**Huckleberry Finn**

To get away from his violent, drunken father, Huckleberry Fin fakes his own death and lives wild in the woods. He soon meets Jim, a runaway slave, and the tow outcasts set off on a dangerous journey down the mighty Mississippi river, in search of freedom.

**OBJECTIVES**

- The students will gain a better understanding of slavery by researching and identifying four characteristics of slavery during the 19th century including living conditions, social acceptance, jobs, and treatment.
OPENING THEMES

- Freedom means different things to different people. What does it mean to you?
  Brainstorm a list of statements that describe the idea of freedom.
- A friend tells you in strictest confidence that he is going to run away from what you both consider an intolerable situation. You know that runaways are often preyed upon by criminals and other unscrupulous people. What do you do?

RESEARCH ASSIGNMENTS

Did you know?

In the years before the Civil War, which started in 1861, Missouri and other southern states allowed slavery. Mark Twain’s father was a slaveholder, and enslaved Africans were a common sight in Twain’s boyhood home of Hannibal. However, even though many people in Missouri were immigrants from southern states and supporters of slavery, many others opposed it. Missourians’ mixed feelings about slavery prevented the state from ever joining other slaveholding states in the Confederacy and made it a battleground during the Civil War.

1. **Where the Slaves Were.**
   It may be difficult for you to get a feeling for how common slavery was during the first half of the 19th century in America. Research how many slaves were in the slave-holding states, compare that number to the number of free people in each state, in what states they were concentrated, what work they carried out and display the information in a chart.

2. **Abolitionists.**
   The abolitionists, mentioned with such horror by Huck, were a group of antislavery activists who wanted the slaves freed. Many gave fiery speeches in aid of their cause. You can write speeches to persuade people to free the slaves, and then perform them.

3. **North and South**
   Before and during the Civil War, the North and South differed greatly on economic issues. The war was about slavery, but primarily about its economic consequences. The northern elite wanted economic expansion that would change the southern (slave-holding) way of life. Abraham Lincoln is one of the
biggest names in this conflict. Research about the reasons and results of the conflict and display it in a chart. You can interview Abraham Lincoln telling about the events 20 years later.

4. **Meet Mark Twain**

Mark Twain was more than just a writer... Present this great American writer in first person as if you were writing his autobiography.

> I was born the 30th of November, 1835, in the almost invisible village of Florida, Monroe County, Missouri. . . . The village contained a hundred people and I increased the population by 1 percent. It is more than many of the best men in history could have done for a town.

—The Autobiography of Mark Twain

5. **Introducing the Novel**

> Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.

—author’s note from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

These humorous warnings were the first words that readers of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* saw when they opened Mark Twain’s new novel in 1885. At the time, Twain was already well known as a humorist and the author of the nostalgic “boy’s book” *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Therefore, Twain’s readers probably did not expect that Twain would have serious motives for writing *Huckleberry Finn* or that the novel would teach serious moral lessons. You can present your research in a chart and/or book review.
BACKGROUND

Point of View

Point of view is the relationship of the narrator, or storyteller, to the events of the story. *Huckleberry Finn* is told by the character Huck, using words like *I* and *we*. Therefore, it is told from the **first-person** point of view. The reader sees everything through Huck's eyes and is given his perspective on events.

When examining a narrative point of view, it is important to distinguish the narrator from the author. Huck is an uneducated fourteen-year-old boy living in a village in the 1840s. He has the knowledge, beliefs, and experiences of such a boy. Twain, on the other hand, was a well-traveled writer and experienced lecturer. He was well aware of how to use narrative techniques, adopt different points of view, and speak in the role of different characters, and he used that knowledge to create a narrator who is very different from himself.

Unreliable Narrator

Huckleberry Finn is also an example of an **unreliable narrator**—one who does not understand the full significance of the events he describes and comments on. Huck is not intentionally unreliable; his lack of education and experience makes him so. Much of the humor in the first chapters comes from Huck’s incomplete understanding of the adults around him and their “sivilized” ways.

