The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

BACKGROUND INFO

AUTHOR BIO

Full Name: Samuel Clemens
Pen Name: Mark Twain
Date of Birth: November 30, 1835
Place of Birth: Florida, Missouri
Date of Death: April 21, 1910

Brief Life Story: Mark Twain grew up in Missouri, which was a slave state during his childhood. He would later incorporate his formative experiences of the institution of slavery into his writings. As a teenager, Twain worked as a printer’s apprentice and later as a typesetter, during which time he also became a contributor of articles and humorous sketches to his brother Orion’s newspaper. On a voyage to New Orleans, Twain decided to become a steamboat pilot. Unsurprisingly, the Mississippi River is an important setting in much of Twain’s work. Twain also spent much of his life travelling across the United States, and he wrote many books about his own adventures, but he is best known for his novels The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876) and its sequel, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1885), having written in the latter what is considered to be the Great American Novel. Twain died of a heart attack in 1910.

KEY FACTS

Full Title: Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
Genre: Children’s novel / satirical novel
Setting: On and around the Mississippi River in the American South
Climax: Jim is sold back into bondage by the duke and king
Protagonist: Huck Finn
Antagonist: Pap, the duke, and king, society in general
Point of View: First person limited, from Huck Finn’s perspective

HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT

When Written: 1876 – 1884
Where Written: Hartford, Connecticut, and Quarry Farm, located in Elmira, New York
When Published: 1884 in England; 1885 in the United States of America

Related Literary Works: The great precursor to Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is Miguel de Cervantes’ Don Quixote. Both books are picaresque novels. That is, both are episodic in form, and both satirically enact social critiques. Also, both books are rooted in the tradition of realism; just as Don Quixote apes the heroes of chivalric romances, so does Tom Sawyer ape the heroes of the romances he reads, though the books of which these characters are part altogether subvert the romance tradition. It could also be said that with its realism and local color, Huckleberry Finn is a challenge to romantic epics like Herman Melville’s Moby-Dick, which Huck might dismiss as impractical. Compare also Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin, a novel that also treats the injustices and cruelty of American slavery but which, unlike Huckleberry Finn, might be considered less a literary and more a propagandistic achievement.

Related Historical Events: Twain began writing the novel in the Reconstruction Era, after the Civil War had ended in 1865 and slavery was abolished in the United States. But even though slavery was abolished, the white majority nonetheless systematically oppressed the black minority, as with the Jim Crow Laws of 1876, which institutionalized racial segregation.

EXTRA CREDIT

Dialect. Mark Twain composed Huckleberry using not a high literary style but local dialects that he took great pains to reproduce with his idiosyncratic spelling and grammar.

Reception. A very important 20th-century novelist, Ernest Hemingway, considered Huckleberry Finn to be the best and most influential American novel ever written.

PLOT SUMMARY

Huckleberry Finn introduces himself as a character from the book sequel to his own, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer. He explains that at the end of that book, he and his friend Tom Sawyer discovered a robber’s cache of gold and consequently became rich, but that now Huck lives with a good but mechanical woman, the Widow Douglas, and her holier-than-thou sister, Miss Watson.

Huck resents the “sivilized” lifestyle that the widow imposes on him. However, Huck stays with the Widow and Miss Watson because Tom tells him that, if Huck doesn’t stick with his life in straight-laced civilization, he can’t join Tom’s gang. So Huck does as the Widow tells him and gets to play robbers with Tom and other boys once in a while.

Even as Huck grows to enjoy his lifestyle with the Widow, his debauched father Pap menacingly reappears one night in his room. Pap rebukes Huck for trying to better his life and demands that Huck give him the fortune he made. Huck resolves to escape from Pap once and for all. After some preparation, he fakes his own death. Afterwards, Huck canoes to a place called Jackson’s Island, where he finds a man he knows from home, a slave named Jim who has run away from his owner, Miss Watson, because he had overheard that she planned to sell him.

Huck is locked up like a prisoner in the cabin, and he is at the mercy of Pap’s drunken, murderous rages, suffering many beatings from the old man. Huck resolves to escape from Pap once and for all. After some preparation, he fakes his own death. Afterwards, Huck canoes to a place called Jackson’s Island, where he finds a man he knows from home, a slave named Jim who has run away from his owner, Miss Watson, because he had overheard that she planned to sell him.

Having found a raft during a storm, Huck and Jim happily inhabit Jackson’s Island, fishing, lazing, and even investigating a house floating down the river that contained a dead body. However, during trip into town while disguised as a girl to gather information, Huck learns that slave-hunters are out to capture Jim for a reward. He and Jim quit the island on their raft, with the free states as their destination.

A few days in, a fog descends on the river such that Huck and Jim miss their route to the free states. In the aftermath of this fog, Huck struggles with the command of his conscience to turn Jim in and the cry of his heart to aid Jim in his bid for freedom. At last, Huck has his chance to turn Jim in, but he declines to do so. The night after, a steamboat ploughs into Huck and Jim’s raft, separating the two.

Huck washes up in front of the house of an aristocratic family, the Grangerfords, which takes Huck into its hospitality. But the Grangerfords are engaged in an absurdly pointless and devastating feud with a rival family, the
Shepherdsons. When a Grangerford girl elopes with a Shepherdson boy, the feud escalates to madbloodshed. Huck, having learned that Jim is in hiding nearby with the repaired raft, barely escapes from the carnage. He and Jim board the raft and continue to drift downriver.

A few days pass before Huck and Jim find two con men on the run. Huck helps the men escape their pursuers and he and Jim host them on the raft, where one of the con men claims to be a duke and the other a king. The duke and king take advantage of Huck and Jim’s hospitality, taking over their raft as they head downriver, all the while conducting scams on shore.

One day, the king learns that a man nearby, Peter Wilks, has died, and that his brothers are expected to arrive. Hoping to collect the man’s inheritance, the duke and king go to his house claiming to be his dear brothers. Though they ingratiatate themselves with most of the townspeople, especially Peter’s daughters, the duke and king are suspected by some of being frauds. Huck comes to feel so bad for Peter’s daughters, though, that he resolves to expose the con men for what they are. As he puts his plan into effect, Peter’s real brothers arrive, and, after the townspeople investigate, the duke and king are exposed. Huck escapes onto the raft with Jim, but despairs when the duke and king manage to do the same.

Desperate for money, the duke and king sell Jim to a local farmer. Silas Phelps, claiming that Jim is a runaway and that there is a reward on his head. The duke betrays to Huck that Jim is being held at the Phelps farm. After some soul-searching, Huck decides that he would rather save Jim and go to hell than to let his friend be returned to bondage.

Huck arrives at the Phelps farm where he meets Aunt Sally, whom Huck tricks into thinking that Huck is a family member she was expecting, named Tom. Soon, though, Huck learns that Uncle Silas and Aunt Sally are none other than Tom Sawyer’s relatives. Indeed, Tom is the family member Aunt Sally was expecting all along, Huck intercepts Tom as he rides up to the Phelps farm, and Tom not only agrees to help Huck keep his cover by impersonating his cousin Sid, but he also agrees to help Huck in helping Jim escape from captivity.

Tom confabulates an impractical, romantic plan to free Jim, which Huck and Jim reluctantly go along with. One night, Jim, Huck, and Tom make a successful break for the Mississippi River, only to learn, however, that Tom was shot in the leg by one of their pursuers. Jim sacrifices his freedom to wait with Tom while Huck fetches a doctor, who, after treating Tom with Jim’s help, insists on bringing Jim back to the Phelps farm, bound. He also presents Tom to the Phelpses wounded but alive.

After he recovers, Tom reveals to an anxious Aunt Sally and Huck that Miss Watson wrote in her will that Jim was to be freed after her death and that she had died two months earlier. Tom wanted to liberate Jim for the sake of self-indulgent adventure.

After things are straightened out, Jim reveals to Huck that Pap is dead; his was a corpse that Jim discovered in the floating house. Huck also learns that he still has six thousand dollars in Judge Thatcher’s safekeeping and is free to do what he wants. Fearful of being adopted by Aunt Sally and "sivilized" again, Huck decides that he is going to go West.

Huckleberry Finn – The boy-narrator of the novel, Huck is the son of a vicious town drunk who has been adopted into normal society by the Widow Douglas after the events of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer. In his love for freedom, Huck rebels both against his father Pap’s debauchery and its seeming opposite, a sternly straight-faced but hypocritical society. Wise beyond his years, cleverly practical but nonetheless supremely humane, Huck defies societal conventions by befriending the black slave Jim while travelling with him on their raft and whom, as Huck matures, he comes to see as his equal. Huck’s maturation is impeded, though, by his respectable and bright but boyishly self-indulgent friend, Tom Sawyer.

Jim – One of Miss Watson’s slaves, Jim runs away because he is afraid of being separated from his beloved wife and daughter. Jim is superstitious, but nonetheless intelligent; he is also freedom-loving, and nobly selfless. He becomes a kind of moral guide to Huck over the course of their travels together, and, indeed, something of a spiritual father. Despite being the most morally upstanding character in the novel, Jim is ruthlessly persecuted and hunted and dehumanized. He bears his oppression with fiercely graceful resistance.

Tom Sawyer – Tom is Huck’s childhood friend, a boy from a respectable family who is both bright and learned; he is also a seasoned prankster. As good-spirited as Tom is, he is not as morally mature as Huck, and his impracticality endangers himself and others, especially Jim. Tom is also self-indulgent, even selfish. Despite his shortcomings, however, Tom exerts a powerful influence on Huck.

The duke and king – The kind of people Huck and Tom might turn into were they to only act out of self-interest, the duke and king are a couple of con men that Huck and Jim travel with. The two are selfish, greedy, deceptive, and debauched, but sometimes their actions expose and exploit societal hypocrisy in a way that is somewhat attractive and also rather revealing. Though the exploits of the duke and king can be farcical and fun to watch, the two demonstrate an absolute, hideous lack of respect for human life and dignity.

The Widow Douglas and Miss Watson – Two elderly sisters, the Widow and Miss Watson are Huck’s guardians at the beginning of the novel until Pap arrives on the scene. The two women demand that Huck conform to societal norms, which Huck resents. Miss Watson is hypocritical in holding Christian values yet cruelly keeping slaves, even separating Jim from his family. However, it would seem that she sees the light just before her death; she frees Jim in her will.

Pap – Huck’s father, Pap is a vicious drunk and racist, demonstrably beyond reform, who wants to have Huck’s fortune for himself. He resents Huck’s social mobility and, when not drunk or in jail, he can usually be found harassing Huck. Infuriated by the Widow at one point, Pap kidnaps Huck and imprisons him in a cabin, where he beats Huck mercilessly, such that Huck is compelled to escape from him once and for all. Pap seems to be free from the Widow and Miss Watson’s idea of society, but he is enslaved to his own wretched viciousness and alcoholism, as much a prisoner as anyone in the novel.

Judge Thatcher – A kind of guardian to Huck at the beginning of the novel. Judge Thatcher nobly helps the Widow in her bid for custody of Huck over Pap, and, at the end of the novel, he dutifully restores to Huck his fortune.

Judith Loftus – A shrewd, gentle woman whom Huck approaches disguised as a girl. Mrs. Loftus exposes that Huck is lying to her, but is kind to him nonetheless. Her husband is a slave-hunter pursuing Jim.

Colonel Sherburn – A cold-blooded killer, Sherburn guns down the vocal but harmless drunkard Boggs for almost no reason at all, of which Huck witnesses in horror. When a lynch mob sets out to avenge Boggs’ death, Colonel Sherburn calmly scorns the mob as being full of cowards and absolutely impotent. He is right: the mob, humiliated, disperses.

The Grangerfords and Shepherdsons – Two noble, pious, aristocratic families that abundantly, bloodily feud with one another despite mutual respect. Huck stays with the Grangerfords after becoming separated from Jim, but becomes embroiled in their feud after he accidentally enables a Grangerford girl to elope with a Shepherdson boy. Huck is confused by how much good, brave people could be involved in such devastating madness.

Jack – A Grangerford slave who tends to Huck and kindly shows him to where Jim is hiding nearby the Grangerford estate.

Mary Jane Wilks – The beautiful daughter of Peter Wilks. Huck is so moved by her goodness that he resolves to expose the duke and king as the con men they are.

Joanna Wilks – A daughter of Peter Wilks with a harelip, Joanna shrewdly catches Huck in many lies as he plays along with the duke and king’s impersonation of the Wilks brothers.

Doctor Robinson and Levi Bell – The intelligent but somewhat condescending friends of Peter Wilks who suspect all along that the duke and king are frauds.

Harvey and William Wilks – Brothers of Peter Wilks who have traveled from England to the U.S. for Peter’s funeral. William is a deaf mute. The duke and king impersonate them during one of their more disgusting scams.

Peter Wilks – Brother of Harvey and William Wilks, father of Mary Jane Wilks and her sisters; deceased.

Sally and Silas Phelps – Tom Sawyer’s aunt and uncle, respectively, who are both good people and parents, upstanding members of their community, and...
yet who troublingly support the institution of slavery, exemplified by their
detainment of Jim, Huck and Tom trick the Phelps when preparing for Jim’s
escape, much to Aunt Sally’s fury and Uncle Silas’s innocent befuddlement.
Aunt Sally offers to adopt Huck at the end of the novel, but he refuses to be
“sivilized” by anyone.

Nat – A Phelps slave whose superstitions Tom exploits in executing his
ridiculous plan to free Jim.

Aunt Polly – Tom Sawyer’s aunt and guardian, sister of Sally Phelps.

THEMES

SLAVERY AND RACISM

Though Mark Twain wrote The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn after the
abolition of slavery in the United States, the novel itself is set before the Civil
War, when slavery was still legal and the economic foundation of the American
South. Many characters in Twain’s novel are themselves white slaveholders,
like Miss Watson, the Grangerford family, and the Phelps family, while other
characters profit indirectly from slavery, as the duke and the king do in
turning Miss Watson’s runaway slave Jim into the Phelpses in exchange for a
cash reward.

While slaveholders profit from slavery, the slaves themselves are oppressed,
exploited, and physically and mentally abused. Jim is inhumanly ripped away
from his wife and children. However, white slaveholders rationalize the
oppression, exploitation, and abuse of black slaves by ridiculously assuring
themselves of a racist stereotype, that black people are mentally inferior to
white people, more animal than human. Though Huck’s father, Pap, is a
vicious, violent man, it is the much better man, Jim, who is suspected of Huck’s
murder, only because Jim is black and because he ran away from slavery, in
a bid for freedom, to be with his family.

In this way, slaveholders and racist whites harm black, but they also do moral
harm to themselves, by viciously misunderstanding what it is to be human, and
all for the sake of profit. At the beginning of the novel, Huck himself buys into
racial stereotypes, and even reprimands himself for not turning Jim in for
running away, given that he has a societal and legal obligation to do so.

