

**TITLE OF LESSON PLAN:**

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

**LENGTH OF LESSON:**

One class period

**GRADE LEVEL:**

9-12

**SUBJECT AREA:**

Literature

**OBJECTIVES:**

Students will understand the following:

1. Identifying and thinking about a key quotation or symbol in a novel can help a reader extract greater meaning from the work.
2. A paper analyzing literature should follow a logical organization.

**MATERIALS:**

For this lesson, you will need:

Mark Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

**PROCEDURE:**

1. Explain that as a concluding activity after reading and discussing *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, your students must produce a paper in which they demonstrate their familiarity with the novel by writing at length about a quotation from it or a symbol in it.
2. Give them the following advice for choosing a quotation to write about (this advice applies to any novel, not just to *Huckleberry Finn*):
  - Select a quotation that has already gained fame.
  - Select a quotation that contains strong emotion.
  - Select an impressive statement from the very beginning or the very end of the novel.

As an example of a quotation that is famous and contains strong emotion, you can cite the following statements by Huck in Chapter 8: People would call me a low down Abolitionist and despise me for keeping mum—but that don't make no difference. I ain't agoing to tell [that I know where Jim, the runaway slave, is], and I ain't agoing back there [to Jim's owner] anyways. As an example of a quotation that is famous and that concludes the book, you can cite the following statement from the end of Chapter 42: I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can't stand it. I been there before.

3. Making sure that students know what a symbol is (something that stands not only for itself but also for something larger than itself), give them the following advice for choosing a symbol to write about (this advice applies to any novel, not just to *Huckleberry Finn*):

- Select a symbol that figures in the novel dramatically—an item that the novel couldn't exist without.
- Select a symbol that has meaning not just in one scene but in the work as a whole.

As examples of symbols that dominate *Huckleberry Finn* and that the book couldn't exist without, you can suggest, first, the raft and, then, the relationship between Huck and Jim.

4. Help students verify that they have identified a meaningful quotation or symbol by asking them to write notes (eventually to be included in their paper) that show *how the quotation or symbol* relates to the work's theme or main idea. For example, model asking yourself how either of the quotations or either of the symbols, noted above, connects with one or more of the themes of *Huckleberry Finn*—say, the theme of self-growth through observing life closely and honestly; or the theme of the dangers of civilization.

5. Discuss with students how they might organize their essays about a quotation or a symbol. Here's one suggestion:

- The first paragraph should include a thesis statement that (1) identifies the quotation or the symbol to be written about and (2) identifies a theme or main idea of the novel.
- The next paragraph should give the writer's translation or paraphrase of the quotation or the writer's associations with the symbol.
- The next paragraph should explain how the quotation or symbol informs all parts of the novel—beginning, middle, and end.
- The final paragraph might explain how an intense study of the quotation or symbol helped the reader get more out of the novel.

6. After students have written their first drafts, remind them of what is involved in following through on the entire writing process.

### **ADAPTATIONS:**

Follow the same pattern of instruction, but lead the class step by step through a discussion of a quotation or symbol rather than sending students off to write individually about a quotation or symbol.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Discuss how Huck exhibits his ingenuity. How does Huck's cleverness compare with Ulysses' ingeniousness?
2. Mark Twain, as well as other American authors, like Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes, used dialect as a literary tool in his writing. Authors use dialect to enhance the mood of a book and portray characters as real, genuine. Discuss how dialect effects the mood and characters in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.
3. Discuss how the feud between the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons is symbolic of the Civil War. Do you agree that the novel is “a satirical treatment of the myth of romantic fiction, Southern chivalry, and witless honor”?
4. Discuss how an author's “well of inspiration” can run dry. What can an author do to replenish himself? Ask students if they have ever experienced writer's block and if so, share the ways they were able to overcome it.

### **EVALUATION:**

You can evaluate your students' performances using the following three-point rubric:

**Three points:**clearly stated thesis statement supported by many specifics from the novel; paragraphs unified and coherent; no errors in grammar, usage, mechanics

**Two points:**adequately stated thesis statement supported by some specifics from the novel; paragraphs unified and coherent; some errors in grammar, usage, mechanics

**One point:** unclear or absent thesis statement; paragraphs lacking unity and coherence; many errors in grammar, usage, mechanics

You can ask your students to contribute to the assessment rubric by stating criteria for *unity* and *coherence*.

## **EXTENSION:**

### **What Did Hemingway Mean?**

Once students are deep into *Huckleberry Finn* or after they have finished reading, ask them to interpret what Ernest Hemingway may have meant when he said, “All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*.”

Here are questions that should move a discussion forward:

- The literary critic Lionel Trilling has been credited with saying that when Hemingway made his comment he had in mind Twain's ability to use common speech in great literature. Do you agree or disagree with Trilling? Why?
- In what ways—theme? style?—might a 20th-century American novel that students have read be said to descend from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*?
- What makes literature modern?

