The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
By Mark Twain
Real name was Samuel Langhorne Clemens

Born November 30, 1835, the night Halley’s Comet flashed across the sky
- Halley’s comet is the only comet visible to the naked eye
- Appears about every 75 years

Grew up along the Mississippi River
Quit school at age 12
Died on April 21, 1910, as Halley’s comet again flashed through the sky
TWAIN’S WORKS

- Travel books (non-fiction)
  - Innocents Abroad
  - Life on the Mississippi

- Historic novels
  - The Prince and the Pauper
  - A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court

- Short stories
  - The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras Country
Day 1: Multiple Choice - 25 multiple choice type questions; study Huck packet.

Quotes - Write a paragraph response for 2 quotes. Study the quotes from this review presentation.

Day 2: Text Analysis - You will be given a passage to reread, and take notes on; then, you’ll write a paragraph to analyze the language. Study rhetorical terms

Essay - You will write one essay from a choice of two prompts: the topics will be the appropriateness and relevance of the novel for today’s readers and Huck’s reason’s for rejecting civilization at the novel’s end.
Quotes

- 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.
- It don’t make no difference how foolish it is, it’s the right way – and it’s the regular way.
- All right then, I’ll go to hell.
- You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft.
- People would call me a low doen Ablitionist and despise me for keeping mum – but that don’t make no difference. I ain’t going to tell.
- 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.
- What! And not sell out the rest o’ the property?
- Human being can be awful cruel to one another.
- Jim won’t ever forgit you, Huck; you’s de bes’ fren’ Jim’s ever had; en you’s de only fren’ ole Jim’s got now.
Introduction

Mark Twain described the major theme of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as

“A sound heart and a deformed conscience come into collision, and conscience suffers defeat.”

- “A sound heart” = a good, honest heart.
- “A deformed conscience” = a conscience influenced by the laws of society and a sense of duty toward those laws.
Key Facts

➢ Genre
  • Satiric Novel (Fiction)
    - A work that uses humor, irony, and extreme exaggeration to ridicule society in order to bring about change

➢ Narrator & Protagonist
  • Huck Finn: literal, realistic, practical

➢ Setting
  • Time
    - Before the Civil War; roughly 1835–1845
  • Place
    - The Mississippi River town of St. Petersburg, Missouri
    - The adventure continues down the Mississippi into Arkansas
Themes: What does Twain teach us about each idea?

- Racism & Slavery
- Intellectual and Moral Education
- The Hypocrisy of “Civilized” Society
Racism & Slavery

- Although written 20 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, America – especially the South – was still struggling with racism and the aftereffects of slavery.
- Insidious racism arose near the end of Reconstruction that oppressed blacks for illogical and hypocritical reasons.
- Twain exposes the hypocrisy of slavery and demonstrates how racism distorts the oppressors as much as the oppressed.
- The result is a world of moral confusion.
Intellectual and Moral Education

- Huck is an uneducated boy.
- He distrusts the morals and precepts of the society that treats him as an outcast and fails to protect him from abuse.
- Huck questions his teachings, especially regarding race and slavery.
- In many instances, Huck chooses to “go to hell” rather than go along with the rules of society.
“Civilized” to Huck means . . .

- Regular baths, uncomfortable clothes
- Mandatory school attendance
- Degraded rules that defy logic
  - Huck’s drunkard, abusive father gets to keep custody of Huck because he is his natural father
  - The injustice of slavery that keeps Jim from his family
  - Seemingly good people are prejudiced slave-owners
  - Terrible acts go unpunished, while lesser crimes lead to severe punishment
Motifs

- Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text’s major themes.
  - Rebirth/Childhood
    - Huck’s youth is an important factor in his moral education; only a child is open-minded enough to undergo the kind of development that Huck does. When Huck feels stifled by society, he escapes to become reborn again. Throughout the novel, Huck loses his identity, assumes different names, and in turn is reborn with new values.
  - Lies and Cons
    - Huckleberry Finn is full of malicious lies and scams; the lies are bad and hurt a number of innocent people.
  - Superstitions and Loneliness
    - Confronted with the obtuseness of their isolation, Huck and Jim rely on each other and their superstitions to cope. Huck does not like being alone, but, ironically, it’s when he’s within society that he feels most alone.
Conflict and Climax

- Major Conflict: Huck’s internal struggle with his “deformed conscience.”