However, as Huck comes to know Jim and befriend him, he realizes that he
and Jim alike are human beings who love and hurt, who can be wise or foolish.
Huck proves himself to be a better man than most other people Huck meets in
his travels. By the end of the novel, Huck would rather defy his society and his
religion—he’d rather go to Hell—than let his friend Jim be returned to slavery.

SOCIETY AND HYPOCRISY

Huck lives in a society based on rules and traditions, many of which are both
ridiculous and inhuman. At the beginning of the novel, Huck’s guardian, the
Widow Douglas, and her sister, Miss Watson, try to “sivilize” Huck by
 teaching him manners and Christian values, but Huck recognizes that these
lessons take more stock in the dead than in living people, and they do little
more than make him uncomfortable, bored, and, ironically enough, lonely.
After Huck leaves the Widow Douglas’s care, however, he is exposed to even
darker parts of society, parts in which people do ridiculous, illogical things,
often with violent consequences. Huck meets good families that bloodily,
fatally feud for no reason. He witnesses a drunken man get shot down for
making a petty insult.

Even at the beginning of the novel, a judge ridiculously grants custody of Huck
to Huck’s abusive drunkard of a father, Pap. The judge claims that Pap has a
legal right to custody of Huck, yet, regardless of his right, Pap proves himself
to be a bad guardian, denying Huck an opportunity to educate himself, beating
Huck, and imprisoning in an isolated cabin. In such a case, fulfilling Pap’s legal
right ridiculously compromises Huck’s welfare. Furthermore, Huck’s abuse
and imprisonment at the hands of Pap is implicitly compared to a more
widespread and deeply engrained societal problem, namely the
institutionalized enslavement of black people. Huck comes to recognize
slavery as an oppressively inhuman institution, one that no truly “sivilized”
society can be founded on. People like Sally Phelps, who seem good yet are
racist slaveholders, are maybe the biggest hypocrites Huck meets on his

RELIGION AND SUPERSTITION

There are two systems of belief represented in The Adventures of Huckleberry
Finn: formal religion (namely, Christianity) and superstition. The educated and
the “sivilized,” like the Widow Douglas and Miss Watson, practice Christianity,
wheras the uneducated and poor, like Huck and Jim, have superstitions
Huck, despite (or maybe because of) the Widow Douglas and Miss Watson’s
tutelage, immediately has an aversion to Christianity on the grounds that it
takes too much stock in the dead and not enough in the living, that Christian
Heaven is populated by boringly rigid people like Miss Watson while Hell
seems more exciting, and, finally, that Huck recognizes the uselessness of
Christianity. After all, prayers are never answered in Huck’s world.

On the other hand, Huck and Jim’s superstitions, silly though they are, are no
sillier than Christianity. Huck and Jim read “bad signs” into everything, as
when a spider burns in a candle, or Huck touches a snake skin. Jim even has a
magic hairball, taken from an ox’s stomach, that, when given money,
supposedly tells the future. Huck and Jim find so many bad signs in the natural
world that, whenever anything bad happens to them, they’re sure to have a
sign to blame it on. However, one of the subtle jokes of The Adventures of
Huckleberry Finn, a joke with nevertheless serious implications, is that, silly
as superstition is, it is a more accurate way to read the world than formal religion
is.

It is silly for Huck and Jim to read bad signs into everything, but it is not at all
silly for them to expect bad things to be just around the corner; for they live in
a world where nature is dangerous, even fatally malevolent, and where people
behave irrationally, erratically, and, oftentimes, violently. In contrast, formal
religion dunks its practitioners into ignorance and, worse, cruelty. By Christian
values as established in the American South, Huck is condemned to Hell for
doing the right thing by saving Jim from slavery. Huck, knowing that the
Christian good is not the good, saves Jim anyway, thereby establishing once
and for all a new moral framework in the novel, one that cannot be co-opted
by society into serving immoral institutions like slavery.

GROWING UP

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn belongs to the genre of Bildungsroman:
that is, the novel presents a coming-of-age story in which the protagonist,
Huck, matures as he broadens his horizons with new experiences. Huck
begins the novel as an immature boy who enjoys goofing around with his
boyhood friend, Tom Sawyer, and playing tricks on others. He has a good
heart but a conscience deformed by the society in which he was raised, such
that he reprimands himself again and again for not turning Jim in for running
away, as though turning Jim in and prolonging his separation from his family
were the right thing to do.

As the novel develops, however, so do Huck’s notions of right and wrong. He
learns that rigid codes of conduct, like Christianity, or like that which
motivates the Grangerson and Shepherdson’s blood feud, don’t necessarily
lead to good results. He also recognizes that absolute selfishness, like that
exhibited by Tom Sawyer to a small extent, and that exhibited by Tom’s much
worse prankster-counterparts, the duke and the king, is both juvenile and
shameful. Huck learns that he must follow the moral intuitions of his heart,
which requires that he be flexible in responding to moral dilemmas. And,
indeed, it is by following his heart that Huck makes the right decision to help
Jim escape from bondage.

This mature moral decision is contrasted with the immature way in which Tom
 goes about acting on that decision at the Phelps farm. Instead of simply
helping Jim, Tom devises a childishly elaborate scheme to free Jim, which
results in Tom getting shot in the leg and Jim being recaptured. By the end of
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Huck is morally mature and realistic,
whereas Tom still has a lot of growing up to do.

FREEDOM

Huck and Jim both yearn for freedom. Huck wants to be free of petty manners
and societal values. He wants to be free of his abusive father, who goes so far
as to literally imprison Huck in a cabin. Maybe more than anything, Huck
wants to be free such that he can think independently and do what his heart
tells him to do. Similarly, Jim wants to be free of bondage so that he can return
to his wife and children, which he knows to be his natural right.
The place where Huck and Jim go to seek freedom is the natural world. Though nature imposes new constraints and dangers on the two, including what Huck calls “lonesomeness,” a feeling of being unprotected from the meaninglessness of death, nature also provides havens from society and even its own dangers, like the cave where Huck and Jim take refuge from a storm. In such havens, Huck and Jim are free to be themselves, and they can also appreciate from a safe distance the beauty that is inherent in the terror of freedom.

That being said, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* implies that people can be so free as to be, ironically enough, imprisoned in themselves. The *duke* and the *king*, for example, foils (or contrasts) to Huck and Jim, are so free that they can become almost anybody through playacting and impersonation. However, this is only because they have no moral compass and are imprisoned in their own selfishness. Freedom is good, but only insofar as the free person binds himself to the moral intimations of his heart.

### The Mississippi River

The Mississippi River, on and around which so much of the action of *Huckleberry Finn* takes place, is a muscular, sublime, and dangerous body of water and a symbol for absolute freedom. It is literally the place where *Huck* feels most comfortable and at ease, and also the means by which *Huck* and *Jim* hope to access the free states. The river is physically fluid, flexible, and progressive, just as *Huck* and *Jim* are in their imaginatively free acts of empathy with other characters and in their pragmatic adaptability to any circumstances that come their way. However, in being absolutely free, the river is also unpredictable and dangerous, best exemplified during the storms that again and again threaten the lives of *Huck* and *Jim*. When he is alone, free from any immediately external influence, *Huck* begins to feel very lonesome and as destructive as the river itself, or, rather, self-destructive. The river, then, embodies the blessing and dangers of freedom, which must be carefully navigated if one is to live a good, happy life.

### The Raft

If the river is a symbol for absolute freedom, then the raft, host primarily to *Huck* and *Jim* but also to the *duke* and *king*, is a symbol for a limitation one must necessarily impose on one’s freedom if one is not to be overwhelmed: peaceful coexistence. Unlike the sometimes ridiculous and hateful rules of society, the rules of the raft are simple: respect differences and support one another. The raft is a kind of model society in which one can enjoy freedom unlike in society on shore, but at the same time not drown in one’s freedom. *Huck* says that his happiest days are spent on the raft with *Jim*. It is significant that the literal destruction of the raft immediately precedes *Huck’s* fit of conscience as to whether or not he should turn *Jim* in. Such a consideration, a betrayal, even, threatens to break *Huck’s* friendship with *Jim* just as the raft is broken. Significant also is the fact that it is after *Huck* learns about the insane destructiveness of human conflict from the Grangerford-Shepherdson feud that *Jim* pops back into *Huck’s* life, the raft of their peaceful coexistence repaired. This is all of course symbolic for the making, breaking, and repairing of trust and good faith in people despite their differences, and speaks to the fact that it is never too late to try to mend severed relations.

### Quotes

#### Chapter 1 quotes

You don’t know about me, without you have read a book by the name of “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,” but that ain’t no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth.

—Huck Finn

The Widow Douglas, she took me for her son, and allowed she would civilize me; but it was rough living in the house all the time, considering how dismal

regular and decent the widow was in all her ways; and so when I couldn’t stand it no longer, I lit out.

—Huck Finn

#### Chapter 2 quotes

“But how can we do it if we don’t know what it is?” “Why blame it all, we’ve got to do it. Don’t I tell you it’s in the books?”

—Huck Finn, *Tom Sawyer*

#### Chapter 3 quotes

I went and told the Widow about it, and she said the thing a body could get by praying for it was “spiritual gifts.” This was too much for me, but she told me what she means—I must help others, and do everything I could for other people, and look out for them all the time, and never think about myself…but I couldn’t see no advantage about it—except for the other people—so at last I reckoned I wouldn’t worry about it any more, but just let it go.

—Huck Finn

#### Chapter 4 quotes

At first I hated the school, but by-and-by I got so I could stand it…I liked the old ways best, but I was getting so I liked the new ones too, a little bit.

—Huck Finn

#### Chapter 5 quotes

“And looky here—you drop that school, you hear? I’ll learn people to bring up a boy to put on airs over his own father and let on to be better’n what he is.”

—Pap

The judge he felt kind of sore. He said he reckoned a body could reform the ole man [Pap] with a shot-gun maybe, but he didn’t know no other way.

—Huck Finn

#### Chapter 6 quotes

The widow she found out where I was, by-and-by, and she sent a man over to try to get hold of me, but pap drove him off with the gun, and it warn’t long after that till I was used to being where I was, and liked it, all but the cowhide part.

—Huck Finn

But by-and-by pap got too handy with his hick’ry, and I couldn’t stand it. I was all over welts. He got to going away so much, too, and locking me in. Once he locked me in and was gone three days. It was dreadful lonesome.

—Huck Finn

“When they told me there was a State in this country where they’d let that nigger vote, I drewed out. I says I’ll never vote again…I says to the people, why ain’t this nigger put up at auction and sold?”
CHAPTER 8 QUOTES

That is, there's something in [prayer] when a body like the widow or the parson prays, but it don't work for me, and I reckon it don't work for only just the right kind.

—Huck Finn

I was ever so glad to see Jim. I warn't lonesome, now.

—Huck Finn

“People will 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, and I ain’t agoing back there anyways.”

—Huck Finn

“Yes—en I’s rich now come to look at it. I owns myself, en I’s wuth eight hund’d dollars. I wisht I had de money, I wouldn’ want no mo’.”

—Jim

CHAPTER 12 QUOTES

“I’m unfavorable to killin’ a man as long as you can git around it; it ain’t good sense, it ain’t good morals.”

—Robber on the wreck

CHAPTER 13

I begun to think how dreadful it was, even for murderers, to be in such a fix. I says to myself, there ain’t no telling but I might come to be a murderer myself, yet, and then how would I like it?

—Huck Finn

CHAPTER 14

Well, he [Jim] was right; he was most always right; he had an uncommon level head, for a nigger.

—Huck Finn

I see it warn’t no use wasting words—you can’t learn a nigger to argue. So I quit.

—Huck Finn

CHAPTER 15

“My heart wuz mos’ broke becase you wuz los’, en I didn’t k’yer no mo’ what become er me en de raf’. En when I wake up en fine you back again’, all safe en soun’, de tears come en I could a got down on my knees en kiss ‘yo’ foot I’s so thankful. En all you wuz thirkin’ bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie.”

—Jim

CHAPTER 16

Jim said it made him all over trembly and feverish to be so close to freedom. Well, I can tell you it made me all over trembly and feverish, too, to hear him, because I begun to get it through my head that he was most free—and who was to blame for it? Why, me.

—Huck Finn

So I reckoned I wouldn’t bother no more about [right and wrong], but after this always do whichever comes handiest at the time.

—Huck Finn

CHAPTER 18

‘Did you want to kill [the Shepherdson], Buck?” “Well, I bet I did.” “What did he do to you?” “Him? He never done nothing to me.” “Well, then, what did you want to kill him for?” “Why nothing—only it’s on account of the feud.”

—Huck Finn, Buck Grangerford

CHAPTER 19

For what you want, above all things, on a raft, is for everybody to be satisfied, and feel right and kind towards others.

—Huck Finn

CHAPTER 20

“I doan’ mine one er two kings, but dat’s enough. Dis one’s powerful drunk, en de duke ain’ much better.”

—Jim

CHAPTER 22

“The pitifulest thing out is a mob; that’s what an army is—a mob; they don’t fight with courage that’s born in them, but with courage that’s borrowed from their mass, and from their officers. But a mob without any man at the head of it, is beneath pitifulness.”

—Colonel Sherburn

CHAPTER 23

I do believe [Jim] cared just as much for his people as white folks does for their’n. It don’t seem natural, but I reckon it’s so.

—Huck Finn
CHAPTER 27
I thought them poor girls and them niggers would break their hearts for grief; they cried around each other, and took on so it most made me down sick to see it. The girls said they hadn’t ever dreamed of seeing the family separated or sold away from the town.
—Huck Finn

CHAPTER 30
“Leggo the boy, you old idiot! Would you a done any different? Did you inquire around for him, when you got loose? I don’t remember it.”
—The duke

CHAPTER 31
“All right, then, I’ll go to hell”—and [I] tore [my note to Miss Watson] up.
—Huck Finn

CHAPTER 33
I’m bound to say Tom Sawyer fell, considerable, in my estimation. Only I couldn’t believe it. Tom Sawyer a nigger stealer!
—Huck Finn

I was sorry for them poor pitiful rascals [the duke and king], it seems like I couldn’t ever feel any hardness against them any more in the world. It was a dreadful thing to see. Human beings can be awful cruel to one another.
—Huck Finn

CHAPTER 42
“I never see a nigger that was a better nuss or faithfuller, and yet he was resking his freedom to do it...He ain’t no bad nigger, gentlemen; that’s what I think about him.”
—The doctor

CHAPTER 43
But 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.
—Huck Finn

Though society, as represented by the Widow Douglas and Miss Watson, would condemn all instances of lying, Huck is a realist, able to look beyond the rigid rules of society in forming moral judgments. He recognizes that people lie and that, in some situations, lying is okay. Huck grows bored of societal rigidity and runs away, only to be convinced to return by Tom Sawyer’s imaginative games, which promise a kind of adventure (if not “real” adventure).