READ AND RESPOND

A Civilized Boy

The first chapters of a novel introduce readers to the conflicts, or struggles, that the characters will face throughout the course of the story. **External conflicts** are struggles between characters who have different goals or between a character and forces of nature. **Internal conflicts** are psychological struggles that characters experience when they are unhappy or face difficult decisions. External conflicts often trigger internal conflicts.

As you read the first fifteen chapters of *Huckleberry Finn*, use the chart below to keep track of the conflicts that the characters experience. Add boxes on a separate sheet of paper if you need to. Recognizing major conflicts will help you understand the major themes, or ideas about life, that are developed in the novel.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Huck __________________________</th>
<th>vs</th>
<th>Miss Watson and the Widow __________</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explanation of conflict: the sisters want to civilize Huck; he wants to be free</td>
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<tr>
<th>______________________________</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explanation of the conflict:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
1. (Personal Response) What is your first impression of Huck? Why?
2. At the beginning of the novel, with whom is Huck living? In what ways do they try to change Huck? Do you think they succeed? Explain.
3. Do you have many rules in your house? Do sentences like “Don't put your feet on the table”, “Don’t yawn and stretch like that” are familiar to you?

4. SUPERSTITION

In the novel, there is a lot of superstition. Some say that superstition is an impractical way of looking at life but the characters in Mark Twain's, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn beg to differ. Allowing characters in a novel to have superstitions makes their lives more realistic and the reading more enjoyable. Huck and Jim's superstitions cause them grief, help them get through, and sometimes get them into trouble in their lengthy runaway journey. Although both of these characters tend to be quite
rational, they quickly become irrational when anything remotely superstitious happens to them. Superstition plays a dual role: it shows that Huck and Jim are child-like in spite of their otherwise extremely mature characters. Second, it serves to foreshadow the plot at several key junctions. Examples of superstition are abundant throughout the novel. For example, spilling salt leads to Pa returning for Huck, and later Jim gets bitten by a rattlesnake after Huck touches a snakeskin with his hands. Superstitions let the reader feel more connected with the characters in the novel and give the characters more of a human persona that makes the novel incredibly pleasurable.

In the first chapter, Huck sees a spider on his arm and he brushed him off without thinking, right into the flame of a candle. Huck needed no one to tell him that killing a poor spider brings the worst kind of luck.

- Include all the superstitions that you encounter in the following chapters and note down what character they come from.

**The Homecoming**

The use of literary figures are what characterize a text as being literary. One example is **Metaliterature**.

- What example do you find in this chapter? Why is it mentioned?

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**Metaliterature**: writings about writing; any written discussing another text

**Hyperbole**: Extravagant exaggeration
Example: “I rubbed at that lamp until my arm almost fell off”

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**Simile**: A simile is when you say that something - a person or place, animal or thing - is LIKE something else. A simile always uses the word ‘as’ or ‘like’
Example: “His hair was black like coal”
A metaphor makes an even stronger image in the reader’s head. When you use a metaphor, you are saying that a person, place, animal or thing IS some thing else (not just LIKE it!). Metaphors are stronger images than similes. They don’t mean exactly what the words say. Example: “It was a camel train loaded with diamonds and gold bars”

- Collect other examples of literary figures that you find through the story

5. Briefly describe Pap. What is his ultimate goal in harassing Huck?
6. Why do you think Huck ran to Judge Thatcher’s house?

**CABIN FEVER**

7. “Huck got used to his life in the cabin”. Do you think you would get used to something like that? Why? Why not?

- Distinguish between: Get used to doing sth and Used to do something

8. How does Huck escape from the cabin in Illinois? What does his ability to escape suggest about him?

**RUNAWAYS**

9. “I always like dead people and tried to help them when I could”, Jim screamed. Why did he say that about Huck?

10. Where is Huck reunited with Jim? In what significant ways are Jim and Huck alike? In what significant ways are they different?
What Would You Do?

Put yourself in Huck’s place when he has just discovered Jim, a runaway slave. If you were in that situation, what would you have done? Would you have turned Jim in or helped him run for freedom? Why? Think about how your decision would impact you, your family, and Jim.

