It is often said that “honesty is the best policy.” To what extent do you think this rule applies in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*? Write an essay in which you look at the use of lies in the novel and take a stand on the following thesis:

Thesis: Three instances in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* prove (or disprove) the idea that “honesty is the best policy.”

You’ll first need to identify three instances of lying in the book which you can develop into supporting paragraphs. Be sure the lies you select are clear and the details you include support the position stated in your thesis. After you’ve developed your supporting paragraphs, provide a concluding paragraph in which you round off your paper with a final thought or two.

2. Pretend that you are someone who writes book reviews for a magazine read by students your age. Your assignment is to write a review of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

In a review, you state your opinion about the strong points and weak points of the work. Based on your review, other people will decide whether or not they want to read the story. The short introductory paragraph of your review can begin with the sentence, “I have just read *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, a novel written by Mark Twain.” You can then state your thesis, which might be one of the following:

Thesis: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a book that will appeal to readers for several reasons.

Or: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a book with several strengths and one weakness.

Or: There are three reasons why I do not recommend *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

In order to convince your readers that your thesis is a valid one, you must then provide three supporting paragraphs that *back up your opinion with evidence from the story*. Each of your supporting paragraphs should have its own topic sentence. For example, your three supporting paragraphs might begin with these three sentences:

The first reason that I would recommend *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is that it’s a really exciting adventure story.

A second reason for reading *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is that it has a number of funny moments.

A final reason for reading *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is that its characters are realistic and complex.

After you develop your supporting paragraphs, add a concluding paragraph in which you round off your paper by providing a final thought or two.

ANSWERS TO THE COMPREHENSION AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN*

Answers to the Comprehension Skill Questions

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|------|-------|
| 1. a | 6. b |
| 2. b | 7. d |
| 3. c | 8. b |
| 4. d | 9. d |
| 5. c | 10. a |

Suggested Answers to the Discussion Questions

1. Students may point out that Tom is more “book smart,” while Huck is more “street smart.” Tom is creative and has a wild imagination, but his “plans” are not practical, and they lead to serious problems. On the other hand, Huck is not as educated and doesn’t speak as well as Tom. However, his ability to escape his father, disguise his disappearance, and survive on his own suggest that Huck is very smart—in ways Tom is not.
2. Answers will vary. Students should point out that at the beginning of the book, Jim was a friendly slave to Huck. But as Huck learns of Jim’s family, witnesses his knowledge, discovers his loyalty, and learns of his decency, Huck begins to care deeply for Jim. This caring is revealed in Huck’s statement that he would work to free Jim even if meant going to “Hell.” Jim too develops strong feelings for Huck. Jim’s hurt at Huck’s joke and his refusal to confess to the Phelps family that he knew Huck shows Jim’s genuine concern for him.
3. Answers will vary. Students may point to the offensive language in the book or the stereotypical nature of Jim’s dialog as reasons for banning the novel. On the other hand, the core themes of the book may make many students feel it should not be banned.