The rules of society are sometimes ridiculous to Huck, like praying before a meal, especially when one’s prayer sounds less like thanks than a grumbling complaint. Huck is also intuitively against how society separates things with arbitrary boundaries, like food here, but, later, classes and races. Just as Huck likes the juices of his food to mingle, so too is he inclined to cross societal boundaries in service of what his heart tells him is right. Such boundaries, like religion, serve the dead. Huck cares about the living—about life.

The Widow Douglas forbade Huck from smoking in the house as well. Huck points out that the Widow condones useless things like studying the Bible, but forbids Huck from doing good and useful things, like smoking. Furthermore, he points out that the Widow herself takes snuff, a tobacco product, and says that this is alright, not on principle, but only because she herself does it.

The Widow Douglas is good and kind, and yet, like many members of society, she can be a hypocrite. What motivates her hypocrisy is self-interest: though she condemns Huck for smoking, the Widow doesn’t condemn snuff because she herself takes it.
Meanwhile, the Widow Douglas’s sister, Miss Watson, teaches Huck how to spell, critiques his posture, and tells him about Heaven and Hell. Wanting a change in his circumstances, any change, Huck says he would rather be in Hell than in Heaven, much to Miss Watson’s consternation. She responds that she is living her life such that she can go to Heaven. Huck concludes that he’d certainly rather not go to wherever Miss Watson is going, but says nothing of this so as not to further upset her. He asks Miss Watson whether Tom Sawyer is going to Heaven or Hell. When Miss Watson says he’s going to Hell, Huck is glad, because that means he and his friend can be together.

After Huck’s talk with Miss Watson, Huck goes up to his bedroom. He sits, tries to think cheerful thoughts, but is so lonesome that he wishes he were dead. He looks out his window at nature, sees the stars, and hears mournful, ghostly sounds in the leaves and in the birdcalls. A spider crawls on Huck’s shoulder. Huck flicks the spider into a candle, where it burns. Huck, frightened, takes this as a sign of bad luck. Soon afterward, he hears a meowing outside. Huck meows back and goes outside, to find Tom Sawyer waiting for him.

CHAPTER 2

As Huck and Tom Sawyer sneak away from the Widow Douglas’s house, Huck trips and makes a noise. One of Miss Watson’s slaves, Jim, hears the noise and leans out of the kitchen doorway and asks who’s there. Huck and Tom are silent, hiding in the dark, even though Huck needs to scratch an itch, which Huck says is even itchier because he knows he can’t scratch it. Huck observes that the slave is a good man: even though he is living her life such that she can go to Heaven, Jim’s circumstances, less boring and more accepting. This choice foreshadows Huck’s later choice to be damned in saving Jim.

Tom and Huck meet up with some other boys, and, after a short excursion, end up in a cave, where Tom announces that the boys present can be members of his band of robbers, which he calls Tom Sawyer’s Gang. All the boys want to be members, and, after swearing an oath that Tom fashioned after what he read in robber and pirate books, are inducted into the Gang. However, the oath requires that, if a member reveals a secret of the Gang, his family be killed. Huck doesn’t have a family other than a drunkard father who no one can ever find, and so the boys debate whether he should be inducted into the Gang at all. Huck at last offers Miss Watson to be killed, which his fellows accept.

The members of Tom Sawyer’s Gang debate what their purpose will be. Tom declares that the Gang’s purpose is to rob people on the roads of watches and money, and then to either kill or ransom whom they rob. One boy questions whether the Gang should ransom people, but Tom insists that it must, because that is what happens in the books that he reads. The only problem is that no one knows what it means to ransom someone. Tom concludes that it is to keep someone until they die, and the boys agree this must be the case. The boys also agree not to kill women, but to keep them in the cave and treat them very sweetly. The Gang decides to pull off its first robbery, but can’t do it on Sunday because that would be wicked. The Gang disperses, and Huck returns home.

CHAPTER 3

After Huck returns home, Miss Watson scolds him for having dirtied his clothes. The Widow Douglas does not scold Huck, but washes his clothes, looking so sorry as she does so that Huck resolves to behave himself. Miss Watson takes Huck into a closet to pray, telling him that he will receive whatever he asks for, but Huck concludes that this is not the case, on the grounds that, when he prayed for a “fish-line,” he got one, but it didn’t have any hooks and was therefore useless.

Huck is frustrated with society as represented by Miss Watson’s lessons—by its strictness, its empty rules about how one must be and look—and he knows that society needs to change somehow. He wants to go to Hell because it sounds better than his current circumstances, less boring and more accepting. This choice foreshadows Huck’s later choice to be damned in saving Jim.

When Huck is alone, away from society, free, he sometimes becomes lonesome, specifically when he perceives signs of death, like the sound of the dead leaves, as they are reflected in the natural world. Such a feeling is only exacerbated by Huck’s childish superstitions, like his reading of the burning spider as a sign of bad luck. This lonesomeness is relieved when Huck is with friends like Tom.

Jim is a good man: even though he detests his enslavement, he investigates the noise to make sure that there is nothing dangerous outside threatening Miss Watson or her interests. Huck’s predicament shows that making a bid for freedom can be uncomfortable, but he would rather be uncomfortable now and free later than otherwise.

Tom takes risks, like stealing the candles, that Huck objects to. Huck is more practical, perhaps because Tom comes from a more privileged background than Huck. Like Huck, Jim explains unknown phenomena, like how his hat got into the tree, with superstitious explanations. It seems silly for the other slaves to believe Huck’s stories, but later in the novel many religious whites will believe stories just as ridiculous.

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Here, the boys play at making their own society. Like the society of the South, that of the boys is rooted in silly traditions, those Tom derived from his robber and pirate books. But the boys also demonstrate that they are more flexible than members of the society of the South. They are willing to bend their own rules so that Huck can be a member of the Gang.

Jim, looking like good Christians, just

The widow Douglas, like society, is rooted in arbitrary traditions that have lost their meaning. The boys don’t know what ransoming is, but adopt it as a practice only because of tradition. While it is okay for a make-believe gang to do so, it is childish for adults in society to do so, especially considering that, while the violence done by Tom’s gang is pretend, that perpetrated by society is very real, with bloody, sometimes deadly consequences. This passage also points out how ridiculous it is to obey the letter of Christianity but not the spirit: the boys are going to do something bad, rob people, but insist that they can’t do it on Sunday, because Sunday is a holy day. But wicked things are no more wicked on one day than another—the boys are mixing up looking like good Christians with actually being good Christians, just as it becomes clear many adults also do.

Tom’s Gang, like society, is rooted in arbitrary traditions that have lost their meaning. The boys don’t know what ransoming is, but adopt it as a practice only because of tradition. While it is okay for a make-believe gang to do so, it is childish for adults in society to do so, especially considering that, while the violence done by Tom’s gang is pretend, that perpetrated by society is very real, with bloody, sometimes deadly consequences. This passage also points out how ridiculous it is to obey the letter of Christianity but not the spirit: the boys are going to do something bad, rob people, but insist that they can’t do it on Sunday, because Sunday is a holy day. But wicked things are no more wicked on one day than another—the boys are mixing up looking like good Christians with actually being good Christians, just as it becomes clear many adults also do.

Though they seem to hold the same Christian values, Miss Watson is strict without compassion, whereas the Widow is compassionate. As Christianity is a religion rooted in compassion, it could be said that Miss Watson and the Widow really do hold different values. Without compassion, whereas the Widow really do hold different values. Without compassion, whereas the Widow really do hold different values. Without compassion, whereas the Widow really do hold different values. Without compassion, whereas the Widow really do hold different values.
Huck recounts how he sat down, one time, in the back of the woods and thought about prayer. He wonders, if someone gets whatever he or she prays for, for why, for example, the Widow Douglas can’t get her silver snuff-box back that was stolen. Huck concludes that, insofar as prayer is concerned, “there ain’t nothing in it.” He tells the Widow this, and she says one can only get “spiritual gifts” by praying, that is, gifts that aid one in being selfless. Huck thinks that selflessness is not advantageous, and decides to just “let it go.” He goes on to say, though, that there must be two Providences, that of the Widow and that of Miss Watson, and that he would belong to the former, even though it might not help him considering that he is so “ignorant and...low-down and ornery.”

Huck thinks about his father Pap, who hadn’t been seen for more than a year, which is just fine with Huck. Pap is an abrasive drunkard. People thought that he had drowned, because a body resembling his had been dredged from the river, but Huck doesn’t think it was Pap’s body after all, because the body was discovered floating on its back, and men, Huck thinks, float on their faces, so that body must have been a woman’s.

Huck turns thinking about Tom Sawyer’s Gang. They played robber for about a month, before all the boys, including Huck, resigned from the gang because they hadn’t robbed anyone but only pretended to. They would hide in the woods and charge on passers-by, like hog-drovers and women in carts taking produce to market. Tom referred to the hogs as “ingots” and produce as “julery”, but Huck sees no profit in pretending.

One time, Huck goes on to recount, Tom summoned the Gang and told them about a large group of Spanish merchants and “A-rabs” who were going to camp in a nearby cave with their elephants, camels, mules, diamonds, and other exotic riches. After polishing their swords and guns, which were really just “lath and broom-sticks,” the Gang set out to raid the Spanish and Arab camp, only to find a Sunday school picnic in its place. The Gang chased the children at the picnic and seized their goods. When Huck points out to Tom that there were no Spaniards and Arabs, Tom tells Huck he is wrong, that it only seemed that way because magicians transformed the Spaniards and Arabs and their possessions into “an infant Sunday school.”

Huck realizes that Miss Watson’s conception of prayer as getting whatever you ask for doesn’t account for the actual effects of prayer. The Widow Douglas clarifies that one doesn’t get whatever one prays for in Christian thought, but rather that one receives not material but spiritual gifts through prayer. The practical Huck doesn’t value such gifts very highly, but he does conclude that, if given the choice between Miss Watson’s seemingly Christian values and the Widow’s real Christian values, he’d take the latter.

This foreshadows Pap’s reappearance later in the novel, as well as the episode in which Huck disguises himself as a girl, only to be found out for what he is. That Huck knows how women and men float speaks to his familiarity with the destructiveness of nature and horrors of death, shocking given his young age.

More than anything, Tom loves to pretend, and he is very childlike in this way. Play is its own reward for him. In contrast, Huck is interested in material profit, which is an interest shared by the adults in the novel. Unlike Tom, Huck’s childhood, it would seem, has ended prematurely, maybe because of the difficulties of his life, the poverty that he again and again contends with.

Tom has a wildly active imagination, fueled by the books he has read. He can turn even something mundane like a Sunday school picnic into the object of adventure. When Huck, always the realist, challenges Tom’s imaginations as fake, Tom can defend their reality with imaginings of magicians. In this way, Tom shows that, with the power of imagination, one can defy the logic of the real world (for better and, we will see, for worse).

Given that they are so powerful, Huck thinks, genies are foolish for serving others sloavishly when they could serve themselves. This reveals one of Huck’s commitments to freedom: if one is able to liberate oneself, one should do so. Though Huck doesn’t cross-apply this commitment to black slaves in bondage now, he will later. Note, also, that Huck tests Tom’s claim about how genies are summoned. Huck is open but skeptical about others ideas and is keen to test what others tell him on his own terms, a trait which enables him to penetrate societal hypocrisy.

CHAPTER 4

Three or four months pass since the Gang’s raid on the Sunday school. Huck has been going to school and learning reading, writing, and arithmetic, though he “don’t take no stock in mathematics.” He hated school at first, but gets used to it. He is also getting used to the regularity of the Widow’s household, and even coming to like it.

One morning, Huck overturns a saltcellar at breakfast. To ward off bad luck, he reaches for the split contents to throw some salt over his left shoulder, but Miss Watson prevents him from doing so, telling him that he is a mess-maker. As Huck uneasily heads out of the house, he keeps a lookout for bad things coming his way. As he walks, he sees in the snow somebody’s tracks, the left boot-heel of which, because stumbled with nails, leaves crosses in the ground to ward off the devil.

Huck nervously makes his way to Judge Thatcher’s house. The judge tells Huck that the six thousand dollars he has left in the bank has collected interest, and warns him against taking any money out of the bank. Huck replies he wants Judge Thatcher to have all of his money. The Judge, not quite understanding Huck’s intentions, buys Huck’s property for a dollar.

It is telling that Huck finds reading and writing valuable, both social subjects concerned with communication in the real world, but not arithmetic, a rigidly abstract subject. That said, Huck is adaptable enough that he soon comes to like what he hated at first.

Miss Watson is always telling Huck about her Christian superstitions, but she sees his superstitions as ridiculous. That said, Huck does indeed encounter something bad: the telltale marks of his father’s tracks in the snow (though the novel builds suspense by not revealing just what the bad thing is yet). Huck’s logical misstep is in thinking that spilling the salt caused his father to reappear.

In response to seeing Pap’s tracks, Huck does something both reasonable and practical: he gives his money to Judge Thatcher so that the greedy Pap can’t take it from him, which would otherwise be allowed by the backward’s custodial laws of society.
Huck goes on to tell how Jim has a hairball, taken from the belly of an ox, that Jim does magic with. Huck goes to Jim, tells him that he saw Pap’s tracks in the snow (those that leave the cross), and asks what Pap is going to do and how long he is going to be around. Jim says something over the hairball and drops it on the ground, but the hairball doesn’t talk. Jim explains that the hairball sometimes needs money to talk. Huck gives the hairball a badly counterfeited quarter with brass showing through the silver, saying nothing of the dollar he got from his father. Judge Thatcher and the Widow are forced to quit the court, says he wouldn’t take a son so-called because he is new to the so-called tradition of parent raising child honors hypocrisy ruling: he gives Pap custody of Huck, so that Huck might avoid a beating. With Huck’s money, Pap gets drunk, and every time he gets drunk he gets rowdy and is jailed. Huck out of money by telling him that he has learned to read and write he must be reprimanded. Pap vows to take Huck’s “frills” out of his life. When the hairball prophesies that Pap doesn’t know what he is going to do, and that Huck is going to have troubles and joys in his life. When Huck goes up to his room, he finds Pap sitting there.

CHAPTER 5

Huck is scared at first to see the old, greasy, pale Pap sitting in his room because Pap “tanned,” or beat, him so often, but soon is not scared at all. Pap reprimands Huck for wearing nice clothes, and says that because Huck has learned to read and write he must think he’s better than his own father. Pap vows to take Huck’s “frills” out of his life. When the hairball prophesies that Pap doesn’t know what he is going to do, and that Huck is going to have troubles and joys in his life. When Huck goes up to his room, he finds Pap sitting there.

Far from offering Huck any kind of freedom from his strictly “civilized” lifestyle, Pap imposes yet another kind of imprisonment, one based on class, where Huck is prevented from bettering and educating himself. This is counter-intuitive: Pap should want the best for his son, but he instead wants no better for Huck than what he himself had.

