



The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

Mark Twain



About the author

Mark Twain's real name was Samuel Clemens and he was born in Florida, USA, in 1835. In 1839, his family moved to Hannibal, Missouri, a town on the Mississippi River, where young Sam experienced the excitement and colorful sights of the waterfront. Hannibal, and the variety of people Clemens met there, feature widely in many of his books, particularly *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). In these books, the name of his hometown is changed to St. Petersburg.

Clemens had some schooling, but became a printer's apprentice when his father died in 1847. He left Hannibal to travel in 1853 and decided he wanted to be a riverboat pilot. So he began working on the steamboats on the Mississippi. In 1861, the American Civil war stopped river traffic and he moved to Nevada. After an unsuccessful attempt at gold and silver mining, he started work for a newspaper, writing under the pen name Mark Twain. Clemens wrote his first popular story *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County* in 1865 and continued to work as a correspondent for various newspapers, traveling all over the United States and Europe. Between 1873 and 1889 he wrote seven novels. His best books are considered to be the skillful re-creations of American life in the period of his youth. Clemens died in 1910, but Mark Twain is still remembered as one of America's greatest writers.

Summary

Huckleberry Finn, known as Huck to his friends, lives with Widow Douglas in St. Petersburg, Missouri. His best friends are Tom Sawyer and Jim, the Widow's black slave. Huck likes Tom because he is very smart and has lots of

good ideas, which often get the boys into trouble. Huck's father returns to St. Petersburg and makes Huck live with him, but Huck runs away. He meets up with Jim, who has also run away because he doesn't want to be a slave anymore. Together they travel by raft down the Mississippi to Cairo. They have lots of adventures and they meet a lot of interesting people. Finally, Jim is captured by a farmer and taken prisoner. Tom Sawyer arrives and he and Huck try to plan Jim's escape. Although the plan is not very successful, Jim is eventually free as Widow Douglas gave him his freedom before she died. Huck stays with Aunt Sally, but is planning to run away again as he doesn't want to be taught to be polite.

Chapters 1–2: Huck doesn't want to live with Widow Douglas and runs away. Tom persuades him to go back so that he can be in a gang of robbers he is going to start. They sign their names in blood, but it's only a game. The Widow sends Huck to school and one day on the way, he sees his father's footprint in the snow. He is afraid of his father and worried about some gold he has given to the judge for safe keeping. The judge buys Huck's gold from him. In the spring, Huck's father takes him to live in a cabin and sometimes hits him. So Huck escapes down the river in a canoe.

Chapters 3–5: Huck paddles as far as Jackson Island and sees a steamboat and people looking for him. They think he is dead. Then Huck meets Jim, who has run away too. One day, they see a big house coming down the river. Inside, there is a dead man. They take some things from the boat and Huck finds \$8 in a coat pocket. He decides to go into town, but dresses as a girl so that nobody will recognize him. He goes first to a woman's house and she talks about how people are going to go to find Jim that night. Huck goes to get Jim and they go down the river on a raft.

Chapters 6–7: Huck and Jim travel down the river at night because it's safer. One night they see an old broken steamboat. Huck looks inside and sees a man with a gun who is going to kill another man. Huck and Jim steal the man's boat and get help. The next night, Huck and Jim get lost in the fog and they can't find each other. The following night, two men with guns approach their raft, looking for Jim. Huck convinces them that he is with his sick father. The men are afraid and go away. The following night, a steamboat hits the raft and destroys it. Huck is convinced that Jim is dead.



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Chapters 8–10: Huck finds Jim, who has a new raft and they continue down the river. They meet two men, who say they are a king and a duke. The king organizes a theater show in the next town and many people pay money to see him. The show is very bad and the people are angry, but the king and duke are happy because they have made a lot of money. Next, the king and duke pretend to be the brothers of a man who has just died and left a lot of money in his will. They try to trick the man's daughters out of the money and their home, but Huck is unhappy about this and helps them.

Chapters 11–12: Jim is captured by Mr. Phelps and taken prisoner at his farm. Huck goes to the farm and Aunt Sally thinks that Huck is actually Tom Sawyer. Huck pretends to go into town to get his bags and meets Tom on his way to the farm. At first, Tom thinks Huck is a ghost, but when Huck explains all about his adventures, they decide to help Jim to escape together. Tom pretends to be Sid Sawyer and they begin planning the escape. Huck suggests stealing the key, but Tom wants to do it the difficult way, like in the stories he has read.

Chapters 13–14: Huck and Tom continue with the escape plans, making things more difficult by writing a letter to warn people that a gang of robbers is coming to steal the slave. A lot of farmers with guns gather at the farm. During the escape, Tom is shot in the leg. They reach an island and Jim is a free man, but Tom is ill and they need a doctor. Huck goes to get a doctor and he goes to help Tom, but as a result, Jim is captured again. They all go back to the farm and Tom and Huck tell everybody the true story. Tom also tells how Widow Douglas had freed Jim just before she died two months earlier. Jim is a free man after all.

Background and themes

The Mississippi River: Twain recreates the American way of life in towns along the Mississippi in the mid-1800s. This river is the second longest in the United States, flowing across the country from Minnesota in the north to New Orleans in the south. Its main course is about 3,766 kilometers long. The river was very important for trade and transportation: food, wood, and other goods were carried along it in steamboats, small boats and even rafts. Many different kinds of people traveled along the river and called at the different trading towns there.

