

# ***PinkMonkey***<sup>®</sup> Literature Notes on . . .

SAMPLE EXCERPTS FROM THE MONKEYNOTES FOR  
"Huckleberry Finn"

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## ***The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn***

**By**

**Mark Twain**



*Edited by Diane Sauder*

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## KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

### SETTING

The novel is set in mid Eighteenth Century America. The first few chapters are set in St.Petersburg, Missouri, where Huck is adopted by the Widow Douglas, who tries to civilize him. He attends the local school and church, and.....

### CHARACTERS

#### Major Characters

*Huck Finn* - the protagonist of the novel and the son of the town drunk. He is about 12 years old.

*Jim* - the runaway slave of Miss Watson's, whom Huck helps to gain freedom.

*Widow Douglas* - Huck's guardian who adopts him and wants to civilize him.

*Pap* - Huck's father who comes back to town when he learns that his son has become rich.

*Tom Sawyer* - a friend of Huck who is about his same age.

*The Duke and the Dauphin* - two friends who go about fooling people and relieving them of their.....

### CONFLICT

*Protagonist:* The protagonist of the novel is Huck Finn, a boy of about 12 years, who must make a .....

*Antagonist:* Huck's antagonist is the society and its customs that allow slavery to exist, that treat the .....

*Climax:* The climax occurs when Huck decides that he must stand by Jim at .....

*Outcome:* The outcome of the novel is comic with Huck deciding to go against the hypocritical society and.....

### PLOT (Synopsis)

Huck Finn, a boy of about 12 years, is the son of the town drunk. Widow Douglas adopts him so that she can civilize him and raise him to be a gentleman. Huck dislikes the regular, staid ways of the widow. Although she is kind and attentive, he is uncomfortable and feels stifled at her house. He does not like going to school, attending church, or wearing neat clothes. Neither does he like being tutored at home by Miss Watson. When he is no longer able to put up with the Widow's ways, he runs away; but Huck is found by Tom Sawyer, who convinces him to come back.

Huck and Tom have earlier found a hidden treasure, which they are allowed to keep for themselves. Huck's father comes to know of his son's prosperity and returns to St. Petersburg. He wants to take away Huck's money, for he feels that it is rightfully his. He tries to catch Huck a number of times, but the clever boy always eludes him. One day, the father waits for him, catches him, and takes him away after a short brawl. He locks Huck in a cabin in the woods three miles down the river and regularly beats him.

A couple of months pass. When the beatings get unbearable, Huck decides to run away from the .....

### THEMES

#### Major Theme

The major theme in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is the theme of "initiation." In an initiation narrative, the protagonist goes through a rite of passage, a growing up process which is multifaceted. In a moment of crisis, the protagonist is suddenly obliged to make the painful transition from childhood to adulthood; this passage .....

## Minor Theme

Twain depicts the horror of slavery through the character Jim. He is going to be sold away from his family by Miss Watson, so he runs away. Huck travels with him down the Mississippi, but even Huck at first treats him like a piece of property, and Jim, because Huck is white, must do what this twelve year old boy wants. Even though .....

## MOOD

The major mood of the novel is adventurous; but it is interspersed with Huck's fear for the safety of.....

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### MARK TWAIN

Samuel Langhorne Clemens, one of America's most popular and humorous authors, was born on November 30, 1835, in Florida, Missouri. As a young child, his health was poor, but he outgrew his health problems and turned into a mischievous boy, much like Tom Sawyer. In 1839, his family moved to Hannibal, Missouri, where he spent his boyhood years, swimming and fishing in the Mississippi River and playing in the nearby woods. As an adventurous child, he ran away from home and almost drowned in the Mississippi several times. He often spent his summers at his Uncle Quarles farm, where he was involved in the pranks of a "gang" of boys, much like the ones found in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. During his stays at the farm, he also witnessed some disturbing incidents, like slave beatings and murder, events that he would later incorporate into his novels.

In 1847, Sam's father died, and the young Sam was forced to leave school and become a printer's apprentice in order to help support his impoverished family. In 1853, he left Hannibal to pursue his printing work in St. Louis, New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and Iowa. From 1857 until the Civil War broke out in 1861, he served as.....

## HISTORICAL/LITERARY INFORMATION

*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* was published in 1876 and in the same year, Twain began its sequel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which he called "another boy's book." He and William Dean Howells, the editor of *Atlantic Monthly*, had a debate about Tom Sawyer that centered around the idea of having Tom "drift into manhood." Twain later gave up the idea of carrying Tom beyond boyhood; instead, he chose to develop the character of Huckleberry Finn.

Twain seemed to take little interest in the Huck Finn book and wrote it "more to be at work than anything else." He set it aside for four years. In 1880, he took it out and wrote a little more, only to abandon it once.....

## CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES

### CHAPTER 1: I Discover Moses and the Bullrushes

#### Summary

The novel opens with Huck introducing himself and his friend Tom Sawyer. They have discovered the treasure hidden by the robbers in the cave, which earns them a reward of six thousand dollars each. Judge Thatcher invests the money in a trust that earns them one dollar a day.

Huck is living in Widow Douglas' care, and she treats him as her own son. She tries to "civilize" him by buying him proper clothes, feeding him regular meals, and making him listen to stories from the Bible. Huck is uncomfortable living with her, for everything is "regular." He feels restless and stifled and longs for his previous freedom. When he cannot stand it anymore, he runs away. He is found by Tom and brought back to the widow. She fusses over him and dresses him in his new clothes again. Huck can do little but bear with her. He longs to smoke, but the widow admonishes him, saying that it isn't "clean" and that he should not do it anymore. This angers him, for he sees the widow taking snuff herself.