Huck would rather enable Pap’s drinking by giving him money than be beat for not doing so, reflecting a pragmatic commitment to being responsible for oneself.

The next day, Pap is drunk and tries to coerce Judge Thatcher into giving him Huck’s fortune, but the Judge refuses. Afterward, Judge Thatcher and the Widow go to a court of law to take Huck from Pap’s custody, but the new judge whom they appeal to, so-called because he is new to the court, says he wouldn’t take a son from his father. Judge Thatcher and the Widow are forced to quit the business, and Pap is granted custody of Huck.

It might seem that Jim is trying to con Huck out of money by telling him that sometimes his hairball requires payment before it speaks, but it must be remembered that Jim himself is superstitious, and that he gladly accepts Huck’s counterfeited quarter, as though to can not Huck but the hairball itself. Huck is, again, practical here, as an adult would be, in saying nothing about his actual dollar, thereby protecting it. Finally, note that, while Jim and Huck are superstitious about the hairball, they do not attribute a supernatural explanation to the re-silvering of the counterfeited quarter. What is considered magical in Huck’s world is arbitrary.

CHAPTER 6

Pap continues to harass Judge Thatcher for Huck’s money, and he harasses Huck for not stopping school. Huck goes to school nevertheless, with even more desire if only to spite Pap. The “law trial” Pap instigates proceeds slowly, so Huck borrows two or three dollars from Judge Thatcher once in a while to give to Pap, so that Huck might avoid a beating. With Huck’s money, Pap gets drunk, and every time he gets drunk he gets rowdy and is jailed. Huck thinks this “was right in his line.”

When Pap loiters around the Widow’s estate too much, the Widow reprimands him. Pap vows to show her who Huck’s boss is, so one day he kidnaps Huck and takes him to an isolated log hut in the woods near the river. Pap is with Huck at all times, so that Huck has no chance for escape. The two live on what fish they catch and what game they shoot with Pap’s (probably stolen) gun. Sometimes Pap locks Huck up to go down to the store to trade fish and game for whiskey. Huck eventually becomes accustomed to his new living situation, despite the beatings.

Pap is pleased with the court’s custody ruling. He threatens to beat Huck “black and blue” unless Huck raises money for him. Huck borrows three dollars from Judge Thatcher, which Pap uses to get drunk, going around town “cussing and whooping and carrying on.” Pap is jailed for making such a ruckus.

After Pap is released, the new judge resolves to reform him. He invites Pap to supper, where he lectures Pap on temperance and other virtues till Pap begins to cry and swears that, though he has been a fool, he is going to turn his life around. The judge believes Pap, and has his whole family shake Pap’s hand, once “the hand of a hog,” but no more. All cry. The judge provides Pap with a room, but soon after Pap begins to desire alcohol. He climbs out of his room, trades his new coat for whiskey, and climbs back into the room. The next morning, he crawls out of the room again, drunk, breaks his arm, and almost freezes to death where he falls. The judge is upset, and says that Pap could be reformed “with a shot-gun, maybe,” but by no other means.

As Miss Watson is stuck in her values and ways, so is Pap stuck in his cruelty, selfishness, drunkenness, and debauchery. Even having his freedom taken away doesn’t deter him from acting badly.

The new judge, maybe regretting that he has given the debauched Pap custody of Huck, tries to give Pap an opportunity to break out of his irresponsible ways, and Pap seems to attempt to do so. But his habits are too deeply ingrained to be corrected: as soon as he is given back his freedom, Pap indulges in his literally self-destructive behaviors again. He altogether lacks Huck’s adaptability. Pap may not be “regular” like the Widow and Ms. Watson, but he is no more free than they are, imprisoned in his bad ways as he is. Only in death, the judge thinks, can such a man be free.
Huck comes to like the “lazy and jolly” life he leads with Pap, the smoking and fishing he does without the burden of study. His nice clothes become dirty and tattered. Huck even wonders how he ever adapted to the lifestyle endorsed by the Widow, what with its manners and rules. Though Huck had stopped cussing over the course of his “sivilizing,” he resumes because Pap doesn't object.

However, Pap eventually begins to beat Huck so often and so severely that Huck, covered with welts, can no longer stand the abuse. Pap also begins to leave Huck alone too often, locking him in the cabin, such that Huck is often “dreadful lonesome.” Scared one time that Pap has drowned and that he might never be freed from the cabin, Huck begins to look for ways to escape. There is no way out of the cabin, though, so Huck looks for tools to make an escape. He finds a rusty old saw which he carefully begins to use an old saw he has found to remove a section from a log of wood, big enough for him to squeeze through. Soon after he begins, Huck hears Pap's gun go off in the woods outside. Huck hides all evidence of his work, just before Pap returns home.

Pap is characteristically in a bad mood when he comes in. He rants that his lawsuit to get Huck's money is proceeding too slowly, and that Huck is not being “sivilized,” at this point. Pap then begins to cuss violently, saying that he’d like to see the Widow to being “sivilized” at this point. Huck lives in the present, unbound by the past; he lives whatever life he thinks is currently best, and has no nostalgia for his previous ways of life. One consequence of this, though, is that Huck is something of a slow learner; it’s because he doesn’t change readily in response to past experiences that Huck is so slow to accept Jim not as a black slave inferior to whites but as an equal human being of desiring of freedom.

It is only when a way of life becomes untenable for Huck that he seeks to change it. Here, for example, it is only after living with Pap becomes unsafe that Huck seeks means of escaping from Pap, which he could have done anytime in the past but neglected to do. Huck formulates a very practical plan for his escape, resourceful and efficient. This plan is contrasted later with Tom’s plan to liberate Jim from the Phelps Farm, which is maybe more stylish than Huck’s, but much more romantic, less practical, and more dangerous.

That Huck wants to live neither with the Widow, where he is not free enough, nor with Pap, where he is too free, reveals that freedom for Huck can be either deficient or excessive, and that the ideal degree of freedom is somewhere between those two extremes, between living only by rigid rules or floating such rules altogether. However, at this point, Huck has not yet learned which rules he should live by, and it is education in this regard that constitutes a major part of his maturation.

After Huck loads the skiff, he and Pap sit down to dinner, during which Pap becomes drunk. He begins to rant against the government for taking Huck from his flesh-and-blood father, just as Huck is becoming useful to him, and also for supporting Judge Thatcher in keeping Huck’s money. Pap then goes on to denounce the government for allowing a man of mixed race to become a wealthy, educated college professor with the right to vote, because Pap doesn’t think a person of mixed race should have opportunities and rights as good as those of white people. Indeed, he thinks the professor should be put up at a slave auction and sold.

As he rants, Pap wanders around the cabin, eventually tripping on a tub of salt pork, which makes him cuss even more. He hops around the cabin, kicks the tub with his boot that has “a couple of his toes leaking out of the front end,” howls even more, and ends up rolling around in the dirt. After supper, Pap gets his jug of whiskey, and Huck predicts that he will be very drunk by the end of the night, at which point Huck could make his escape. But Pap stays up late thrashing and moaning, and Huck himself, exhausted, falls asleep. He wakes to Pap screaming that snakes are crawling up his legs. Pap hops around the cabin some more till he falls down, and, after rolling violently on the floor, lies still, saying soon thereafter that the dead are after him. Pap rises and crawls, begging the dead to leave him alone, and starts to cry.

Pap’s self-destructiveness is exemplified in this scene: he hurts himself, but, rather than tend to his injury, he, rather hypocritically, only exacerbates it by lashing out and, in lashing out, hurting himself even more. This resembles how he refuses the new judge’s help in being reformed and, falling back into drunkenness, literally hurts himself after falling out of his window. As for Pap’s hallucinations, the first may draw on Pap’s religious beliefs. In the Bible, the snake is a figure for the Devil and sin, which Pap is haunted by. Pap’s hallucination of the dead touching him foreshadows his own death by drowning chapters later.

Pap is clearly not in his right mind at this point, drunk and despairing as he is, so much so that he thinks Huck is the Angel of Death. An irony here is that, though Pap’s hallucination pertains to a Christian image, Pap is acting most unlike a Christian: he does not accept death tranquilly, with the promise of redemption and eternal life in Heaven in mind, and he is viciously violent toward Huck.

Pap thinks of himself as a victim of bad government policies, but in doing so he neglects to take into account the people who have tried to help him salvage his life, like the new judge, nor does he accept responsibility for his bad decisions. Pap is also resentful of all people more successful than he is; a vicious racist, he doesn’t believe a black man should be more materially successful than him, and is resentful of successful black people in general.
CHAPTER 7

Pap wakes Huck, who fell asleep in the night, and asks him what he’s doing with the gun. Huck lies and says that someone tried to break in and that Huck was lying in wait for the intruder, which Pap accepts. He tells Huck to go check the fishing line for breakfast. Huck does so, scanning as he does the rising river. Seeing a passing canoe, Huck jumps into it and paddles it ashore, thinking Pap will be pleased. But then another idea strikes Huck: he decides to hide the canoe and use it in his escape.

After Huck returns to shore, Pap berates him for taking so long with the fish. Huck lies that he fell in the river, and Pap get five catfish off the fishing lines and head home. As the two Finns lay about and Pap says that Huck should rouse him the next time an intruder comes prowling, Huck has an idea to prevent Pap and the Widow from pursuing him after he makes his escape.

Pap and Huck collect nine logs from the river to sell and then eat dinner. Pap is content to do so, even though any other man would keep scanning the river for things to sell from it. After dinner, Pap locks Huck up in the cabin again and boats to town to sell the nine logs. After Pap has gotten a ways, Huck retrieves his saw from its place called Jackson’s Island on the river, and to visit towns at night to stock up on supplies. Huck soon falls asleep, only to soon wake. It looks late to Huck, and “smelt late” too, though Huck acknowledges that he doesn’t know how to put the sensation in words.

Huck hears a sound. It is Pap padding back to the cabin. Huck loses no time in slipping quietly down the river in his canoe, shaded by the bank. He paddles down the center of the river to avoid being hailed by people on the ferry landing before, at last, reaching Jackson’s Island, “like a steamboat without any lights.” Huck lands and conceals his canoe. In the darkness, he sees a raft go by the island and hears a man on the raft shout commands to someone onboard with him. Huck goes into the woods to get some sleep before breakfast.

As earlier, Huck again tells a white lie to Pap to cover up his escape plans. Huck is more committed to freedom than he is even to truth. But Huck is not committed to freedom in an idealistic, impractical way: he is willing to do whatever it takes to execute his escape plan efficiently, without a trace.

Pap, like Huck, proves himself to be practical, collecting only as many logs to sell as he needs before quitting. But, unlike Huck, Pap’s practicality serves self-destructive ends, like the purchase of whiskey, as opposed to a nobler end like freedom. This is the end Huck’s practicality serves as Huck takes what he needs from Pap’s cabin and hides all traces of his escape by covering his tracks, literally and otherwise.

As Huck waits for the moon to come out so that he can travel by its light, he eats, smokes, and thinks to himself that people looking for him after his escape, thinking him dead, will follow the trail left by the sack full of rocks to the river and afterwards dredge the river for his body, as well as the trail of meal in order to find the “robbers that killed [him].” He is sure, though, that nobody will think that he is alive, much less find him. He plans to paddle to a place called Jackson’s Island on the river, and to visit towns at night to stock up on supplies. Huck soon falls asleep, only to soon wake. It looks late to Huck, and “smelt late” too, though Huck acknowledges that he doesn’t know how to put the sensation in words.

Huck hears a sound. It is Pap padding back to the cabin. Huck loses no time in slipping quietly down the river in his canoe, shaded by the bank. He paddles down the center of the river to avoid being hailed by people on the ferry landing before, at last, reaching Jackson’s Island, “like a steamboat without any lights.” Huck lands and conceals his canoe. In the darkness, he sees a raft go by the island and hears a man on the raft shout commands to someone onboard with him. Huck goes into the woods to get some sleep before breakfast.

CHAPTER 8

Huck wakes and takes in his surroundings, like a couple squirrels, Huck says, that “jabbered at me very friendly.” Soon Huck hears a “boom!” sound. Looking upstream, he sees a ferry firing a cannon, which, Huck figures, is being done to make his own carcass come to the river’s surface. Hungry, Huck remembers that people looking for carcasses in the river put quicksilver in loaves of bread and float them down the river, because they always go right to the drowned body and stop there. Huck retrieves such a loaf and is pleased to learn that it tastes better than the “low-down corn-pone” that he usually eats.

Huck thinks that the Widow or parson must have prayed for a loaf of bread to find his body, and, indeed, one did. He figures that when somebody like the Widow or parson prays, the prayer is answered, but that when someone like him prays, the prayer goes unanswered.

Freedom, as Huck’s actions prove here, is not free. Huck literally sacrifices a hog to make sure that his escape goes unnoticed, and that he himself can successfully disappear into his newfound freedom. Though Huck now wishes his escape to be stylish as Tom would have it, later, when freeing Jim from the Phelps Farm, Huck will wish Tom were more practical, suggesting that he has an immature attitude about style now that he grows out of over the course of the novel. Certainly, though Huck has what could be called a “practical imagination”—he thinks of how to tie up every loose end in his escape.

Huck reveals himself to be very empathetic here. He imagines how people would react to a set of circumstances, like the trail left by the rocks leading down to the river. However, Huck’s empathy is limited. It may extend to a search party, for example, but it will not extend to people like Jim, who Huck thinks of as being, in some ways, inferior to white people, until Huck matures. That being said, Huck does have a unique imagination that will enable him to so mature, as indicated by the strangely imagined sensation he has of “smelling” lateness.

After being locked up with the hostile Pap, Huck finds even squirrels to be welcoming. However, this scene is later contrasted with scenes in which nature is very dangerous. Although Huck is free in nature, he could not survive there without human society for very long. It’s ironic, though, that here society provides Huck, albeit unknowingly, with better food to eat when he is presumed dead, than when he is alive.
Huck hides behind a long near the island’s shore to observe the ferry as it passes. Many people he knows are onboard, including Pap, Judge Thatcher, and Tom Sawyer, all of whom are talking about Huck’s “murder.” The captain tells them to scan the shore of Jackson Island for the corpse, and all of them do so, but none see Huck even though he is very close by. The cannon is fired, and Huck imagines that, had it been loaded, the blast would have killed him. The ferry drifts on downstream.

Huck makes a tent, catches a catfish to eat, and puts in more fishing lines to catch breakfast. He begins to feel lonesome, however, and decides to go to bed. Such is his routine for the next three days and nights. He thinks of himself as the “boss” of Jackson’s Island. One day, however, after running across a snake and trying to shoot it, Huck crosses among the yet-smoking ashes of a campfire. He nervously returns to his camp and hides his things. He himself hides in a tree. When it gets dark, Huck paddles to the Illinois bank of the river, prepares supper, and decides to stay put for the rest of the night.

