

Great Books: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 9-12

Curriculum Focus: Literature

Lesson Duration: One class period

Program Description

Twain's masterpiece is a picaresque romp, a series of outlandish episodes involving the boy who would become literature's favorite runaway. Yet it also grapples with one of the most powerful themes in our nation's history – slavery.

Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Examine how a key quotation or symbol in a novel can help a reader extract greater meaning from the work.
- Write a paper analyzing the organization of a piece of literature.

Materials

- *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain
- Computers with Internet access
- Pens and paper

Procedures

1. Explain that as a concluding activity for *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, your students must write a short paper demonstrating their familiarity with the novel by examining a quotation or a symbol.
2. Give them the following advice for choosing a quotation (this advice applies to any novel):
 - Select a quotation that is well known.
 - 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 well known and contains strong emotion, cite the following statement by Huck in Chapter 8:

People would call me a low down Ablitionist 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 well known and contains strong emotion, cite the following statement by Huck in Chapter 8:

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. Define symbol (something that stands for something larger than itself), and then guide students in choosing a symbol (this advice applies to any novel).
 - Select a symbol that figures in the novel dramatically, an item that the novel couldn't exist without.
 - Select a symbol that has meaning throughout the work. For example, *Huckleberry Finn* has many symbols that are essential to the story, such as the raft is a symbol for the relationship between Huck and Jim
4. Help students verify that they have identified a meaningful quotation or symbol. Ask them to brainstorm lists or create idea webs (which should be included in their papers) that show how the quotation or symbol relates to the work's themes, such as self-growth through observing life closely and honestly or the dangers of civilization.
5. Provide this example for organizing student essays:
 - The first paragraph should include a thesis statement that identifies the quotation or the symbol and identifies a theme in the novel.
 - The second paragraph should paraphrase the quotation or list associations with the symbol.
 - The third paragraph should explain how the quotation or symbol appears in all parts of the novel – beginning, middle, and end.
 - The final paragraph might explain how examining the quotation or symbol enriches a reader's experience.?
6. Encourage students to edit other first drafts and revise their own drafts to create a thoughtfully written essay about *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students clearly stated thesis statements supported by many specifics from the novel; paragraphs were unified and coherent; contained no errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics.

- **2 points:** Students adequately stated thesis statements supported by some specifics from the novel; paragraphs were unified and coherent; contained some errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics.
- **1 point:** Students produced unclear or absent thesis statements; paragraphs lacked unity and coherence; contained many errors in grammar, usage, or mechanics.

Vocabulary

aversion

Definition: 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

Definition: 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

Definition: The philosophical belief that every physical and mental event 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

Definition: 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.

parable

Definition: 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

Definition: A distinct alteration in appearance, character, or condition

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

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit link:

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>



This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Language Arts – Reading: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts; Writing: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process, Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing, Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions, Gathers and uses information for research purposes

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association have developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching the English language arts. To view the standards online, go to <http://www.ncte.org/about/over/standards/110846.htm>

This lesson plan addresses the following NCTE standards:

- The critical point of Huck's transformation is his apology to Jim understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
- Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
- Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
- Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
- Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the [Discoveryschool.com](http://www.discoveryschool.com) Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>
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DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

How To Use the DVD

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

Play Video – This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.

Video Index – Here the video is divided into four parts (see below), indicated by video thumbnail icons. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. Brief descriptions and total running times are noted for each part. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

Curriculum Units – These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher's Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the TV remote or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

Standards Link – Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.

Teacher Resources – This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.

Video Index

Part 1 (15 min.)

Discusses the enduring appeal of Huck Finn; includes background on Twain's life and times.

Part 2 (16 min.)

Discusses life on the Mississippi and its influence on Twain's life. Follows the adventures of Huck and Jim.

Part 3 (12 min.)

Discusses the controversy surrounding the book. Follows Twain's later life.

Part 4 (5 min.)

Discusses the influence of this novel on American literature, as well as an analysis of the work.



Curriculum Units

1. Getting To Know Samuel Langhorne Clemens (Mark Twain)

Pre-viewing question

Q: What do you already know about Mark Twain?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: How did the author feel about slavery? How were these beliefs formed?

A: He supported slavery. His family owned slaves; his community and church did not speak out against slavery.

2. Huckleberry's Legacy

Pre-viewing question

Q: What aspects of this book are relevant today?

A: Answers may include race relations and the struggle to make the right decisions.

Post-viewing question

Q: What comparison is made between the novel and a river?

A: The challenges and issues that come up in the novel must be navigated like the currents and crossings in a river.

3. Classic Novel vs. Useless Trash: Debating the Value of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Pre-viewing question

Q: Do you think *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a controversial novel? Why or why not?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: How have film versions of the novel tried to make the story non-controversial?

A: Some versions excluded Jim, changed language, had no black actors, made no jokes about chivalry, religion, or war.

4. Meet Huck Finn

Pre-viewing question

Q: What human attributes, if any, does a huckleberry have?

A: Answers should include attributes with subtexts that connect to color, taste, etc.

Post-viewing question

Q: What qualities do you admire about Huck? Why?

A: Answers will vary.

5. Good Boy/Bad Boy: Huck Finn's Internal Struggles

Pre-viewing question

Q: What is the difference between right and wrong? How do you know?

A: Answers will vary.



Post-viewing question

Q: Why does Huck feel sorry for the King and the Duke, even though they compromised Jim's safety?

A: Answers could include the fact that Huck realizes how cruel people can be to each other for no reason, and it is just not worth it.

6. Symbolism

Pre-viewing question

Q: Why do people sometimes take advantage of each other?

A: Answers could include the competitive side of humanity.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why is the Mississippi River a geographical gate into and out of slavery?

A: The river runs through the North, which promotes freedom for African Americans, and the South, which promotes slavery.