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*Adventures of
Huckleberry Finn*

BY MARK TWAIN



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Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading

Aspects of the Novel

Objective: Recognizing the controversial aspects of the novel both at the time of publication and today

Activity

Read the following articles, written in 1885, of the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* discussing the decision of the Concord Library to remove the book from the shelves of the library. Based on these articles, complete the chart. The complete text of these articles is available online.

From *The New York Herald*, March 18, 1885:

The sage censors of the Concord public library have unanimously reached the conclusion that "Huckleberry Finn" is not the sort of reading matter for the knowledge seekers of a town which boasts the only "summer school of philosophy" in the universe. They have accordingly banished it from the shelves of that institution.

The reasons which moved them to this action are weighty and to the point. One of the Library Committee, while not prepared to hazard the opinion that the book is "absolutely immoral in its tone," does not hesitate to declare that to him "it seems to contain but very little humor." Another committeeman perused the volume with great care and discovered that it was "couched in the language of a rough, ignorant dialect" and that "all through its pages there is a systematic use of bad grammar and an employment of inelegant expressions." The third member voted the book "flippant" and "trash of the veriest sort." They all united in the verdict that "it deals with a series of experiences that are certainly not elevating," and voted that it could not be tolerated in the public library.

From the *Hartford Courant*, April 4, 1885:

The Boston Advertiser attacks Mark Twain as venomously and persistently as if his recent suit against a Boston publishing house had been brought against itself; and it ventures into declaration which would have hard work to prove. For example, it says that there is "something very suggestive in the eagerness and unanimity with which library committees and newspapers throughout the country have followed the precedent established by the Concord library in condemning Mark Twain's last book." but it omits to mention the libraries or to list the newspapers.

Indeed, some of the leading newspapers of the country have taken the liberty to laugh at the Concord folks for their conduct, and the libraries that have rejected the volume are, we venture to say, few and far between. They must all be of the class that the Concord library belongs to; for one of the trustees of that library, when interviewed on the matter, said that no fiction was permitted on the Concord shelves. Of course, "Huckleberry Finn" isn't a true story. It is fiction, and so it's barred by this Concord limitation. The discovery that they had bought a biography in good faith and had got something that was not true may be the cause of the discontent, although the life of Huck Finn is not the only biography that partakes of the nature of fiction, and the Concord library would be further depleted if all biographies that are not true were cast from it.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters I – VII**Theme**

Objectives: Recognizing emerging themes by analyzing the statements and actions of the characters
 Recognizing and appreciating the humor in the work

Activity

1. One of the major themes in this story is hinted at in the following passage:

The Widow Douglas she took me for her son, and allowed she would sivilize me; but it was rough living in the house all the time, considering how dismal regular and decent the widow was in all her ways; and so when I couldn't stand it no longer I lit out. I got into my old rags and my sugar-hogshead again, and was free and satisfied. Huck finds living in the Widow Douglas's "sivilized" home to be "rough living." Further, he describes the Widow as being "dismal regular and decent," implying that living a civilized life is no fun.

Analysis of the Meaning of the Passage: The reader understands from this passage that Huck is more comfortable when he is free of the constraints of civilization.

Statement of Theme: The freedom to live outside civilized society may bring more happiness than the restrictions of civilized society can.

2. Analyze the following excerpt from the story and write a statement of theme based on it.

Pretty soon I wanted to smoke, and asked the widow to let me. But she wouldn't. She said it was a mean practice and wasn't clean, and I must try to not do it any more. That is just the way with some people. They get down on a thing when they don't know nothing about it. Here she was a-bothering about Moses, which was no kin to her, and no use to anybody, being gone, you see, yet finding a power of fault with me for doing a thing that had some good in it. And she took snuff, too; of course that was all right, because she done it herself.

Analysis of the Meaning of the Passage: _____

Statement of Theme: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters I – VII**Superstition and Characterization**

Objectives: Recognizing superstitions and their place in the lives of characters in the novel
Relating literature to life by writing about life experience

Activity

1. Superstitions are beliefs or attitudes based on fear or ignorance and are inconsistent with the known laws of science. Today, we still adhere to superstitions. For example, many people believe it is bad luck to break a mirror. List five common superstitions that are part of our modern culture whether or not you believe in them.