Suddenly, Huck hears the sound of horses and human voices. He shoves out in his canoe and ties up back to his old place. There he tries to get some sleep, but can’t, “for thinking.” Restless, Huck goes into the woods with his gun, to re-find the campfire ashes he discovered earlier. Though he has no luck, later he does see a fire. A man is sleeping nearby: it is Jim. Huck greets him, but Jim jumps up, then falls to his knees, begging Huck not to hurt him, for he thinks Huck is a ghost. Huck succeeds in convincing Jim that he is not, in fact, a ghost. Huck also finds that he is no longer lonesome having found Jim.

Huck learns that Jim came to Jackson’s Island the night after Huck was allegedly killed, and that the runaway slave has been living on nothing but strawberries. Huck sets up camp and brings out his provisions of meal, bacon, and coffee, all of which Jim thinks is done by witchcraft. Huck also catches a catfish, which he and Jim enjoy for breakfast. The two eat till they’re stuffed and laze in the grass.

Huck is maybe too curious about how society thinks about his “murder” for his own good. Overhearing discussions onboard the ferry almost gets Huck wounded, after all, and he could have even been killed. He would do well to enjoy his freedom at a distance from people, at least for now.

Huck is not as free in nature as would make him comfortable. He has to contend with life-threatening dangers like snakes, and also other people out in nature, like those looking for him who could revoke his freedom, or, even more dangerous, violent fugitives. Huck is in need of people he can trust and who can help him at this point. He will experience difficulties impossible to overcome without friends.

Just as things become desperate for him, Huck discovers a friend in Jim, with whom he can negotiate the difficulties of nature and of society alike. With characteristic superstition, however, Jim, thinking that Huck was murdered, is afraid that Huck is a ghost.

That Jim thinks that Huck summons creature comforts by witchcraft speaks to how poorly Jim has been faring: because the target of racial oppression, Jim can’t eat as well as Huck, and so can’t fathom doing so without magic being the cause. Together, Huck and Jim can live in relative peace.

If it wasn’t Huck killed in the cabin, Jim asks Huck, who was killed? Huck then explains his escape to Jim, who praises the plan as being worthy of Tom Sawyer himself. In turn, Huck asks Jim how he came to be on Jackson’s Island. Jim, reticent at first, has Huck swear to silence, which Huck does, and he assures Jim that he will honor his oath even if people call him a “low down Abolitionist.” Jim explains that Miss Watson treated him poorly and often threatened to sell him to a slaveholder in New Orleans. One night, Jim overheard Miss Watson say that, even though she doesn’t want to sell him, she could get eight hundred dollars for him, and so has decided to sell. Consequently, Jim fled, doing so by water to avoid being tracked by men and dogs. He eventually swam up to Jackson’s Island.

Some young birds fly by Jim and Huck. Jim says that this is a sign that it is going to rain, for chickens flying by signify rain, and so, Jim figures, the same must be the case with young birds. Huck makes to kill one of the birds, but Jim stops him saying that doing so would be death. Jim explains that his father was once very sick, and one of Jim’s relatives caught a bird, and Jim’s grandma said his father would die, and his father did. Jim goes on to list things that bring bad luck, like counting what one is going to eat and shaking a tablecloth after sundown.

Huck asks if there are any good-luck signs. Jim says there are very few, and that they’re not very useful, because there’s no reason to know if good luck is coming one’s way. For example, Jim says, if you have hairy arms and a hairy chest, it’s a sign that you will be rich. Huck asks Jim if he has hairy arms and a hairy chest, which Jim does. Though Jim admits he isn’t rich now, he says he was once rich, recounting how he lost his money speculating in livestock and a bank. But at last, Jim thinks, he is rich now, because he owns himself, and is worth eight hundred dollars. He wishes he had that money, because then he “wouldn’t want no mo’.”

Here Jim reveals that underlying his superstition is an expectation that bad luck is always around the corner, which is well founded considering that Jim is socioeconomically and racially oppressed. He expects bad things because he is often afflicted with bad things. Jim also reveals here how a concept like wealth is relative. Even though he is not wealthy by societal standards, he knows that he is wealthy if only because he’s free. Freedom alone makes one sufficiently rich. The concept of Jim getting $800 for himself also, though, highlights the craziness of anyone getting money for selling anyone else. Jim is worth more than $800—he’s worth an infinite amount as a human being. By having Jim value himself according to slavery’s terms, the novel shows how slavery makes no sense.

In the wild, Huck and Jim need to do whatever they can to survive, but superstitions sometimes get in the way of common-sense survivalist actions, like Jim’s superstition about birds. Huck and Jim could eat the birds, but, because of an irrational, impractical superstition, they refrain from doing so. Jim’s list of superstitions reveals how arbitrary superstitions are.

While it is good of Huck to swear to keep Jim’s secret, it is ironic that he thinks of being called an abolitionist a bad thing. Abolitionists fight for the freedom of the oppressed, which, the novel holds, is better than fighting to oppress. Though Huck doesn’t understand that now, he will later in the novel. This section of the novel also reveals some of the cruelties of slavery as an institution: Miss Watson, who claims to be a Christian, values money more than she does a human who, in Christian belief, has an immortal and infinitely valuable soul. Jim is also treated cruelly, and hunted like an animal.
CHAPTER 9

In the morning, Huck wants to find the middle of the island, so he and Jim set out and find it. This place is a high hill or ridge with a cavern in its side. Jim convinces Huck that the two of them should hide their gear in the cavern in case people come looking for them. He also convinces Huck to hide the canoe nearby. Having hidden everything, Huck and Jim eat in the cavern.

Outside, it begins to rain fiercely. Huck is very content, however, and Jim points out that Huck wouldn’t be in the cavern were it not for him, that Huck would be out in the woods drowning in the rain. During subsequent days, Huck and Jim paddle all over the flooded island in their canoe. Animals abound, meek with hunger. Jim and Huck see saw-logs drift by, but leave them for fear of being discovered. Indeed, the pair never goes out in daylight.

One night a two-story cabin floats by. Though Huck and Jim board the cabin through a window, it is too dark to see anything, so they lash their canoe to the cabin and wait to explore till morning. At dawn, the two look into the cabin. They see furniture and what Jim identifies as a dead man, shot in the back, whose face, Jim tells Huck, is too “gashly” to look at. Also on the floor of the cabin are cards, whisky bottles, black masks; and on the walls there are words scribbled in charcoal. Jim and Huck take some men and women’s clothing from the house into their canoe, along with other supplies. Huck and Jim then shove off from the house, Jim lying down in the canoe to cover and a quilt to avoid being—traits that slavery never grants to emotionally intelligent human beings—traits that slavery never grants to slaves.

CHAPTER 10

Huck wonders who shot the dead man he and Jim discovered, and why, but Jim doesn’t tell him because “it would fetch bad luck.” The pair finds money stashed in a coat, which leads Jim to speculate that the people in the house stole the coat; otherwise they would have known money was in it and wouldn’t have left it. Huck wants to discuss the dead man more, but Jim refuses.

While freedom is very important to Huck, it is all the more so for Jim, who faces severe punishment if he is caught, and a life of enslavement and separation from his beloved family. For this reason, Jim is all the more protective of his freedom and so takes extra precautions, like hiding the gear in the cavern.

At the beginning of the novel, Huck is racist and has little respect for the intelligence of black people. However, Huck is forced to acknowledge his own prejudice as Jim proves again and again that he is just as reasonable and practical as his white companion. He saved Huck from the storm, and his cautiousness protects Huck too.

Though it is not revealed here, the corpse that Jim discovers is that of Huck’s father, Pap. Jim, shows a kind of parental care for Huck by refusing to reveal this to Huck, to protect Huck from the scene of his father’s brutal murder. The evidence Jim and Huck discover in the cabin suggests that Pap was drunk, maybe cheated at cards for personal gain, and was murdered by the men whom he cheated, who wore masks to commit their crime. Pap was vicious to the end. Despite the gory scene, Huck and Jim are resourceful enough to take from the cabin what they can use.

Jim withholds the identity of the dead man from Huck not because he superstitiously thinks that doing otherwise “would fetch bad luck,” but to protect Huck. In doing so, Jim shows himself to be a caring, loving, gentle, and emotionally intelligent human being—traits that slavery never grants to slaves.

In response, Huck reminds Jim of how, a few days earlier, Huck had fetched a snakeskin with his bare hands, which Jim thought would bring the very worst luck. However, Huck says, all it’s brought are the eight dollars, and, on account of that, Huck wishes he had such bad luck every day. Jim warns that the bad luck is coming. And it does. That Friday, Huck finds a rattlesnake in the cavern he and Jim are hiding in and kills it, curling it up on Jim’s bed as a prank. When Jim throws himself into bed that night, however, the dead snake’s mate is there and bites Jim’s ankle. Huck kills the second snake as Jim gulps down some of Pap’s whisky, yelling in pain, his foot swelling up all the while. Jim is incapacitated for four days and nights, by the end of which Huck resolves never to touch a snakeskin again for fear of bad luck, nor do other things that bring bad luck, like look over his left shoulder at the moon.

The next morning, bored, Huck wants to go exploring, which Jim thinks is a good idea, but he reminds Huck that he mustn’t get caught. Huck decides to dress up as a woman using clothes found in the drifting cabin, an idea that Jim praises. Huck practices acting like a girl all day, and paddles in his canoe up the Illinois shore just after dark. He lands at a town, and, after walking around, peeps in at a window to see a woman, later identified as Mrs. Judith Loftus, knitting. She is a stranger, so Huck decides to ask her about what he wants to know. He knocks and reminds himself not to forget that he is pretending to be a girl.

While Jim sometimes invokes his superstitious-ness to protect other people, like Huck, Huck sometimes invokes his superstitious-ness to relieve himself of responsibility for his actions. After all, he plays a mean prank on Jim by putting the snake in Jim’s bed, but, instead of holding himself responsible, he blames the back luck he generated by touching the snakeskin. Also note how Jim, held by slavery to be sub-human, always treats Huck kindly, while Huck, held be slavery to be superior to Jim because of his whiteness, plays mean pranks. The novel continues to eat away at the idea that slavery’s categorization of blacks is in any way accurate.

CHAPTER 11

Judith answers the door and asks Huck his name and where’s he’s from. Huck lies to the woman, giving a girl’s name. The woman is hospitable, and she begins to talk about herself and the goings-on in town, including Huck’s alleged murder. She says some people think that Pap murdered Huck, while others think that Jim murdered Huck. There is a reward for the capture of either. In fact, the woman’s husband went to Jackson’s Island to hunt for Jim, which makes Huck very uneasy. The woman begins to look at Huck curiously. She asks Huck’s name again, and Huck accidentally gives a different name from what he gave at first. The woman points out as much, so Huck comes up with another lie to account for his self-contradiction, wishing very badly to leave.

Huck is very good at lying and, though once in a while he contradicts himself, as when he identifies himself to Judith by two different names, his fibs are often effective. This is because Huck has an uncanny ability to put himself in other people’s shoes and imagine what life would be like from perspectives other than his own. That being said, Huck doesn’t lie for pleasure or even profit, but rather a means of conning people and satisfying expression of freedom, but rather a means of conning people and satisfying expression of freedom, but rather a means of conning people and satisfying expression of freedom, but rather a means of conning people and satisfying expression of freedom.
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

CHAPTER 13

Terrorized, Huck and Jim search for the skiff the men used to reach the wreck, at long last finding it. Just as they do, one of the three men pokes his head out of a door mere feet away from Huck. But the man doesn't see him in the dark. After the man goes back into the steamboat and lets the other two of the men planning to kill the man in order to protect themselves, because they think he will betray them to the State for having broken the law. Huck eavesdrops as the two men decide not to shoot the man, but rather to escape the steamboat and let the third man drown in it as the storm raises the water level of the river. Killing a man, one of the two says, just “ain't good morals.” As the men start out, Huck tells Jim to make for the raft that is lashed to the steamboat. But, when Jim does so, he discovers that the raft has broken loose, stranding him and Huck.

In contrast to Tom's make-believe gang of children, the gang Jim and Huck encounter on the doomed steamboat are very real, vicious, and murderous—but, like Tom's Gang, this one is just as arbitrary in its moral code. It is ironic that one of the thieves refuses to shoot a man, but is willing to let a man drown. This thief seems to want to excuse himself from the guilt of murder, even though his action here has the same effect as murder. His rule is absurd.

CHAPTER 12

Huck and Jim drift away from Jackson's Island, undiscovered by the men looking for them. At dawn, they tie up their raft on the Illinois side of the river and hide it, lying low there all day while Huck recounts what Mrs. Judith Loftus told him. Come dark, Jim builds a wigwam on the raft, in which a fire can safely be built. By night, the pair drifts downriver on the raft, passing silent cities like St. Petersburg and St. Louis as they go, the inhabitants of which are all asleep.

At nights, Huck goes into town to buy provisions and supplies. In the mornings, he slips into cornfields to “borrow,” that is, steal produce. Huck says that Pap told him that it wasn’t harmful to “borrow” things if you mean to pay for them eventually, but the Widow told Huck that such “borrowing” is really just stealing. Huck and Jim discuss this and consequently decide not steal any more crabapples or persimmons. Nevertheless, Huck says that he and Jim “lived pretty high.”

Mr. Loftus reveals herself to be as clever as Huck in exposing Huck’s real identity, and also moral in protecting Huck from what she thinks is his master’s cruelty. Of course, she is really protecting Huck from a much more desperate condition, the loss of his freedom. It is sad that, although Judith is among the most moral characters in the novel, Huck does not trust her enough to give her his real name, reflecting his deep lack of trust in other people, which itself originates from Huck's bad experiences with a broken society and people like the murderous Pap.

One night during a storm, Huck and Jim see a wrecked steamboat. Huck wants to board it and have an “adventure,” in the spirit of Tom Sawyer, but Jim “was dead against it.” Huck, however, convinces a reluctant Jim to go against his better judgment, supposing that the pair will find valuable things onboard the boat.

In this suspenseful scene, it is bad luck that one of the three men aboard the boat almost discovers Huck and Jim, but good luck that he doesn’t. Fortunes change like this all the time in the novel, which points to the sinniness of Huck and Jim’s superstitious beliefs that center only on bad luck.

Huck and Jim have the perfect freedom to choose which moral system they will subscribe to: Pap’s, which is convenient but harmful to others, or the Widow’s, which imposes hardships on Huck and Jim but not on others. The two, committed to the well being of others, freely decide not to steal—and still live well! One can be free and good at once.