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____________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________
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DRESSING UP

11. What does Huck find out when he disguises and meets a woman?
12. What do you think will happen next?

ON THE WATER

- Draw or photocopy a map of the Mississippi River Valley. Then track Huck and Jim’s journey on the Mississippi River. Put a star or other symbol next to towns that they visit.

LOOKING FOR CAIRO

Analyzing Relationships

Review the chapters paying special attention to Huck’s relationship with Jim. Note how Huck treats Jim as well as how Huck feels about him. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, write a brief analysis of their relationship. What changes does it undergo? What do you think causes these changes? Support your opinions with quotations and other evidence from the novel.

- What does Jim plan to do when he becomes a free man? What is Huck’s reaction to the plan?
In *Huckleberry Finn*, people and things are not always what they appear to be. As you read the following Chapters, make note of times when people or things appear to be one way but are actually very different underneath. In the left-hand column of the chart below, note what the character or thing seems to be. In the right-hand column, note what the character or thing actually is. Add rows to the chart if necessary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appearance</th>
<th>Reality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Huck pretends he is a boy whose family has smallpox.</td>
<td>Huck is actually lying to protect Jim.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**BACKGROUND**

**Satire and Irony**

**Satire** is a kind of literature that tries to open people’s eyes to the need for change by exposing the flaws of a person or society. Satirists’ main weapon is humor, which is created through techniques such as irony.

**Irony** is the contrast between what appears to be true and is actually true, or between what we expect to happen and what actually happens. Twain created an ironic character in Pap. We expect a father to be proud of his son and provide for him, but Pap is angry that Huck is learning to read and “getting religion,” and Pap wants to spend Huck’s money on himself. Though we may laugh at Pap, we should also be aware of the messages behind the humor: Judge Thatcher is too easily tricked by Pap’s “reformation,” and there is something wrong with a system that would let Pap take Huck.

Through the use of irony, Twain develops some of the most important themes of *Huckleberry Finn*. As you read the following Chapters, look for examples of irony, and think about the flaws that Twain is attempting to expose.

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**BLOOD FEUD**

13. What does Buck say when Huck asks him how the feud between the
Shepherdsons and the Grangerfords got started? What is ironic about Buck’s response?

- The Shepherdsons and the Grangerfords are unable to settle their differences, and so they resort to violence. Imagine that you have been called into help them resolve their conflict through peaceful means. What would you say to them? What would you have them do? In a small group, role-play a conflict resolution meeting between the two families.

**MEETING ROYALTY to HARD CHOICES**

14. Briefly describe the duke and the king. What might Twain be satirizing through the use of these characters?

- How do you go about making important decisions? Do you tend to follow your heart or your head?
- Read to find out what important decisions Huck faces and how he goes about making them.

15. What were your feelings when Huck thought about sending the letter to Miss Watson so that Jim could be recaptured?

**THE ESCAPE ARTISTS**

In many popular adventure stories, the hero is held captive by evil enemies or forces yet manages to escape.

**Sharing Ideas**
As a class, discuss books and movies in which a hero overcomes seemingly impossible odds to find freedom. Who or what holds the hero captive? What miseries does the hero endure while being held? How does the hero escape? Do friends help?

**Setting a Purpose**
Read to find out how Huck and a friend plan to help Jim escape.

**BACKGROUND**

The Antihero
Traditional heroes are often superhuman. We look up to them because they are braver, stronger, more clever, or more unwilling to sacrifice their principles than we. **Antiheroes**, on the other hand, are very human. Like us, they have faults, make mistakes, and puzzle over difficult decisions. In the end, however, antiheroes usually do the “right thing”—what we, ourselves, hope we would do in similar circumstances. As you read the final chapters of *Huckleberry Finn*, think about the heroes of the novel. Are they traditional heroes or antiheroes? What makes them so?

16. At the beginning of the chapter, How does Huck expect Tom to react when he explains the plan to free Jim? Why does Tom’s response surprise Huck?

