

Study Guide – The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

The following questions will help guide your reading of The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. If you find these questions raise other questions in your mind, jot them down and raise them in our class discussion of the book.

1. Twain tells his story with a first person narrator (Huck). Often, Huck doesn't fully understand what is going on, but (presumably) the reader is picking up on some of Twain's satiric humor as Huck innocently or naively describes a situation. How does telling the story through Huck's voice allow Twain to poke fun (indirectly) at numerous aspects of life in the late nineteenth century? In considering this question, cite specific passages to demonstrate the points you're making.
2. Twain thought of himself primarily as a "humorist" and not a novelist. What are the different types of humor that appear in this book? How does Twain use humor both to make us laugh and to make us think? Can you identify some passages that would have been funny to a 19th century audience but not to a 2018 audience? Are there passages that might be funnier to a 2018 audience than a 19th century audience?
3. "Pap" is Twain's "bad guy" in the novel. What makes Pap so bad? Does he represent a "type" of person that one might have encountered in the 1880s (or today)? How does Twain use Pap to encourage his own readers to take a look in the mirror?
4. Twain's contemporaries considered his sketch of life along the Mississippi River during the antebellum period to be highly accurate. Assuming it was accurate, how would you describe the people, the places, the local values, customs, prejudices, and patterns of living?
5. What (if anything) does the river symbolize? How about the raft? Did you see any other use of symbolism in the novel?
6. Drawing only on the text of The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (and not on any prior knowledge you may have of Mark Twain's views), what would you say Twain thinks about slavery? About a culture that tolerates or celebrates the holding of slaves? Cite two or three specific passages from the novel that support your conclusion.
7. Some twentieth century critics have claimed that Jim is merely a negative and oversimplified racial stereotype – almost a minstrel figure. Others sharply disagree and say he is the "hero" of the novel. What do you think? (Support

your answer on specific passages from the book. Jot down the page numbers so you can easily find the passage when you're in class.)

8. Huck often talks about the struggle he has with his "conscience" (particularly when he is considering whether he should turn in Jim). Should Huck listen to his "conscience"? If not, why not? How should he figure out the difference between right and wrong?
9. Huck is the consummate "outsider" – beyond "civilization." Granting that, what does this suggest regarding Twain's views about "civilization" and its institutions? Why might it be better that Huck stay "un-civilized"?
10. Twain introduces numerous minor characters who Huck meets along his journey. How do these men, women, and children shape Huck's character? What does Huck learn from his encounters with them?
11. Huck is narrating the story, but can you identify any passages throughout the novel where Twain's voice seems to emerge – where a character's words seem to be expressing Twain's views?
12. Why do you think Twain re-introduces Tom Sawyer near the end of the novel? Some critics have claimed the last part of the book "ruins" the novel. Others claim it is a perfect ending if one understands the message Twain seeks to convey. How did you respond to this part of the book?
13. This book has long been considered one of the greatest, if not the greatest, novels in American literature. Unlike many "classics," however, it has been praised both by "highbrow" literary critics and "average" readers (i.e. you and me). What accounts for the book's popularity with such a wide range of readers? Why have so many readers found the character of Huck and his adventures on the river so compelling?