### **Censorship Then and Now**

Ask one group of students to report on the responses by critics and the public to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* when it was first published. Ask another group of students to report on attempts to keep *Huckleberry Finn* out of secondary schools from the 1990s up to the present time. Lead a discussion on the pros and cons of people who would censor the novel.

## **SUGGESTED READINGS:**

### **Understanding the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents**

Claudia Dust Johnson, Greenwood Press, 1996

### **Hit List: Frequently Challenged Books for Young Adults**

The Intellectual Freedom Committee of the Young Adult Library Services Association,

United States American Library Association,

**Huckleberry Finn on Film: Film and Television Adaptations of Mark Twain's Novel, 1920-1993**

Clyde V. Haupt, McFarland, 1994

**“De Ole True Huck”**

Dudley Barlow, Education Digest, May 1996

**“Say It Ain't So, Huck”**

Jane Smiley, Harper's, January 1996

**“In Praise of Huckleberry Finn”**

Lance Morrow, Current, May 1995

**“Jim and the Dead Man”**

Mark Twain, The New Yorker, June 26, 1995

**“Alice, Huck, Pinocchio, and the Blue Fairy: Bodies Real and Imagined”**

M.L. Rosenthal, Southern Review, Summer 1993

**“Mark Twain and Huck Finn Still Stirring Up Trouble”**

All Things Considered—National Public Radio, July 31, 1995, Program n1925

**WEB LINKS:**

**Mark Twain Resources on the WWW**

Jim Zwick has created a formidable site on Twain. There are links to his works, quotations from his novels, lesson plans, and student projects that can be adapted for use in your classroom.

<http://marktwain.miningco.com/>

**Mark Twain in His Times**

This site presents texts, manuscripts, reviews, and newspaper articles on Twain and his works. Many of the sections are interactive, and they can be used to enhance the reading and study of Twain.

<http://etext.virginia.edu/railton/>

### **Peter Salwen's Mark Twain Page**

Peter Salwen has created an extensive site on Mark Twain. It contains articles, notices, a quotation collection, and an impressive set of links on Samuel Clemens.

<http://salwen.com/pstwain.html>

### **Mark Twain: Huckleberry Finn**

This site offers a complete early edition of Huck Finn, with all 174 illustrations from the first edition, dozens of early reviews from newspapers and magazines across the country, and covers from London and New York.

<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/twain/huckfinn.html>

## **VOCABULARY:**

### **aversion**

A strong dislike for something, with a desire to turn away from it.

#### **Context:**

In my schoolboy days, I had no aversion to slavery.

### **cynicism**

The belief that all human conduct is motivated by self-interest.

#### **Context:**

There always was a hint of cynicism at the far end of Twain's comic genius.

### **determinism**

The philosophical belief that every event—physical and mental—has a cause and is never due to chance.

#### **Context:**

That's what you have—a larger vision of freedom—when you really feel the forces of determinism all around you.

### **dialect**

A regional variety of a language, differing somewhat in pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary from other forms of the same language.

#### **Context:**

The adventure is told in the dialect of the Mississippi valley before the Civil War.

### **ingenious**

Creative, imaginative and showing originality.

#### **Context:**

We like him (Huck) because he is ingenious—as ingenious as Ulysses in many ways.

### **parable**

A narrative that conveys a moral lesson, used extensively in the New Testament.

#### **Context:**

Some see this (feud) as a parable on the youth who slaughtered one another in the Civil War.

**transformation**

A distinct alteration in appearance, character, or condition.

**Context:**

The critical point of Huck's transformation is his apology to Jim.

**ACADEMIC STANDARDS:**

**Grade Level:**

6-8

**Subject Area:**

language arts

**Standard:**

Demonstrates competence in general skills and strategies for reading literature.

**Benchmarks:**

Recognizes the use of specific literary devices. Recognizes complex elements of plots.

**Grade Level:**

6-8

**Subject Area:**

U.S. history

**Standard:**

Understands the historical perspective.

**Benchmarks:**

Analyzes the influence specific ideas and beliefs had on a period of history.

**Grade Level:**

9-12

**Subject Area:**

language arts

**Standard:**

Demonstrates competence in general skills and strategies for reading literature.

**Benchmarks:**

Analyzes the effects of complex literary devices on the overall quality of this work.

Identifies the simple and complex actions (e.g., internal/external conflicts) between main and subordinate characters in texts containing complex character structures.

Makes abstract connections between one's own life and the characters, events, motives, and causes of conflict in text. Understands complex dialogues and analyzes the stylistic effect of those dialogues in the story.

Analyzes the effectiveness of complex elements of plot (e.g., setting(s), major events, problems, conflicts, resolutions).

**Grade Level:**

9-12

**Subject Area:**

language arts

**Standard:**

Demonstrates a familiarity with selected literary works of enduring quality.

**Benchmarks:**

Demonstrates an understanding of why certain literary works may be considered classics or works of enduring quality.