Whereas someone like Miss Watson would condemn the robbers, Huck’s moral system, not conforming to society’s, is based more on an elastic empathy. He is imaginatively free enough to truly do unto others as he would have done unto him, and is not afraid to put himself into an immoral person’s shoes.
Huck's lies are often self-serving, but here he lies on behalf of the robber-murderers, in order to save them. Huck lies because he thinks that if he were to tell the truth, the watchman wouldn't help the people drowning upstream. The robbers would let their companion drown; society would let all the robbers drown. Huck would always prevent people from drowning if at all possible.

Huck tells Jim about Louis XVI and his young son, who was killed after his father’s execution. Jim feels sorry for the little prince, and Huck replies that some people think he escaped and came to America. Jim is pleased, but imagines that he must be lonely, given that there are no other kings in America. Huck says that the prince could join the police force or teach French. Jim doesn’t understand: don’t all people speak the same language, he asks. Huck says no, and gives an argument for why that is so, but Jim pokes a hole in the argument, such that Huck is forced to conclude, “It wasn’t no use wasting words.” Both Huck and Jim fall silent.

CHAPTER 15

Huck and Jim judge that they are three days out of Cairo, near the Ohio River. The pair plans to take a steamboat up the Ohio into the free States, where slavery is illegal and Jim can no longer be hunted. But a fog sets in, limiting Huck and Jim’s visibility. With Huck in the canoe and Jim in the raft, the two become separated, and Huck becomes lost. Huck hears whooping sounds, and thinking them Jim’s signal, he whoops back, but to no avail. Huck continues to drift, “lonesome,” and, at some point, takes a nap. When he wakes, Huck realizes how big the river is before spotting the raft in the distance. Huck and Jim reunite.

Huck asks Jim if he fell asleep and why Jim didn’t think to wake him. Jim says he is just grateful that Huck wasn’t drowning. Huck asks Jim if he’s been drinking, to which Jim, taken aback, responds that he hasn’t. Huck tells Jim that he must have been dreaming that the pair was separated, indeed, that there was any fog at all. Jim can’t believe it; he sits quietly for five minutes. At last he tells Huck he must have been dreaming, but that it was the most powerful, vivid dream he’d ever had.

Huck has tricked Jim before, but not about something so important as this. That he is inclined to trick Jim at all demonstrates Huck’s childishness, but it also demonstrates, more problematically, Huck’s callousness toward Jim, maybe the product of his belief that Jim is racially inferior to him. Huck doesn’t yet fully empathize with Jim.

Even though the fog occurred randomly and without malice, Huck’s lie, that Jim dreamed the fog, encourages Jim to think of it within a superstitious interpretive framework, not as random and meaningless but as meaningful.
Huck then asks what the leaves and rubbish on the raft mean, along with its broken oar. Jim realizes that Huck was tricking him all along. Jim hadn’t been dreaming at all. He and Huck really were separated, and there really was fog. Jim tells Huck that he was heartbroken thinking that Huck had died in the fog, and that he had cried and wanted to kiss Huck’s foot to see him safe and sound again. And Huck could only think about making a fool out of Jim with a lie and shaming him. When he hears all this, Huck is himself ashamed. At last, after working himself up to humble himself to a black person, Huck apologizes to Jim, and feels no regret.

CHAPTER 16

Huck and Jim continue their journey to Cairo, and, as they approach it, Jim trembles and is feverish with the thought of being so close to his freedom. Huck begins to tremble and feel feverish too, because he acknowledges that he is helping Jim to liberate himself. Huck’s conscience is troubled by this; it tells Huck that he should have told someone that Jim was running away, that he is meanly wronging Miss Watson, who has done nothing to harm him, by helping Jim, her property. Huck feels so mean and miserable that he wishes he were dead.

Restless and fidgety like Huck, Jim talks about what he will do when he is free, how he will work and save money so that he can buy his wife and two children out of slavery, or, if the owners of his wife and children won’t sell, how he would enlist the help of abolitionists to “steal them.” Huck is mortified to hear Jim speak this way, about stealing his children, who belong, Huck thinks, to “a man that hadn’t ever done me no harm.” Huck is sorry to hear Jim lower himself in this way. He resolves to turn Jim in.

Huck has no control over his conscience, conditioned by society. It makes itself known to him not with a reasoned argument but a bodily symptom of sickness, and, as such, Huck can’t reason with himself to figure out what course of action he should take. Instead, at least for now, he can only do what conscience compels him to do. In relation to conscience, then, Huck is not free, though he will grow into such a freedom.

Jim’s course of action is very reasonable—he wants to liberate his family from unjust bondage—but Huck, in the throes of his Southern slave-owning conscience, can’t understand the logic of Jim wanting to free his family no matter which way, and does not see as ridiculous that Jim’s family should belong more to their master than to Jim. The slave-owner may never have harmed Huck, but he has harmed his slaves simply by owning them.

Huck has no control over his conscience, conditioned by society. It makes itself known to him not with a reasoned argument but a bodily symptom of sickness, and, as such, Huck can’t reason with himself to figure out what course of action he should take. Instead, at least for now, he can only do what conscience compels him to do. In relation to conscience, then, Huck is not free, though he will grow into such a freedom.

Huck feels bad and low when he returns to the raft, but reasons that he would feel just as bad had he done “right” and turned Jim in. He figures it is easier to do wrong than right, and that the outcome of doing either is the same, and so decides to “always do whichever come handiest at the time.” Jim finds Huck hiding in the river, holding onto the raft. Jim praises Huck for his clever deception of the two men.

Jim is angry at Huck not for lying, but for failing to imagine the consequences of his lies, and, more generally, for failing to imagine how he (Jim) experiences the world. Jim was worried to death for Huck, even like a family member would worry, but Huck can’t imagine that and sees only a cheap opportunity to trick Jim in the style of Tom Sawyer. But after Jim expresses how much he worried over Huck, Huck realizes how calloused he’s been, and, as he will later in the novel to an even greater extent, he treats Jim like the equal that he is. That Huck feels no regret for apologizing shows his willingness to cross the slave/white divide and to see Jim as a true human being.

Jim spots in the distance what he thinks is Cairo. Huck volunteers to paddle over and see if it is, with the intent of turning Jim in. As he does, a skiff comes along, aboard which are two armed men. They tell Huck that they’re hunting five runaway slaves, and ask Huck if there are any people aboard his raft, and, if so, whether they’re white or black. Huck desperately wants to tell them about Jim, but the words won’t come out of his mouth. At last, Huck lies: he says the man aboard his raft is white. The men say they’ll see for themselves. Huck tells them he wishes they would, because, he lies, the white man on the raft is his father, who’s sick, along with his mother and Mary Ann, also aboard the raft. As the men paddle to investigate, Huck lets on that the illness that afflicts his family is both contagious and dangerous: smallpox. As soon as Huck does so, the men refuse to get anywhere near the raft, apologize to Huck, give him money, and paddle away.

Given that Huck would feel bad regardless of what course of action he pursued, he realizes that conscience is not a firm means of determining what is right. He therefore endorses an ethic of handiness: whatever his heart tells him to do instinctually, Huck resolves to do. He is free, in this way, to be himself, and by following his heart, his compassion, Huck’s actions will show the depravity of the moral rules that dominate Southern society because of its embrace of racism.

Huck and Jim resume their journey, passing two towns, only to find out that neither are Cairo. Huck tells Jim that the two of them must have passed by Cairo when lost in the fog nights earlier. Jim doesn’t want to talk about and blames the rattlesnake skin for their bad luck, a judgment with which Huck agrees.

Despite how excited Jim was to reach the free states, he gracefully accepts the bad news that he and Huck have passed Cairo. This may well be because of his superstitions: instead of blaming somebody for bad luck, he just moves on.

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Huck and Jim learn they have reached the muddy Missouri River, and figure that Cairo is upstream. They decide to canoe there after resting. But when they return to where they left the raft and canoe, they find that the canoe is missing. They are forced to raft downriver till they reach a place where they can buy a canoe. As they drift, a steamboat comes at them full-speed. Huck supposes that the captain is playing a kind of game of getting as close to the raft as he can without touching it. But the steamboat keeps coming; a bell rings and men yell and cuff at Huck and Jim to get out of the way. At last, the steamboat crashes into the raft, throwing the pair overboard. Huck swims ashore and finds himself before a house, before barking dogs swarm him. Huck knows better than to move.

CHAPTER 17

A man, speaking out of a window into the darkness, commands the dogs to hush and asks, "Who's there?" Huck says that he's George Jackson, only a boy. The man asks if Huck knows the Shepherdsons. Huck says that he does not, but the man remains skeptical. Nevertheless, he invites Huck into the house, but tells him that, if anybody is with him, Huck better tell them to stay back lest they be shot. Huck slowly approaches and enters the house, greeted by a family, the Grangerfords, some of whom are armed. All of them agree, though, that Huck is not a Shepherdson.

The Grangerfords are welcoming and friendly and provide Huck with a meal, clothes, and a place to stay. The boy who lends Huck clothes, Buck, is about as old as Huck is. He boasts that if there had really been Shepherdsons outside, he would have killed one. His father tells Buck that he'll get his chance to do just that, but all in good time. After changing into dry clothes and speaking with Buck, Huck goes down into the parlor to find the Grangerfords smoking and talking. He eats and talks with them. The family assures Huck that he can stay with them as long as he likes.

Huck and Jim live in a world that doesn't seem to have a bottom on bad luck. The pair seem to be in a rough spot after missing Cairo, but that doesn't even compare to the bad luck of losing their canoe, and what's worst of all, the bad luck of their random collision with the steamboat. We might wonder, though: is it childish of Huck to think the steamboat captain is playing a game, however, or merely optimistic? Or maybe Huck has seen captains play such games before? Whatever the case, after this tense scene, Huck and Jim are once again on their own.

Huck and Jim are once again on their own. As a rule, Huck, however receptive and empathetic, distrusts the people he meets on his travels, giving false names as a matter of course. But, as this scene makes clear, it's not only Huck who is distrustful; the Grangerford who invites Huck into his home is skeptical of Huck too. While it is good of the Grangerfords to overcome their distrust, it is also sad that their society is structured in such a way as to engender such distrust at all.

Huck admires the Grangerford's home, many of the features of which, like the brass doorknob and the brick-bottomed fireplace, are more characteristic of a house in town than in the country. Huck also admires the family's collection of books, which includes classics like Pilgrim's Progress, which Huck finds "interesting" but "tough." Hanging on the parlor walls are pictures depicting people and scenes from Revolutionary America, like George Washington and the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Also hanging on the walls are pictures painted by a member of the Grangerford family, Emmeline, a little girl who died young, all of which are dark in theme and color. Her masterpiece is of a woman preparing to jump from a bridge, but Huck thinks the woman looks too "spidery." Emmeline also wrote poetry about the deaths of men, women, and children; for example, a ballad for a boy who drowned in a well. Huck likes Emmeline's art, and even tries to pay tribute to her with a poem of his own, but he proves unable to write one. Emmeline's room, Huck says, is kept the same as it was on the day she died.

CHAPTER 18

Huck regards Mr. Grangerford, who is the least frivolous of men, as being a gentleman, well-bred, dignified, a joy, but also the stern peace-keeper of the household if need be, though there is seldom the need. This is because all of the Grangerfords are respectful and good-spirited. The older sons of Mr. Grangerford are “tall” and “beautiful” in Huck’s estimation. One afternoon, they toast their parents along with Huck and Buck. The Grangerford women are all beautiful too, one proud, grand, but good, another gentle as a dove. Three Grangerford sons have died, along with Emmeline.

Huck observes that many slaves serve the Grangerford family, each Grangerford being tended to by one slave. Huck himself has a slave to tend to him while staying at the Grangerford home, though, because Huck is not used to being served, he does not give his slave much work to do, while Buck, in contrast, works his slave very hard. Mr. Grangerford, Huck learns, owns many farms and over a hundred slaves, and it is by profiting from his slave-worked farms that Mr. Grangerford has amassed his wealth.

Mr. Grangerford is a foil to Pap. Where Pap is debauched and murderous toward even his own son, Mr. Grangerford is dignified and beloved, even in his just sternness. He is the kind of man who we think, should be most self-reliant and self-governed. But, just like Pap, Mr. Grangerford is swept up by societal dictates to endanger his family in their feud with the Shepherdsons. That his children are so good and beautiful just shows how much he stands to lose.
Huck learns that there is another aristocratic family living nearby: the Shepherdsons, as proud and grand as the Grangerfords. One day, as Huck and Buck are hunting, a Shepherdson named Harney rides by. Buck tells Huck to jump into the woods and hide. When Buck does so, Buck fires a shot at Harney, but only manages to knock his hat off. Harney rides toward where the boys are, gun in hand, but they run as fast as they can, not stopping till they reach the Grangerford home. Mr. Grangerford is pleased to hear this story recounted. However, he tells Buck that he does not want him to shoot Shepherdsons from behind a bush, but that he should jump into the middle of the road next time to shoot.

Huck asks Buck why he wanted to kill Harney. Buck says he doesn’t have a reason, that Harney never did anything to him, but “it’s on account of the feud” that he would have killed him. Huck has never heard of a feud. Buck explains that it’s when one or two families fight till everybody’s dead, and then there’s no more feud. Buck explains that many Grangerfords and Shepherdsons have died in the feud, and many have been wounded. An old Grangerford rode down and killed a young Grangerford, only to be killed himself a week later. Huck says the old man must be a coward, but Buck says there isn’t a coward in either of the two feuding families.

Huck goes to church with the Grangerfords and listens to a sermon about brotherly love, which he finds tiring but which the Grangerfords discuss approvingly at length. After church, Miss Sophia, a Grangerford girl, asks Huck into her room. There, she asks him to do her a favor and not tell anybody, which Huck agrees to do. Miss Sophia tells Huck to retrieve her copy of the New Testament from the church. As Huck enters the church, he notices many hogs resting on the cool floor. He observes that, while people go to church only when they have to, hogs go to church whenever they can.

Like a miniature Civil War, the Grangerford-Shepherdson feud has cost many lives, and Buck himself casually supposes that it will end only when everybody involved has been killed, which only shows how pointless the bloodshed is. More than that, Buck doesn’t even know what the feud is about; he has pitifully inherited his bleak bloody fate from the society he lives in. What makes the feud all the more pathetic is Buck’s insistence that all involved are rather heroic. So many good people are killing one another, and all for nothing.

Right after Miss Sophia makes to rendezvous with her partner, Jack, of his own free will, and with benevolence, unites Huck with Jim. We might think that Jack is eager to help Huck because he has not been cruel as Buck is to his slave, and that he helps Jim because, like Jim, he also has a love for freedom. This scene also foreshadows Huck’s escape from the feud on the repaired raft with Jim.

