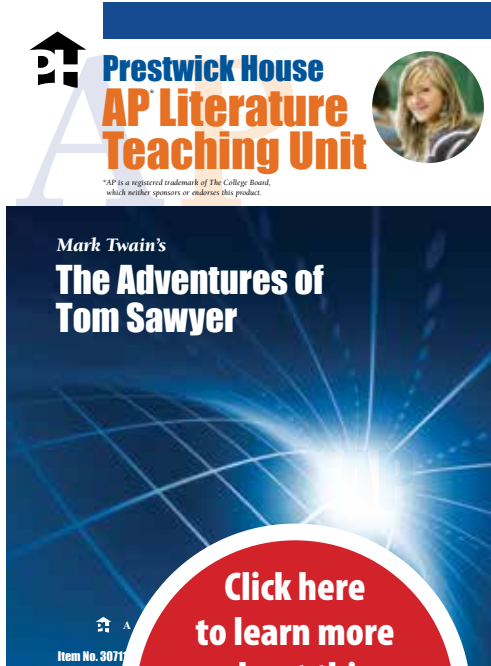




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Teaching Unit

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer

by Mark Twain

by Rita Truschel



Prestwick House

Item No. 307113

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. identify the conventions of satire.
2. examine theories of humor.
3. analyze the narrative arc including character development, setting, plot, conflict, exposition, narrative persona, and point of view.
4. identify and analyze the literary techniques of pace, in *medias res*, suspense, antagonist, dialect, internal monologue, aside, allusion, hyperbole, irony, parody, pathos, and sarcasm.
5. analyze the effect of word choice and sentence structure to express meaning, tone, and theme.
6. analyze themes of independence, education, lying, religion, social outcasts, and death.
7. offer a close reading of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and support interpretations and assertions using evidence from the text and knowledge of Mark Twain's biography and period history.
8. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.
9. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.

Introductory Lecture

SATIRE

Satire is a literary form that uses wit, ridicule, contempt, and insult to expose human errors, foolishness, hypocrisy, and evil. The purpose of satire is social criticism. But satirical authors do not explicitly prescribe morals or solutions. Their subjects and style might be humorous, or not funny at all. Techniques such as caricature, comparison, exaggeration, irony, sarcasm, and parody lace these texts.

Famous examples of satire in English include Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and *A Modest Proposal* (1729), and Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961). Satire and parody are combined in the television cartoons *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy*, and the faux news of *The Onion*, *The Daily Show*, and *The Colbert Report*.

THEORIES OF HUMOR

One obvious definition of humor is what causes laughter. But it is also obvious that not all people consider the same things funny, or laugh only from happiness. Comedians and philosophers have identified other elements in humor as well. The Greek philosopher Plato detected pleasure, pain, and malice in the impulse to laugh.

Four principal theories are summarized by Aaron Smuts for the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, hosted by the University of Tennessee at Martin (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/humor/>):

- **Superiority theory** attributes laughter to the laugher's seeing others as ridiculous or inferior. Thomas Hobbes called laughter "sudden glory."
- **Relief theory** suggests that laughter releases energy and tension, including repressed hostile and sexual feelings. Herbert Spencer and Sigmund Freud developed these ideas.
- **Incongruity theory** argues that laughter responds to an expectation transformed into a surprise. Such humor arises from confusion, illogic, irrelevance, and inappropriateness. Immanuel Kant wrote that laughter is excited by the absurd.
- **Play theory** sees humor as an evolutionary adaptation of animal instinct. This instinct shows itself as pleasure, disinterest in potentially serious situations, mock aggression, social bonding, and empathy.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. What distinguishes oral storytelling from written narrative?
2. Tom Sawyer's childhood adventures are predominantly a series of episodes. How does the author sustain interest and unify the story?
3. What does children's literature reveal about the social values of the society in which it was written? of societies in which it is read?
4. Mark Twain originally intended the novel to follow Tom Sawyer into adulthood. How might that have altered the story and its appeal to readers?

“Brother, go find your brother!”

He watched where it stopped, and went there and looked. But it must have fallen short or gone too far; so he tried twice more. The last repetition was successful. The two marbles lay within a foot of each other.

Just here the blast of a toy tin trumpet came faintly down the green aisles of the forest. Tom flung off his jacket and trousers, turned a suspender into a belt, raked away some brush behind the rotten log, disclosing a rude bow and arrow, a lath sword and a tin trumpet, and in a moment had seized these things and bounded away, barelegged, with fluttering shirt. He presently halted under a great elm, blew an answering blast, and then began to tiptoe and look warily out, this way and that. He said cautiously—to an imaginary company:

“Hold, my merry men! Keep hid till I blow.”

Now appeared Joe Harper, as airily clad and elaborately armed as Tom. Tom called:

“Hold! Who comes here into Sherwood Forest without my pass?”

“Guy of Guisborne wants no man’s pass. Who art thou that—that—”

“Dares to hold such language,” said Tom, prompting—for they talked “by the book,” from memory.

“Who art thou that dares to hold such language?”

“I, indeed! I am Robin Hood, as thy caitiff¹ carcase soon shall know.”

“Then art thou indeed that famous outlaw? Right gladly will I dispute with thee the passes of the merry wood. Have at thee!”

They took their lath² swords, dumped their other traps on the ground, struck a fencing attitude, foot to foot, and began a grave, careful combat, “two up and two down.” Presently Tom said: “Now, if you’ve got the hang, go it lively!”

So they “went it lively,” panting and perspiring with the work. By and by Tom shouted:

“Fall! fall! Why don’t you fall?”

“I sha’n’t! Why don’t you fall yourself? You’re getting the worst of it.”

“Why, that ain’t anything. I can’t fall; that ain’t the way it is in the book. The book says, ‘Then with one back-handed stroke he slew poor Guy of Guisborne.’ You’re to turn around and let me hit you in the back.”

There was no getting around the authorities, so Joe turned, received the whack and fell.

“Now,” said Joe, getting up, “you got to let me kill you. That’s fair.”

“Why, I can’t do that, it ain’t in the book.”

¹ **caitiff**: cowardly, despicable

² **lath**: thin wooden

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer

Chapter 1

1. What is the effect of beginning this story with one word—"Tom!"

2. What are the characters like, and how do they relate to each other?

3. Who is telling this story? What are the advantages of this narrative point of view?

4. What is Twain's intention in violating conventions of standard written English? What effect does he create?

Chapter 6

1. What does Tom know about illness?

2. Why is Huckleberry Finn an outcast in the village?

3. Why do children like Huck?

4. Why does Tom challenge adult perceptions of Huck?

5. What can a reader infer from Tom's declaration of love? What evidence in the chapter supports that inference?

Chapter 10

1. Summarize Tom and Huck's dilemma after the murder.

2. Explain the irony of the boys' written vow.

3. What is the effect of the howling dog?

4. How is Tom's resolve tested? What choices does he make?

Chapter 14

1. What is the turning point of the boys' island idyll?

Chapter 15

1. What is Tom's intention when he goes into his aunt's house? What does this suggest about his character?

2. Which element prevails in this episode: pathos or absurdity?

Chapter 21

1. What can be inferred regarding the narrator's opinion of the schoolteacher?

2. Translate the parodies of school compositions.

Chapter 32

1. How does the author structure the children’s dramatic return to the village?

2. Why does Tom faint when he learns the cave door was locked?

Chapter 33

1. How does the narrator regard Injun Joe’s death?

2. What did Tom deduce about the treasure?

3. What is Tom’s reaction to finding the treasure?