Slavery and racism: This book has always been controversial because it deals with slavery. Some libraries

banned it when it was first published because they thought it was racist. Twain, however, uses his book to attack racism. Until 1861, people in the United States could buy slaves, black men, women and children from Africa, to work on their farms. They were given food and a place to sleep but they were not paid and usually had an extremely difficult life. Above all, they were not free. Some states, particularly in the north, did not agree with slavery. These were called free states. In the story, Jim is trying to get to a free state. Slavery was finally abolished after the American Civil War.

Society and social rules: This book is humorous, but it has a serious message. Twain was trying to point out the cruelty and injustice of society at his time. He does this through Huck, a kind boy who is curious about life and feels uncomfortable living according to accepted social rules. He prefers the freedom of living on the river. Rejecting his cruel father, he finds true friendship with Jim and he realizes that this is more important than social standards. He also shows how sometimes you have to put yourself at risk to save those you care about.

Discussion activities

Before reading

- Discuss:** Put students in small groups and ask them to discuss the following questions. If possible, allow them time to look for information on the Internet.
What do you know about the United States today? What do you know about the history of the United States? Have you heard of the Mississippi River? Is it long or short? Which parts of America does it pass through?
- Pair work:** Ask students to answer the following questions in pairs, encouraging them to give reasons for their choices.
Do you like being polite? Do you prefer wearing new clothes or old clothes? Do you prefer sleeping in a bed in a house or outside in the open air? Do you like reading, writing, spelling and working with numbers? Do you like adventures? What kind?
Get feedback from the whole class and then ask students to look at the first picture in the book of Huckleberry Finn. In pairs, ask them to predict what he would answer to the questions above.

Chapters 1–2

After reading

- Team game:** Write the following characters on the board: *Huck, Tom, Widow Douglas, Jim, Pap, Judge Thatcher*. Put students in small groups and give them 5–10 minutes to think of true sentences about these characters without looking in the book. Then, each group in turn has to say a true sentence about one of



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the characters. Sentences cannot be repeated. If the sentence is right, the team scores one point. After 10 minutes, the team with the most points wins.

- 4 **Pair work:** Ask students to discuss the following questions in pairs and then get feedback from the whole class.

Why does Huck want everybody to think he is dead? Do you think this is a good idea? What do you think is going to happen to him now? What will he eat? Where will he sleep? Will he meet anybody? Will he be in danger?

Chapters 3–5

While reading (at the end of p. 14)

- 5 **Role play:** Put the students in pairs. One of them takes the role of Huck and the other takes the role of Jim. Tell them to act out the meeting between the two on Jackson's Island.

Huck: Say hello and explain to Jim that you are not a ghost. Offer him some food from your canoe. Tell Jim why you ran away from your father's cabin.

Jim: Tell Huck not to hurt you. Tell him you like dead people. Explain to Huck that you are hungry. Tell him why you ran away from Widow Douglas's house.

After reading

- 6 **Write, ask and answer:** Write *What does Huck throw at the rat?* on the board and elicit the answer (A piece of metal). Now tell students to write similar questions about Chapters 3–5. Students then mingle with each other, asking and answering each other's questions.

Chapters 6–7

While reading (p. 26, after "... and then they both went back into the steamboat.")

- 7 **Guess:** Put students in small groups and ask them to guess what had happened to the three men before the scene that Huck and Jim saw. Then get feedback from the whole class.

What is the relationship between the men? What happened before Huck and Jim arrived at the steamboat? Why did one man want to kill the man on the floor? What was in the big bag they put in the boat? Where did they get the money from?

After reading

- 8 **Discuss:** Put students in small groups and ask them to discuss their answers to the following questions. Get feedback from the whole class.

What lies does Huck tell to the man in the boat, Jim, and the two men with guns who came over to the boat? Was Huck being good or bad when he told these lies? Do you ever lie? When and why?

Chapters 8–10

While reading (p. 46, after "I knew what they were planning.")

- 9 **Discuss:** Ask students to discuss in pairs what they think the duke and the king are planning and if they think it will work. Get feedback from the whole class.

After reading

- 10 **Write and guess:** Write *Mary Jane had black hair and a very kind face* on the board. Elicit which word is wrong from the students (She had red hair). Now students choose a sentence from Chapters 8–10 and rewrite it changing one word. Students mingle, reading out their sentences and the other students have to identify and correct the mistake.

Chapters 11–12

While reading (p. 57, after "How could we help Jim to escape?")

- 11 **Discuss:** Ask the students to discuss in small groups the different ways that Huck and Tom could help Jim to escape. Tell them to think of other stories or films in which a prisoner escapes and the ways in which they did it.

After reading

- 12 **Pair work:** Write the following words on the board: *wagon, illegal, kiss, dig, shirt, rats*. Have the students talk and write in pairs to say how these words were used in Chapter 3.

Chapters 13–14

After reading

- 13 **Write and guess:** Divide the class into small groups of four (or less if numbers don't allow for this). Tell each student to look at a different illustration from Chapters 13–14 (pp. 62–63, p. 65, p. 67 and p. 69). Tell them that they have to write a description of the illustration (what they can see and what is happening), but make five deliberate mistakes. Then, they read out their descriptions to the rest of the group who have to look at the illustration and spot the mistakes.
- 14 **Act and guess:** Put students in small groups and have them choose one scene from the book. Students practice miming the scene and then perform for the rest of the class, who have to guess what is going on.

Vocabulary activities

For the Word list and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.