The next day, Huck notices he is alone in the Grangerford’s house. He goes outside, where Jack tells him that Miss Sophia has run away to marry Harney Shepherdson. All the Grangerfords are out and about, trying to prevent the marriage. Huck runs after the Grangerfords to the river road, where he finds mounted and armed Shepherdsons shooting at Buck and another Grangerford hidden behind a woodpile. Huck hides in a tree and watches one of the Grangerfords shoot a Shepherdson out of his saddle. The other Shepherdsons tend to the man, and eventually ride away. Huck calls to Buck, who begins to cry, saying that his father and brothers are dead, and that he wishes he had killed Harney the day he saw him on the road.

The Shepherdsons ride back and shoot at Buck and the other Grangerboy. Wounded, the two boys jump into the river. Huck feels so sick he almost falls out of his tree. He regrets, he says, ever having seen such things, and dreams about them often. After dark, Huck climbs out of his tree and vows never to return to the Grangerford house. He feels guilty for having ignited the day’s violence by not telling anybody about the note in Miss Sophia’s Testament, which he figures must have meant that Miss Sophia was to meet Harney at the time specified. As Huck creeps along the riverbank, crying, he finds two dead bodies, one of them Buck’s. Huck covers their faces, thinking how good Buck was to him.

It is ironic that the Grangerfords, who are waging a feud of brotherly hate, approve of the sermon on brotherly love. Hypocritically, what they approve is the opposite of what they practice. In this case, religion could instruct the Grangerfords in leading better, happier lives, but their commitment to Christian values is less than their commitment to senseless honor; or, worse, they don’t even realize that they’re hypocrites.

Huck’s innocent observations about humans and hogs in church allow Twain to drive home this charge of religious hypocrisy.

After retrieving Miss Sophia’s Testament, Huck shakes it out and falls a note, on which is written: “Half-past two.” Huck gives the Testament and note to Miss Sophia, who lights up when she reads the latter. Huck inquires as to what the note is about, but Ms. Sophia, secretly, doesn’t respond, and she sends Huck off to play.

This scene foreshadows Miss Sophia’s elopement with a Shepherdson boy. The note in the Testament is right at home there: its contents give Miss Sophia information about meeting with her beloved, which is consistent with the ideal of brotherly love.
CHAPTER 19

One morning, while canoeing through a creek in search of berries, Huck encounters two men running, pleading with Huck to let them on his canoe, begging for their lives. Huck tells the men not to jump into the boat but to run through the bushes and then wade through the creek before finally meeting up with him later, to throw the pursuing dogs off their scent. The men do so.

After meeting up with the two men, Huck learns that the older one got into trouble for selling “an article to take tartar off the teeth,” while the other, younger, one for running a religious “temperance revival” against drinking alcohol while, his devotees discover, drinking himself. The two con men agree to work together. The older one specializes in cons that involve doctoring and preaching.

When the younger con man learns this, he bemoans the fact that he is forced to con people, having once been “so high.” He claims to have been born the Duke of Bridgewater. Huck and Jim pity the man after he begins to cry, and the duke tells the pair that they should bow when they address anyone to cry, and the duke tells the pair that they should bow when they address the duke and king, which “you feel mighty free and easy and comfortable.”

CHAPTER 20

The duke becomes sour, but the king tells him that he should cheer up. Life on the raft is comfortable, with plenty of food and ease. The king asks for the duke’s hand, and the duke gives it to him. Huck and Jim immediately feel more comfortable after the unfriendliness on the raft dissipates; for, as Huck thinks, “what you want above all things, on a raft, is for everybody to be satisfied, and feel right and kind towards the others.” Indeed, even though Huck knows that the duke and king are con men, he doesn’t say anything, so as to avoid conflict.

Like Huck, the duke and king are fantastic performers, which requires of them a kind of freedom, the freedom to transform into different characters. The two are also adaptable: though they don’t find an audience to play to, they quickly and productively change their plans. While these are good traits, however, they can be misused, as the duke and king misuse them to selfish ends.

With Jim still on the raft and the duke at the printing office, Huck and the king go to the meeting in the woods and find thousands of people there. A preacher and his congregants are singing a hymn, and the preacher soon begins to preach. The crowd goes wild. The king joins the preacher on the platform and proclaims to the congregants that he is a reformed pirate who, if given enough money, will return to the Indian Ocean to convert other pirates to Christianity, at last bursting into tears. A hat is passed through the congregation, and the king makes eighty-seven dollars.
Meanwhile, the duke is in town at the printing office, selling bills and advertisements in, and subscriptions to, a town newspaper, making, in total, nine and a half dollars. He also printed a wanted poster describing Jim, so that he and the king and Huck and Jim can travel by day, for if anyone were to stop them concerning Jim, they could say that they have captured him and are returning him to his owners. All agree that the duke is pretty smart.

That night, as Huck comes up to replace Jim as the lookout, Jim asks Huck if he expects them to run into any more kings on their journeys. Huck says he doesn’t, much to Jim’s relief. Jim says that two kings are bad enough, drunk as they currently are. He also tells Huck that he asked the king to speak French earlier, and that the king told him that he had been out of his country for so long that he had forgotten his native language.

CHAPTER 21

The duke and king continue to practice Shakespeare. After a few days, the group arrives at a small town, where the duke posts a bill advertising his and the king’s performance. Huck notices that the town is dilapidated; the houses aren’t painted, weeds grow in the gardens, and hogs loaf around everywhere. In town, Huck overhears a conversation in which one man tries to bum tobacco off of another.

By noon, many townspeople are drinking. Huck witnesses three fights. One townsperson cries out that “old Boggs” is riding into town, drunk, much to everyone’s excitement. Boggs has a reputation for insulting people. He even asks Huck if he’s prepared to die. Though Huck is scared, a townsperson assures Huck that Boggs is good-natured and harmless. Boggs begins to shout at a man called Colonel Sherburn, whom he says he will kill. People laugh and talk, that is, until Sherburn steps out of a shop and tells Boggs he is tired of his antics but will endure it, if only till one o’clock.

The duke’s plan that enables him and his companions to travel by day subverts labels of freedom and enslavement as they are established by society. It is by pretending that Jim is captured that his freedom can be preserved. To generalize this, the duke and king present a way of life in which playing along with society enables one to be free.

As good and understanding as Jim is, he recognizes that the duke and king are deeply selfish and, like Pap, debauched. That being said, Jim invests such a pure trust in people, despite knowing how bad they can be, that he accepts the con men as what they claim to be, even though the king himself can’t back up his claim to be French.

In contrast to the Grangerford estate, which is well-kept and beautiful, the town Huck explores in this passage seems neglected and impoverished, maybe as a legacy from its inhabitants’ involvement in the Civil War. Rather than industriously rebuild, the people here loaf.

Boggs is a kind of harmless Pap, debauched but non-violent. While he seems scary to Huck, one has no real need to fear him; he is not what he seems. In contrast to Boggs is Sherburn, who is maybe the most sincere character in the novel. He says what he means and does what he says. In this sense, Sherburn, in his sincerity, stands apart from the hypocritical society of which he is part.

CHAPTER 22

The lynch mob tromps through town, scaring women and children as they go, till they arrive at Sherburn’s home, where they tear down his fence. Sherburn calmly steps out onto the roof above his porch with a gun in hand, and is silent for a long time. Then he slowly and scornfully addresses the mob. He says he is safe from them as long as it is daytime and they are not behind him, because they are cowards and he is a “man.” He tells them they are not really courageous but borrow courage from their mass. Sherburn goes back into his house and the mob, humiliated, disperses.

Huck goes to the circus, which he thinks splendid. A drunk man approaches the ringmaster of the circus and says he wants to ride a horse, impeding the progress of the circus such that the men in the audience swarm to throw the drunk man out. But the ringmaster lets him ride. The audience laughs save Huck, who trembles to see the drunk man endanger himself, has just murdered a man in cold blood. Sherburn is free, but a danger to society in his freedom, a dark vision of what Huck could become if he follows a path of violence.

Later, that night, the duke and king put on their performance of Shakespeare in town, but only twelve people show up, and they laugh the whole time. The duke says that the people of Arkansas aren’t cultured enough to appreciate Shakespeare, and he devises a way to give them the low comedy they want. He posts another bill in town, advertising: “THE KING’S CAMELEOPARD [giraffe] OR THE ROYAL NONESUCH.” The biggest line of the bill announces that ladies and children will not be admitted to see the show.

Boggs continues to carry on about Boggs’s antic till one o’clock, after which he murders the innocent man. He makes laws, however unjust, and enforces them with brutal surety. Society, in turn, resolves to enforce their law against murder by lynching Sherburn, but, as we will see, society is not so firm as the fiercely constant Colonel.

If Sherburn reveals the mob’s cowardice, the circus reveals its audience’s cruelty. Everyone save Huck laughs at the drunk man’s endangerment, when Huck’s empathetic trembling is maybe the more humane response to such a spectacle. But, we learn, the man is part of the circus all along. The boundary between the real and artificial is disturbingly porous in Huck’s world.

The duke and king’s performance of Shakespeare invites comparison with the circus: what makes the latter fun but the former ridiculous? The circus misrepresents itself just as the duke and king do, and the duke and king don’t endanger anyone as the circus does. It seems that the novel concludes that The Royal Nonesuch is harmless enough as a money-making scheme, and that the duke and king’s unique vice is in their ruthlessness when it comes to exploiting innocent people.
CHAPTER 23

All day the duke and king prepare for their performance of "The Royal Nonesuch," rigging up a stage with a curtain and lighting. Many men are in attendance that night, and, after the duke talks the show up, the king enters on all fours, naked, and painted "as splendid as a rainbow." The audience laughs wildly, so much so that the king performs his "capering" act three times.

After that, the duke thanks the audience members and asks them to spread the word about the show. The audience members, however, are dissatisfied with how short the show was. They begin to storm the stage before a big man jumps up on a bench and shouts that they have been cheated, yes, but that they don't want to be the laughing-stocks of the town. He proposes that they talk the show up to the other men in town, which they all proceed to do.

The next day, the duke and king play to a full house and scam them in the same way as they did the audience before. As they eat later that night, the duke and king tell Jim and Huck to float the boat two miles below town and to hide it. On the third and final night of performing "The Royal Nonesuch," the house is crammed again, but Huck notices that the men in the audience all have rotten eggs and produce and dead cats hidden in their pockets and coats. Just before the show is scheduled to start, the duke tells Huck to make a run for the raft. He does so, and the duke does the same.

Back at the raft, Huck and the duke meet up with Jim and the king, who didn't even go to town for the performance. The duke reveals how well he and the king pulled off the scam, and mocks the townsmen for thinking that they would get the last laugh by throwing their eggs and cabbages and cats at the con men. All in all, the duke and king make a little less than five hundred dollars.

Thus far, the duke and king have seemed, while vaguely seedy and selfish, harmless enough and farcically silly, a perception strengthened by the king's ridiculous performance, which the audience finds hilarious. The duke and king seem to know what society wants (low farce), and they deliver.

The men in the audience resent having been defrauded, but instead of limiting the damage the duke and king can do to their community, they maximize it to protect their own externally derived sense of dignity. They know that what the duke and king are doing is wrong, but hypocritically become complicit in it.

The duke and king must expect that the men in the town will use the third show as a way to exact revenge against the con men themselves; otherwise, they would not know to make an escape plan for the night of their final performance. The townspeople, then, are woefully predictable in their selfishness, which the duke and king rather cunningly exploit. We can't help but think that society had it coming, so to speak.

On the raft, the boy tells the king that he resembles Mr. Wilks. The king lies and says that he is a reverend, and that he is sorry if Mr. Wilks is late for something. The boy then reveals that Mr. Wilks's brother Peter Wilks has died, and that, as he died, he wished to be used in a con. In contrast to the king's overvaluation of appearance, that he is himself overvalued, Huck exploits society's overvaluation of appearance.

By tricking the boy into trusting him with his clothes and false identity as a priest, the king exploits the boy for information to be used in a con. In contrast to the boy's guilelessness is Huck's gentle skepticism of everyone he meets. Huck doesn't care about appearances but about substance.

CHAPTER 24

As the duke and king devise another con, Jim tells the duke that it is uncomfortable to be tied up every day. In response, the duke invents a new way for Jim to stay by himself during a day without risking capture. He dresses Jim up in a costume for King Lear, a character in Shakespeare's play King Lear, and paints Jim blue. The duke then makes a sign saying that Jim is a sick Arab. When people approach him, Jim is to jump out and carry on and howl till they leave him be.

The king, dressed in black clothes that make him look "swell and starchy," rafts to a nearby town with Huck. As they drift in, the two run across a young country boy. The king says he'll give the boy a lift and invites him on the raft, which the boy accepts. On the raft, the boy tells the king that he is a reverend, and that he is sorry if Mr. Wilks is late for something. The boy then reveals that Mr. Wilks's brother Peter Wilks has died, and that, as he died, he wished to see his brothers from England, the living ones being Harvey and the deaf mute William. The king asks more questions about the Wilks family, and the boy obliges in answering.

Huck knows that the duke and king are really just con men, but he doesn't think it would do any good to tell Jim that, and anyway, Huck thinks, "you couldn't tell them from the real kind." The next morning, Huck wakes to find Jim mourning, thinking about his wife and children. Huck realizes, even though it doesn't seem natural to him, that Jim must care just as much about his family as white people do for their own. Jim recounts to Huck how one time he asked his daughter to shut the door and she didn't do it but just smiled at him. Jim slapped her, only to learn soon after that the girl is deaf and dumb. Jim doesn't think he'll ever forgive himself for harming her.

Huck implies here that anybody who exploits society for purposes of self-interest, from a con man to a monarch, is villainous: social standing doesn't reflect one's character. For example, Jim, who is oppressively marginalized, reveals here that he is maybe the most morally sensitive character in the novel, supremely loving of his daughter and ashamed for having hurt her out of ignorance. In what is central to his growth, Huck learns that blacks are just as capable of love as whites.
After dropping the boy off, the king tells Huck to fetch the duke. Huck knows what the king is up to (conning the Wilks family), but he retrieves the duke anyway. The king tells the duke everything the boy told him, all the while imitating an English accent. After hailing a yawl, the duke, king, Huck and Jim all travel to the town where the Wilks family lives. There, the duke and king claim to be Peter Wilks’s brothers Harvey and William. The townspeople sympathize and help them, while Huck thinks their con “enough to make a [person] ashamed of the human race.”

CHAPTER 25

The duke and king, pretending to be Harvey and William Wilks, are received by Peter Wilks’s family, including Mary Jane, whom Huck thinks is very beautiful. When the duke and king approach Peter’s coffin, all the people gathered go quiet, and the two con men begin to cry their eyes out, and everyone else starts to cry too. The duke and king work the crowd, and Huck finds the situation “disgusting.”

The king addresses the crowd, saying how hard it was to lose Peter and how grateful he is to those gathered. Someone begins to play music, and the king resumes, inviting close friends of the family to supper that night. As the duke makes signs with his hands and goo-goos like a baby, the king goes to the townspeople and addresses mostly all of them by name, and informs them about what Peter had written to him.

