

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer

Mark Twain



About the author

Mark Twain was born Samuel Clemens in the southern United States, in Florida in 1835, but he grew up in Hannibal, Missouri. He spent his childhood in a river town on the Mississippi River. This environment was the main source for some of his best known novels such as *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). When he was twelve, his father died and he had to give up school to work as a printer's apprentice. His pen name, "Mark Twain," means *safe waters*, a phrase used by Mississippi boatmen. His best books are considered to be skillful re-creations of American life at that time. Clemens died in 1910, but Mark Twain is still remembered as one of America's greatest writers.

Summary

Tom, an orphan who lives with his Aunt Polly, is a playful boy. His close friend, Huck, hasn't got a family, is homeless and doesn't go to school. Tom and Huck have several adventures together; they witness Injun Joe kill a doctor, clear Muff Potter's name when he is accused of murder and see Injun Joe find a lot of money. Tom and his friend, Becky, get lost for three days in a cave. While looking for their way out, Tom sees Injun Joe. Later, Tom and Huck go back to the cave and find the money Injun Joe had hidden there. Huck is adopted by Mrs. Douglas. Now, he has a home and goes to school but he finds it hard to fit in and runs away. Tom, however, convinces him to return.

Background and themes

Multiple intelligence: Tom is often associated with mischief. He doesn't play by the rules of society and he is not much of a student. Out by the river or in the cave, however, Tom excels at everything he does. In the end, he always does the right thing.

Life in the past: The adventures take place by the Mississippi River in the mid-1800s. In those times children's lives were very different from today.

Discussion activities

Before reading

- Research:** Ask students to look for information on the Internet. *Where is the Mississippi River? Is it long or short? How did people live in the 1850s in America? Did children have a good life? What did they play with? Is your life now very different?*

Chapters 1–3

After reading

- Discuss:** *Is Tom a happy boy? Is he clever? What does he like? What doesn't he like? Is Tom a good friend? What is a good friend? What do you like doing with your friends?*

Chapters 4–8

After reading

- Write, ask and answer:** Write *What was on the teacher's table?* on the board and elicit the answer (his new book). Now tell students to write similar questions about Chapters 4–8. Students then mingle as a group, asking and answering each other's questions.

Chapters 9–13

While reading (At the end of Chapter 10)

- Role play:** Put students in pairs to act out a conversation between Tom and Aunt Polly. *Student A: You are Aunt Polly. Ask Tom about his adventure in the cave. Student B: You are Tom. Answer Aunt Polly's questions.* Brainstorm possible questions with the whole class first (see key).

After reading

- Game:** Write the following characters on the board: *Tom, Huck, Becky, Aunt Polly, Injun Joe, Muff Potter, Mrs. Douglas.* Put students in small groups and give them five minutes to think of as many true sentences about these characters as possible without looking back at the book. Each group has to say one true sentence in turn. They cannot repeat. If they can't think of one or the sentence is wrong, they are eliminated. The group left at the end is the winner.