- Climax: The point in the story where the protagonist’s conflict is resolved, leading to the resolution of the story.

The climax of *Huckleberry Finn* is when Huck decides to steal Jim out of slavery from the Phelps farm (his own moral code) despite the fact that he believes he will suffer in hell for it (society’s teachings).
Major Symbol: The Mississippi River

In *Huck Finn*, the river symbolizes freedom, and it becomes symbolic of Huck’s journey to discover his natural virtue. The current determines the direction of the raft as well as Huck’s life.

There is a major contrast between life on the river and life on the shore because life on the river (uncivilized) is peaceful and easy, yet not totally without danger; however, life on the shore (civilized) can be cruel, authoritarian, hypocritical, and reflective of what Twain called the “Damned Human Race.”

Life on the raft is paradoxical. Even though they are confined to a small space on the raft, Huck and Jim experience greater freedom on the raft. Why?
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn has been a controversial book since it was first published in 1885 – mostly because of its inappropriate language and racial slurs.

The following slides will represent four different points of views of Twain’s most famous novel.
1884

- Written by William E. Henley of the Athenaeum
  - “In *Huckleberry Finn* Twain returns to his right mind”
  - “The book is Mark Twain at his best”
  - “It is meant for boys”
  - “Huckleberry . . . is the hero of such scrapes and experiences as to make your mouth water”
  - “Jim and Huckleberry are real creations”
Statements made by the Concord Library Committee after they excluded the book for the public library

- “absolutely immoral in its tone”
- “very little humor”
- “If not for the author’s reputation, the book would undoubtedly meet with severe criticism.”
- “the veriest trash”
- “a low grade of morality”
- “language of a rough, ignorant dialect”
- “systematic use of bad grammar and an employment of rough, inelegant expressions.”
Comments by John H. Wallace of The Washington Post

- “Huckleberry Finn uses the pejorative [insulting] term nigger profusely.”
- “It speaks of black Americans with implications that they are not honest, they are not intelligent as whites, and they are not human.”
- “It constitutes mental cruelty, harassment, and outright racial intimidation to force black students to sit in a classroom to read this kind of literature . . .”
“You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft.”

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“All right, then, I’ll go to hell.”

“People would call me a low down Ablicationist and despise me for keeping mum – but that don’t make no difference. I ain’t going to tell…”

“It don’t make no difference how foolish it is, it’s the right way – and it’s the regular way. And there ain’t no other way…”

“Jim won’t ever forgit you, Huck; you’s de bes’ fren’ Jim’s ever had; en you’s de only fren’ ole Jim’s got now.”

“Human being can be awful cruel to one another.”

“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.”
Written by Clarence Page of the Des Moines Register

- “Huckleberry Finn may have been black . . . No, not Huck himself, but his voice.”
- “The news that ol’ Huck might have been a soul brother is ironic considering how many blacks have tried to keep Huckleberry Finn out of the hands of school children every year, despite its strong anti-slavery, pro-brotherhood message, because it happens to mention the word ‘nigger’ about 200 times.
- “Twain exposed the lunacy and hypocrisy of American racism by showing it through the eyes of a boy who finds himself . . . helping a slave to escape.”

“I, too, flinched when I heard my white teacher reading the word ‘nigger’ aloud when she introduced our ninth grade class to the book. But I soon found myself reading it on my own, at first out of curiosity, then out of sheer pleasure.”
Twain’s View on Slavery

- As a schoolboy, Twain had no aversion to slavery
- He was not aware there was anything wrong with it
- The papers said nothing against it
- Churches taught that God approved it
- He took a strong liking to blacks when they worked on his family’s farm

- He and his family were friends with many blacks in his home town of Hannibal
- Twain’s family owned a slave that he deeply admired
- Twain called him “Uncle Dan’l”
- The character of Jim in Huck Finn is said to be modeled after this man
- He is also mentioned in several other Twain stories under his real name