17. How are the duke and the king punished? What is Huck’s reaction to their punishment?

18. What does Tom’s elaborate plan to free Jim tell you about Tom? What does it tell you about his attitude toward Jim?

**LIGHTING OUT**

19. What does Huck decide to do at the end of the novel? Why doesn’t he stay with Aunt Sally?

20. What did you think of the ending of *Huckleberry Finn*? Would you have ended the novel the same way? Why or why not?

**The Controversial Conclusion**

As Mark Twain wrote *Huckleberry Finn*, he pondered over the plot. He thought especially long and hard about how to end the novel and effectively resolve the conflicts that he had presented. Though some critics feel that the conclusion of *Huckleberry Finn* is logical and effective, other critics have severely criticized it.

➢ As you read the last chapters of *Huckleberry Finn*, think about the events that came before and the way that the characters in the novel usually behave. Then judge the conclusion for yourself. Is it consistent with the characters we have come to know? Does it resolve the major conflicts in the novel in a satisfactory way?

**POST-READING**
21. **Personal Response:** What do you predict will happen to Huck? What sort of life do you think he will have? Why?

**Literature Groups**

- Mark Twain contrasts life on the raft with life on shore. In your group, discuss the differences between what the raft represents to Huck and what life on shore is like. Cite lines from the text that describe raft life and shore life to support your argument. Then present your conclusions to others in your class.

- Why was *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* considered to be “not a proper boy’s book”? Do you think it could still be considered not a proper young person’s book? Explain.
Arguments and Supporting Evidence

**Essential Question:** Should Mark Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn be banned? Why or why not?

**Thesis Statement:**
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

List each of the arguments you are making to support your thesis. Then, list 2-3 documented facts to support each of those arguments. Record the type of evidence you have gathered. Refer to key below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Argument 1</th>
<th>Supporting Evidence</th>
<th>Type of Evidence</th>
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<th>Argument 2</th>
<th>Supporting Evidence</th>
<th>Type of Evidence</th>
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<tr>
<th>Argument 3</th>
<th>Supporting Evidence</th>
<th>Type of Evidence</th>
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**Types of Evidence:**
- Fact
- Statistics
- Graphic/Multimedia
- Expert Opinion/Quote
- Primary Source (e.g. excerpt from the novel)
- Law/Official Policy
**HUCKLEBERRY FINN GLOSSARY**

**Bunk:** a narrow bed, often fixed to a wall

**Crook:** someone who is dishonest, especially someone who uses their position of power for their own personal advantage

**Drown:** to sink under water and die

**Feud:** an angry disagreement between two people or groups that continues for a long time

**Fidget:** to keep making small quick movements with parts of your body because you are bored, nervous, or impatient.

**Fraudster:** someone who commits the crime of fraud

**Harass:** to keep annoying or upsetting someone, for example by criticizing them, attacking them, or treating them in a way that is offensive to them

**Hog:** a male pig whose sex organs have been removed

**Loafer:** Someone who likes loafing around

  **To loaf about/around:** to spend time doing nothing, usually when you should be working

**Log cabin:** a small simple house made of logs in the countryside or in the mountains

**Oath:** a formal promise, especially one made in a court of law (To make an oath)

**Plunder:** valuable things taken from a place using force

**Prank:** a silly trick that you play on someone to surprise them (To play a prank on sb)

**Raft:** a simple flat boat made by tying long pieces of wood together

**Ransom:** hold someone to ransom: to keep someone as a prisoner until an amount of money is paid

**Rascal:** (OLD-FASHIONED) a dishonest man

**Sassy:** someone who is sassy shows no respect for people in authority
**Saw:** a tool used for cutting wood or metal, consisting of a handle and a metal blade with several sharp teeth along one edge

**Scam:** a dishonest plan, especially for getting money

**Scold:** to criticize someone, especially a child, severely and usually angrily for something they have done wrong

**Shelter:** a place where people are protected from bad weather or from danger

**Skiff:** a small light boat with enough space for one person

**Smallpox:** a serious disease in which your skin becomes covered in spots that can leave permanent marks

**Steamboat:** a large boat that moves by steam power

**Stranded:** left somewhere with no way of going anywhere else

**Tannery:** a place where animal skins are made into leather

**Timber:** wood used for building houses or making furniture

**Wigwam:** a tall tent used in the past by some native americans as their home

**Wreck:** a ship that has sunk