Students can share their lists of superstitions to see the variety or consistency of modern superstitions.

2. Write a 100 – 125 word paragraph about a personal experience you had where it seemed as if superstition had a part in the incident.

Find five examples of Huck's superstitious beliefs in Chapters I – VII. Each group should record the chapter where the superstitions are found.

Oral presentations and discussion of the superstitions found by the groups should include what the superstition means to Huck and what part of his life the superstition may help him understand.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters I – X

Characterization

Objective: Inferring character traits based on the action of the story

Activity

Identify the traits that Huck possesses.

TRAIT CHART FOR HUCK

| | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| ___ 1. shrewd | ___ 11. impulsive | ___ 21. loyal |
| ___ 2. daring | ___ 12. realist | ___ 22. civilized |
| ___ 3. dangerous | ___ 13. imaginative | ___ 23. vagabond-like |
| ___ 4. resourceful | ___ 14. fun-loving | ___ 24. illiterate |
| ___ 5. unspoiled | ___ 15. disreputable | ___ 25. irresponsible |
| ___ 6. humble | ___ 16. innocent | ___ 26. gullible |
| ___ 7. lonely | ___ 17. clever | ___ 27. frightened |
| ___ 8. self-sufficient | ___ 18. youthful | ___ 28. practical |
| ___ 9. simple | ___ 19. reasonable | ___ 29. impudent |
| ___ 10. conventional | ___ 20. stupid | ___ 30. honest |

Of the traits identified for Huck, consider the following:

- Which of the traits do you infer from the character's comments or actions?

- Which of the traits do you learn about because the narrator or another character tells you of them?

- Which of the traits did you learn of because the character (himself or herself) tells you?

- Of the three possibilities, which is the most reliable way to judge character and which is the least reliable?

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters VIII – XVI**Writing and Reading for Details**

Objectives: Completing a creative writing assignment based on the details in the text
 Identifying the geographic locations mentioned in the text

Activity

Jim and Huck are traveling down the Mississippi River looking for Cairo, Illinois, because that is where the Ohio River enters the Mississippi River. Once they find Cairo, they can travel up the Ohio to the free states, and Jim can be a free man. Look at the map of the United States during the 1850s. Locate and label the following on this map.

- Hannibal, Missouri
- Cairo, Illinois
- Ohio River
- Mississippi River

Outline the slave states in one color and the free states in a different color

In Chapter XVI, Huck starts to paddle to shore to see if they are in Cairo. He encounters some men in a skiff who are looking for five runaway slaves. It is clear from this incident that one road to freedom for slaves in this era is to travel by river. Using Jim's experience as a guide, write a **Survival Guide for Runaway Slaves**. Include any information you think might be helpful for a slave trying to reach Cairo and freedom. Your survival guide should include at least ten items helpful for runaway slaves to consider as they make their way to freedom. It might begin as follows:

SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR RUNAWAY SLAVES

1. It is important to plan the time you are going to leave carefully, so that you will have time to get away.
2. Don't steal a skiff or try to travel by foot. A skiff will be missed, and if you travel by foot, dogs will be able to track you.
3. It is best to travel on the river. Leave on a raft in the middle of the night when you cannot be seen.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Wrap-Up

Book Review

1. Write a book review stating what you liked and did not like about this book. Go to www.amazon.com for examples of book reviews.
2. Research Mark Twain's life story. Write a three or four paragraph essay comparing Huck's life story with Twain's. In what ways are they similar? Different?
3. After escaping to freedom or after emancipation, many former slaves changed their names. Some adopted the last name of their former masters while others selected names from the Bible or from history. In *The Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass*, Mr. Douglass recalls that after escaping slavery a friend suggested that Frederick Bailey change his name to Frederick Douglass. The name Douglass came from the "Lady of the Lake." Based on the information in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, what name do you think Jim might select? Write a paragraph offering support for your choice.
4. Write a two or three paragraph persuasive essay based on incidents from the text supporting or repudiating one of the following thesis statements.
 - *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a novel about prejudice and intolerance.
 - The chapters in the book in which Jim is absent are less interesting than those chapters in which he is present.
5. Use the following as a thesis statement for a two or three paragraph essay:
 - The river in this story represents peace, happiness, and freedom while the towns represent rules, boredom, and cruelty.
 - Cite incidents from the novel to support this thesis.