The widow's sister, Miss Watson, is also living with her. She is a nagging and unpleasant woman who helps in the effort to "civilize" Huck. She tells him about the "bad place" (hell) and warns him he will wind up there if he does not behave. Huck says he wishes that he were there so he could be away from all the routine. This angers Miss Watson, but Huck pacifies her by saying that he just wants to go somewhere for a change, even if it is hell. He sees no great advantage in going to a "good place," especially if Miss Watson is going to be there to continue picking at his faults.

Huck goes to his room but is restless. He tries to think of something cheerful, but is unsuccessful; he wishes that he were dead. He takes out his pipe and begins to smoke. After a time, he hears Tom's signal.

### Notes

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is connected with *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and the opening statement of the book makes this evident; however, the novel about Huck Finn stands by itself and totally revolves around Huck. Reading the earlier novel gives some background information that is beneficial, but necessary.

Since Huck narrates the story in first person, the language and thinking are reflective of a twelve-year-old southern boy that lacks education; the narration has no polish. Moreover, for most of the novel, there are no deep reflections to be found in the narrative. Huck is intelligent and has a fine sense of understanding, but all his energies are used up in observation rather than thinking. Analysis is something that will come later. This also highlights the fact that this book is a growth narrative, a story of a boy's initiation into manhood.

Widow Douglas' attempt to reform Huck is meeting with little success; he is just not the type of person who can stand civilized life. He longs to be free, to live life without constraints or society's rules. It is also the earnest wish of most adolescents to be left to their own devices, untroubled by the adult world of rules and etiquette. Later chapters, with Huck and Jim afloat on the Mississippi, are indicative of the freedom that Huck is prevented from attaining in this chapter.

Huck's concept of religion is also unconventional. He is taught the difference between good and bad by the Widow Douglas and Miss Watson, but he has trouble accepting what he hears. He is told that smoking is bad by the Widow Douglas, and yet she uses snuff. Huck sees the hypocrisy in this and decides he prefers to be bad. This discussion is significant to later events in the novel when Huck will have to deal with much larger issues of good and bad as they relate to the slave Jim. Ironically, the uneducated Huck is regularly able to see through the hypocrisy of the people who preach Christian ethics, but do not practice them. Through Huck, Twain is certainly critical of conventional religious attitudes.

Superstition also plays a role in the novel. The uneducated and unreligious Huck is very superstitious. In this first chapter, Huck is upset that he accidentally kills a spider, an act that he believes will bring him bad luck. To try and prevent any evil, he reacts in another superstitious manner by making the proper signs to ward it off. Throughout the book, Huck and Jim will reveal that their lives are filled with superstition.

Adolescents often experience loneliness and frustration, which causes them to express a deathwish. Huck is no different from the typical pre-teen. When he cannot have the freedom that he so wants in this first chapter, he says, "I felt so lonesome I most wished I was dead." For the major part of the book, Huck is in lonely places, and has a sense of isolation; but, ironically, it is in Widow Douglas' house that he is overcome with this feeling. He feels so lonely and lost because no one in this house understands him. Later in the novel, his sense of isolation will be caused by the vastness of the natural world that he faces while traveling the Mississippi River.

All these issues are raised in this first chapter with effortless ease. Twain wonderfully crafts the narrative in such a way that Huck's spontaneity is not only believable but touches the reader. From the first pages of the book, Twain succeeds in creating a bond of sympathy for Huck; the success of the entire narrative depends upon the continuation of the reader's sympathy.....

## OVERALL ANALYSES CHARACTERS

### *Huckleberry Finn*

Huck Finn is one of the most popular fictional characters in American literature. Approximately twelve years of age, he is a typical "frontier boy" with a love of fun, a respect for nature, and a lot of common sense. Although he can adapt to almost any situation other than a normal, civilized life, he is most happy living independently and in the wild.

Throughout the book, Huck proves he is kind and sympathetic by his basic nature. He is ashamed that he causes the kind Widow Douglas grief. He even feels sorry for the Duke and Dauphin when he sees them tarred .....

### *Tom Sawyer*

Tom is a perfect contrast to Huck. While Huck tries to escape from society, Tom represents most of .....

### *Jim*

Jim is the slave of Miss Watson who runs away when he learns that he is being sold away from his family. He meets Huck on Jackson Island, where both are hiding. He joins Huck on a raft to seek freedom by way of .....

### **PLOT (Structure)**

The plot of *Huckleberry Finn* is divided into three sections. The first takes place in St. Petersburg, where Huck is living as the adopted son of Widow Douglas. When he is kidnapped by his own father, beaten, and kept prisoner, Huck decides to run away. Section two of the book is set on the Mississippi River, as he and Jim try to escape and find freedom. The third and final section of the book takes place at the Phelps' farm, where Jim is held in captivity as a runaway slave. The one thing that binds the three sections together is the character of Huck Finn, who is the .....

### **THEMES**

Twain, through this novel, reveals a boy's initiation into manhood. Huck's existence on the raft teaches him about life as it really is. Whenever he goes on shore, he sees the cruelty of society and man's inhumanity to his fellow man. When he returns to the raft, he feels the peace of nature and the nobility of the black slave that shares his journey.

Southern society has taught Huck that slaves are sub-human creatures with no feelings, only a piece of property to be bought and sold. At the beginning of the novel, Huck buys into this philosophy without question. He cannot.....

### **QUESTIONS**

1. Explain how Huck Finn changes in the novel.
2. Discuss Huck's relationship with Jim.....

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