**SII: Lesson 4**

***The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*** by **Mark Twain**

**I- The Novel**

**The novel** is an invented **prose narrative** of considerable **length** and a certain **complexity** that deals imaginatively with human experience, usually through a connected sequence of **events** involving a group of **persons** in a specific [**setting**](https://www.britannica.com/art/setting).

**II- Mark Twain**

**Mark Twain (his real name was** **Samuel Langhorne Clemens)** was born on November 30, 1835, Missouri and died on April 21, 1910, Connecticut. He was an **American** humorist, journalist, lecturer, and novelist who acquired international fame for his travel narratives and for his adventure stories of boyhood, especially The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876) and**The** [***Adventures of Huckleberry Finn***](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn-novel-by-Twain) (**1885**). The gifted Mark Twain was one of America’s best and most beloved writers.

**III- The Study of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn***

**1.** **Summary**

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, written by Mark Twain and told in the first- person point of view, is about a young boy, **Huck**, who is in search of freedom and adventure. The shores of the Mississippi River provide the background for the entire book.

Huck is adopted by the **Widow Douglas**, a kind but stifling woman who lives with her sister, **Miss Watson**. Then, Huck is kidnapped by **Pap**, his drunken father. Pap kidnaps Huck because he wants Huck's money. Huck was awarded $6000 from the treasure that he and **Tom** **Sawyer** found in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.* Tired of his confinement and fearing the beatings, Huck escapes from Pap by faking his own death, killing a pig and spreading its blood all over the cabin in the woods. Huck finds a canoe to shove off down the river. Instead of going back to **Widow Douglas**'s house, he decides to run away. He is sick of all of the confinement and civilization that the widow enforces upon him. He comes across **Jim**, **Miss Watson**'s slave, and together, they spend nights and days journeying down the river in search of freedom.

While traveling on a raft down the river, Huck and Jim have many adventures and become best friends. They find a house with a dead man. They end up stealing many things from the house. They find a wrecked ship, and go on it, only to be mixed up with murderers. They get away with money and some other goods. They get separated from each other in the heavy fog, but eventually find each other. A steamboat crashes into their raft and Jim and Huck are separated again. Huck has a run-in with the **Grangerfords** and the **Shepherdsons**, two families at war with each other. He is reunited with Jim shortly after this. Then, they meet **the King** and **the Duke**, and get into a good deal of trouble performing plays. The King and the Duke pretend to be **Peter Wilks**'s long lost **brothers** from England and try to steal all of the money left behind in his will. They escape before they are caught when Wilks’s real brothers arrive from England. Huck finally gets rid of them, but is left to search for Jim, who gets sold by the King. He ends up at Tom Sawyer's **Aunt Sally**'s house, where Tom and Huck rescue Jim.

Through all of the adventures down the river, Huck learns a variety of life lessons and improves as a person. He develops a conscience and truly feels for humanity. The natural **goodness** of Huck is continually contrasted with the effects of a corrupt society.

**2.** **Main** **Characters**

**Huckleberry Finn**: narrator and protagonist

**Jim**: Miss Watson’s runaway slave

**Tom** **Sawyer**: Huck’s best friend who enjoys extravagant stories and schemes

**Pap Finn**:Huck's abusive, drunken father

**The Duke:** a man who claims to be an English Duke and takes control of Huck and Jim's raft.

**The King:** a man who claims to be the disappeared heir to the French throne and takes control of Huck and Jim's raft

**Widow Douglas:** Town widow who tries to adopt and civilize Huck through kindness and religion

**Miss Watson:** Widow Douglas's sister

**Judge Thatcher:** Town judge who watches over Huck's reward money

**The Grangerfords:** A family that watches over Huck and maintains a deadly feud with the neighboring Shepherdsons

**Peter Wilks:** Deceased townsman. His grieving family takes in the duke, the king, and Huck as Peter Wilk's two brothers and boy servant

**William and Harvey Wilks:** Peter Wilks' brothers who live in England

**Aunt Sally Phelps:** Tom Sawyer's aunt

**3. Realism in the Novel**

Realism is the portrayal of the world as accurately as possible. It rejects idealization, expressing only true and raw experiences. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which is based on an adventure of a white male named Huck and an African American slave named Jim, represents many of the realistic views during slave holding period. It is an immensely **realistic novel**, revealing how a child's morals and actions clash with those of the society around him. Twain shows realism in almost every aspect of his writing; the **description** of the **setting**, that of the **characters**, and even the way **characters speak**. The setting is described with much detail and imagery so as to make it as close as possible to the actual surroundings. Twain also satirizes many of the foundations of that society, showing the hypocrisy of people.

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* also displays realistic qualities in the way **characters** and their speech is written. Characters who are **less** **educated**, such as Jim the slave, speak using slang, shortened words, or improper grammar. Characters who are **more** **educated**, such as Miss Watson, **speak properly** and do not use colloquial terms. The use of proper diction that fits the characters, time period, and location is another way in which this novel becomes **realistic**.

Through *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain tries to show the **wrongness** in **slavery** and the **wrongdoings** of **society** at the time and the **ignorance** and **hypocrisy** of the people. He does this through realism and almost factual description. He tries to convey this from the point of view of a relatively innocent child, who has not been conditioned by society, and has had time to make his own opinion about life. Twain communicates a powerful message through what, at first, seems like a simple children's adventure book.

**4. Major Themes in the Novel**

**Death, Rebirth, and Growth**

The escaped slave becomes as father figure to Huck, in deciding to save him, Huck **grows** morally beyond the bounds of his slave-owning society. It is Jim's adventures that initiate Huck into the complexities of human nature and give him moral courage. After each adventure, Huck learns something new and becomes a **new person**. He **grows** throughout these adventures beyond his age. The old Huck dies when he fakes his **death**, and he is **reborn** after those adventures as **someone** **new**.

**Conflict between Civilization and Natural Life**

The primary theme of the novel is the **conflict** between **civilization** and **natural** **life**. **Huck** represents **natural life** through his freedom of spirit, uncivilized ways, and desire to escape from **civilization**. He was raised without any rules or discipline and has a strong resistance to anything that might civilize him. This conflict is introduced through the efforts of [Widow Douglas](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/study-guide/character-list#widow-douglas) when she tries to force Huck to wear new clothes, give up smoking, and learn the Bible. Throughout the novel, Twain seems to suggest that the uncivilized way of life is morally superior and that civilization corrupts, rather than improves, human beings.

**Slavery**

The theme of **slavery** is perhaps the most important aspect of this novel. In his personal and public life, **Twain** was **anti-slavery**. Considering this, it is easy to see that [*The* *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn) provides an allegory to explain that slavery is **wrong**. Twain uses **Jim**, a main character and a slave, to demonstrate the humanity of slaves. To prevent being sold and forced to separate from his family, Jim runs away from his owner, [Miss Watson](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/study-guide/character-list#miss-watson), and works towards obtaining freedom so that he can buy his family's **freedom**. All along their journey downriver, Jim cares for Huck, not as a servant, but as a friend. Thus, Twain encourages the reader to feel **sympathy** for Jim and outrage at the society that has enslaved. At the end, Huck chooses to free Jim, based on his personal experiences rather than social norms, thus choosing the morality of the “natural life” over that of civilization.