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THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN

OVERALL OBJECTIVE: To provide teachers with instructional materials that will enhance their students' understanding of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* through development of skills in the areas of vocabulary, reading comprehension, literary analysis, writing, and appreciation of the novel via a multi-level instructional approach.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THIS PACKET: **To help students**

1. build vocabularies based on the language used in the novel.
2. develop the reading comprehension skills of understanding cause-effect relationships, recalling sequence of events, and relating details to generalizations.
3. develop the literary analysis skills of understanding characterization, irony, dialect, figurative language, and symbolism.
4. practice the writing skills used in writing descriptions and in narrating events from different points of view.

APPROACHES TO THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN

A committee of English teachers once asked by the federal government to prepare a list of books that should be required reading for all high school students could agree unanimously on only one text – *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Twain's masterpiece is indeed an ideal classroom choice for its combination of riotous humor, serious message, and historical significance.

Huckleberry Finn is, first, a delightful reading experience for teacher and student alike. Its episodic structure makes for easy division into assignments, while its longer episodes – the duke and king sequence, the setting free of Jim – draw students into a more sustained pattern of reading as the book develops. Despite their setting, many of the book's incidents concern problems familiar to most teenagers, and can be used to provoke discussion about such matters as loyalty and good manners, or as stimuli for journal entries or autobiographical essays. And the sheer hilarity of many chapters – Huck's attempts to teach Jim, the elaborate escape plans – are an antidote to the excessive seriousness of much assigned reading.

But the novel has its deeper themes as well. Underlying its variety of incidents is the ongoing story of Huck's practical education in morality and in human nature. Encountering a wide range of people both good and bad, Huck learns to distinguish between appearance and underlying reality, and to accept others for what they are rather than for what society says about them. Most important is Huck's awareness of Jim's humanity; he learns that slaves have feelings, and he forms a bond with Jim closer than that he has with any white adult. Similarly, he re-evaluates the antics of the duke and the king when their greed begins to do harm to those he likes.

Through all these events Huck is forced to choose between accepted morality and the promptings of

his own conscience. He helps Sophia Grangerford, and thereby comes to see the folly of feuding. He determines to protect the Wilks girls at the risk of his own life. Most important, he gradually accepts his obligations toward Jim, overthrowing in the process the standards of his slave-owning society. The teacher can make use of these developments in Huck to stimulate discussion about prejudice, decision-making, and judging others.

These subjects, serious as they are, never appear sententious or didactic because they are viewed through Huck's own eyes. Huck Finn is both a fascinating, representative young person and a model of the naive or innocent narrator. His struggles against adult efforts to civilize him will earn the cheers of many students, and his ability to take decisive action, and especially to fabricate successful deceptions, will win their admiration. Yet he combines these traits with an extreme naivete about the world, and a comically distorted view of many subjects. By pointing, for example, to the fact that he believes his willingness to free Jim is another example of the evil that Miss Watson always saw in him, the teacher can use Huck to show students how to read for tone and for irony.

The teacher may also use other characters and incidents in the novel as sources for literary analysis exercises, and for essay writing. Not only Huck, but Tom and Jim as well, show comic misunderstandings of both literature and life, compelling students to read through the text's ironies to the real message. Tom's blind faith in the conventions of romantic adventure stories, for example, can lead to class discussion about the distortions of reality found in today's movies, television, or other popular media. The King's assertion that fools form a majority in any town will provoke heated debate about the validity of popular opinion.

Huckleberry Finn can be used in conjunction with a wide range of more recent literature. Theodore Taylor's *The Cay*, for example, further considers the subject of learning to accept others, while novels such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Souder* show the continuing struggle between racism and justice in America. For a sharply contrasting first-person narrative, the class may be assigned *Anne Frank*, while *The Catcher in the Rye* presents a modern parallel to *Huck Finn* in its story of a runaway youth's picaresque adventures. Huck's efforts to avoid being civilized are similar to those of the Indian boys in *The Light in the Forest* and *When the Legends Die*. Or the teacher may wish to suggest such other classics of growing up as *The Red Pony* or *A Day No Pigs Would Die*. Such reading will serve to strengthen the conviction that *Huckleberry Finn* transcends the period it so vividly depicts, and speaks about universal concerns to audiences of all times.

WHAT IS THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN ABOUT?

Chafing at life with the Widow Douglas and her sister Miss Watson, Huck Finn enjoys pranks and fantasies with Tom Sawyer and Tom's gang. But Huck's drunken