Mary Jane fetches the letter her father left behind, and the king reads it and cries. In the letter, Peter Wilks bequeaths to his daughters his house and three thousand dollars in gold, and, to his brothers, three thousand dollars in gold. The letter also says where the gold is hidden.

Though Huck earlier denounces the duke and king as rascallions, he is now mature enough to know that none of their cons compare in depravity to their defrauding of the Wilks family, where, in a time of tragedy, the two are not only emotionally exploiting grieving people, but are also stealing the possessions of two men whose brother has just died, nothing less than everything that remains of Peter’s life.

The duke and king, along with Huck, go to the cellar and find the hidden bag full of gold, and, even though anybody else would be satisfied with the mere sight of that much gold, the duke and king count it. They discover that there’s about four hundred dollar worth of gold missing. The two agree to make up the deficit with their own money so that, when counting the sum before the townspeople to prove that everything is being done fairly, no one will question what happened to the missing gold. The duke and king also agree to give their part of the treasure to Wilks’s daughters so that no one will even suspect them of fraud.

Upstairs before the townspeople, the duke and king announce that they are giving what Peter seemingly bequeathed them to his daughters, because otherwise the two would feel as though they were robbing the girls. The Wilks girls hug the two con men, thinking the two their very loving uncles. The king goes on to invite all the townspeople to Peter’s funeral obsequies, which he mistakenly refers to as “orgies” until the duke discreetly corrects him. The king explains he uses “orgies” instead of “obsequies” because that is the word used in England, based on Greek and Hebrew etymology.

A man, Doctor Robinson, laughs in the king’s face after he gives his etymology of “orgies.” The townspeople are shocked, but the undeterred doctor goes on to accuse the king of being a fraud. The townspeople tell him he’s wrong, and the Wilks girls cling to the king and begin to cry. But Doctor Robinson tells the girls that, as their father’s friend, he begs them to get the king out of their house. Mary Jane responds by giving the king Peter’s six thousand dollars to invest on her and her sister’s behalf. Doctor Robinson tells the girls that they will regret this day and takes his leave.

CHAPTER 26

The duke and king and Huck are all given rooms in the Wilks home to sleep in. Later that night, the duke and king host a supper for a group of townspeople. The Wilks girls say that they have cooked poorly, but Huck thinks the food is fine and that the girls are just fishing for compliments. The duke and king express their greed in several ways here, from counting the money to counter-intuitively agreeing to give their part of the treasure to the Wilks daughters. Of course, they do so to further ingratiate themselves with society and to gain more with that trust than they would be able to do otherwise. The duke and king manage to make seemingly good deeds serve selfish, wicked ends.
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

CHAPTER 27

Huck tries to take the money outside. He makes it as far as the parlor, where Peter Wilks’s corpse lies in its coffin and sleeping men sit around, before he hears footsteps coming toward him. Huck quickly hides the money in the open coffin and then hides himself behind a door. The footsteps are those of Mary Jane, who comes into the parlor, stands before her father’s coffin, and quietly mourns.

Huck creeps back up to his room, and night turns to day. In the afternoon, Peter Wilks’s funeral is held. Mourners walk past Wilks’s coffin, looking down, some crying. Huck notices how often people blow their noses, how soft and gliding and stealthy the undertaker is, and he concludes that Peter Wilks “was the only one that had a good thing.” As the preacher is speaking, a dog begins to bark. The undertaker goes out reassuringly, hits the dog till it’s silent, and comes back in. The townspeople appreciate the undertaker’s actions; he’s a very popular man in town.

After the king “got off some of his usual rubbish” by giving another speech, the undertaker seals the coffin. Huck can’t be sure whether the bag of gold is still in there or if somebody took it out, and he’s worried that Mary Jane and her sisters might never get it back. The king says he and the duke must be leaving for England, and tells the Wilks girls that they’re welcome to come. The two con men, meanwhile, are in the process of selling all of the Wilks estate, house and slaves and all—they plan to keep the money from the sale, then leave the unlucky buyer to discover once they are gone that the purchase is null and void because it was sold by men who had no right to sell it. Huck’s heart aches to see the girls get fooled like this, but can’t think of a way to safely expose the duke and king.

Huck has been caught in lies before, but never as frequently as this. Why he is lying to protect the duke and king is strange in the first place, though, given how disgusted Huck is with the two con men. It could be that Huck contradicts himself so much here because his more mature and guilty subconscious is trying to expose the truth.

Mary Jane conforms too much to societal convention for her own good. When she should trust her sister’s intuitions, she trusts Huck blindly because he is a stranger far from home. But Mary Jane, as Huck sees, is also deeply good. Because she is a human victim to Huck, and not just an abstract victim of the duke and king’s scam, Huck maturely resolves to help her.

Huck reflects on how he has morally matured in just two hours: whereas before putting a human face to the duke and king’s victims he would have gone along with their scam, now he feels compelled to expose the duke and king’s wrongdoing. Note also how the king’s tyrannical greed, seemingly boundless, prevents him and the duke from escaping with the money now, a costly mistake.

The duke and king expose their racism when they suppose that a black person might try to steal the money, when they themselves are stealing the money! It must be said, though, that, while the duke and king are racists, they do not seem to be making a moral judgment against black people here, but rather are just concerned with the practical matter of keeping the money to themselves.

Huck, with his love of life, is disturbed by how mawkishly miserable the mourners are, and also by the undertaker, who is cruel to a harmless dog and whose cruelty is bizarrely appreciated. Mourning seems a mere societal convention to Huck, who is free from sentimentality, thinking as he does that Peter is better off than the living in this case because he is free from self-imposed miseries.

In one of his cruelest, most selfish acts, the king separates a black family for profit, just as Jim was separated from his family. The Wilks girls are distraught at this, and, if Huck hadn’t known that “the sale was of no account” and that the family of slaves would soon be reunited, he figures he would have had to tell on the duke and king.

In selling the Wilks’s family of slaves, the king separates a mother from her children. The Wilks girls are distraught at this, and, if Huck hadn’t known that “the sale was of no account” and that the family of slaves would soon be reunited, he figures he would have had to tell on the duke and king.

Huck searches the king’s room for the money but doesn’t find it. Just then the duke and king enter the room. Huck hides behind a curtain and overhears the two con men debate whether they should stick around to sell the Wilks home or leave right away to avoid detection. Huck thinks he wouldn’t have felt bad about this an hour or two ago, but that now he does. The king convinces the duke to stick around and sell the house, because doing so wouldn’t harm the Wilks girls.

One of the Wilks girls, Joanna, whom Huck calls “the hare-lip” because she is afflicted with that condition, asks Huck about England. Huck lies, but the hare-lip catches him in a contradiction, which Huck just barely wriggles out of with yet more lies. Huck resumes, but gets caught in another inconsistency, which he again wriggles out of, only to be caught in yet a third contradiction, all because he is forgetting his earlier lies.

Joanna accuses Huck of telling her lies. Huck denies the accusation, swearing on a dictionary that he has told nothing but the truth. Joanna says she believes some of what he says but not all. Just then, Mary Jane approaches and tells Joanna that she shouldn’t talk to Huck in that way, because he is a stranger far from his native country. Huck feels bad, because Mary Jane is so good in defending him and yet he is letting the duke and king steal her and her sisters’ money. Huck decides to return the money to the girls.

As they leave the room, the duke tells the king that they should hide the money in another place, because otherwise some slave who comes upstairs to pack up Mary Jane’s belongings might find the gold and steal some of it. Almost discovering Huck, the king takes the money from behind the curtain and hides it in a straw mattress. After the duke and king leave, Huck takes the money, planning to hide it outside. Huck slips, gold in hand, down the ladder leading from his room to the rest of the house.

After ingratiating himself even more with the townspeople by exploiting their mawkish sadness, the king along with the duke prepares to complete the scam. Huck aches to see the girls, who are so good, get hurt, but he is not an idealist who would expose the con men without having figured out the logistics first. Huck has morally matured, but his sense of the practical is a constant in his decision-making.

Summary & Analysis

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Later, the duke and king also question Huck about whether he’s been in their room. Huck lies and says that he hasn’t, but that he did see some black slaves go in there several times. The duke and king are upset to learn this, thinking the slaves stole the bag of money hidden in the mattress, but the two also know they can’t do anything because the slaves have already been sold. The duke and king yell at each other and, as they walk off, Huck is glad to have made it seem like the slaves stole the money without bringing harm to them.

CHAPTER 28

Huck comes upon Mary Jane, who is packing for her trip to England. She is also crying because, in selling the Wilks’s slaves, the duke and king separated a mother from her children. Moved by her tears, Huck blurts out knowledge of the fraudulence of the Wilks’s slaves, the duke and king persist in their fraudulence. After the king cracks a joke at the real Harvey’s expense, most of the townspeople present laugh, but there a few who don’t. One of these is Doctor Robinson; another is a lawyer named Levi Bell, who calls the king a liar. Doctor Robinson suggests that the two sets of men claiming to be Harvey and William be afforded with each other at a tavern so that their real identities can be determined.

Huck reveals that the duke and king are not Mary Jane’s uncles but rather a couple of frauds. Mary Jane indignantly wants to have the duke and king tarred and feathered. Huck says he would tell on the duke and king immediately except that he would be endangering someone (Jim), and he proposes a different plan.

Huck tells Mary Jane to go away, because he is afraid that she will express in her face knowledge of the duke and king’s fraud, which will in turn allow the two to escape. Mary Jane is to return in the evening, after Huck and Jim have made their escape, and expose the duke and king, sending for the townspeople of Bricksville, the site of the performance of The Royal Nonesuch, as witnesses regarding the duke and the king’s trickery. Huck also gives Mary Jane a note explaining where he has hidden her bag of gold. Mary Jane promises to remember Huck forever and pray for him, and, though Huck says he has not seen Mary Jane since, he thinks of her often.

After Mary Jane lights out, Huck runs into her sisters. Huck lies that Mary Jane has gone to visit a sick person in town, and, though the girls press Huck on the facts of his story, he at last tricks the two into not mentioning anything to the duke and king that might alert them to Mary Jane’s knowledge of their fraudulence.

It is hard to say whether Huck’s lie reveals Huck’s own racism, that blacks are predisposed to wrongdoing, or whether it merely exploits the duke and king’s own racist assumptions. Such a question does not concern Huck, however, who is just happy to have pragmatically protected his identity as the thief and to have done so without hurting anybody else. Huck cares about consequences, not means.

Later that day, the duke and king hold an auction to sell off the Wilks estate. As the auction draws to a close, a steamboat lands, and a noisy crowd approaches, singing out that in their company are none other than two men who claim to be Harvey and William Wilks.

CHAPTER 29

Despite the arrival of the two men who claim to be Harvey and William Wilks, the duke and king persist in their fraudulence. The people who could tip the duke and king are so taken by the con men that they only test their assumptions when directly contradicted.

The duke and king are astonishingly able to get away with auctioning off the Wilks estate despite the suspicion Dr. Robinson cast on them. The townspeople are so taken by the con men that they only test their assumptions when directly contradicted.

It is ironic that when the king tells what he believes to be the truth about where the gold is, the townspeople don’t believe him, but that when he tells what he knows to be a lie, which Huck himself thinks very transparent, the townspeople less readily gainsay him, suggesting how easily mislead society is in its search for the truth. Also, Huck has been a rather proficient liar till now; it seems his strain to lie is due to moral qualms or having to lie about something regarding which he has no knowledge.

Levi Bell begins to speak with the king, and eventually tricks him, the duke, and the other old man claiming to be Harvey Wilks to write something down. Bell then produces from his pocket a letter from Harvey, to find that none of the handwriting given him matches that of the letters. The old man explains that his brother William copies his letter, and Levi concludes that his plan to expose the frauds has succeeded only partially; he knows that the duke and king are frauds, but he is unsure about the other two men.

The duke meets his match in Levi Bell, who tricks the veteran trickster into exposing his own lies. It is strange, though, that the townspeople don’t act on the results of Mr. Bell’s test. Whereas it would be reasonable at this point to jail the duke and king, the townspeople seem not to have followed Mr. Bell’s logic at all, and allow the duke and king a chance to escape later. Society does not act logically.
The real Harvey Wilks asks the king to reveal what is tattooed onto Peter Wilks’s chest. Whitering, the king at last says that it is a pale, blue arrow. The old man says that that’s false, that his tattoo is really of the letters “P.B.W.” But the men who buried Peter Wilks say they saw no such mark. The townspeople become convinced that all four men claiming to be Peter’s brothers are frauds, and, enraged, decide to dig up Peter’s body to see if he has any tattoo at all.

After disinterring Peter’s corpse, the townspeople discover the bag of gold that Huck hid in Peter’s coffin. The man who is holding Huck by the arm to prevent him from running away lets go of the boy to get a look at the bag, and Huck immediately makes a run for it. He meets Jim by the river, and the two begin to drift away. Suddenly, though, Huck hears a familiar sound, the humming of a skiff. It is the duke and king. Huck sinks to the floor of the raft and almost cries in drinking, till they’re drunk, mellow, for wanting to hide the money so he could later have it all to himself. The money got into the duke’s possession without the king for letting the slaves take the gold that triggers an argument for wanting to hide the money so he could later have it all to himself. The money was discovered in the duke and king’s coffin, which provided an opportunity for him and the king to escape because they were locked up in the penitentiary. The duke intervenes and tells the king that the money was discovered in Peter Wilks’s coffin, which provided an opportunity for him and the king to escape. It is the reference to the bag of gold that triggers an argument between the duke and king over how the money got into Peter’s coffin in the first place, each blaming the other for wanting to hide the money so he could later have it all to himself. The king, overwhelmed and exhausted, blubberingly confesses that he hid the money in the coffin. The duke shames him for letting the slaves take the blame. Then the two men take solace in drinking, till they’re drunk, mellow, thick as thieves again, and literally sleeping in one another’s arms. As the two sleep, Huck tells Jim everything that’s happened.

Even though Huck is helping the Wilkses expose the duke and king, he is wise enough to know that the townspeople are stupidly unpredictable, so, instead of taking his chances with the mob, he makes a bold bid for freedom. But that freedom is limited by the arrival of the duke and king, whose self-interestedness has come to metaphorically imprison Huck and Jim in a life of fraud and close scrapes.

Over the course of the novel, the king has morphed into another Pap in Huck’s life, debauched and, now, murderous. He is a petty, stupid tyrant, whose power over Huck is restrained only by the duke, who is himself hardly a moral authority.

It is the duke who rightly identifies the price of freedom here as the need to take responsibility for oneself, which the king refuses to do. Also, society clearly has backwards priorities: they allow the duke and king to escape because they were excited by seeing gold to which they have no claim.

It is hard to say why the king takes responsibility for something he didn’t do, hiding the gold, except that maybe he is so morally exhausted that he wants to take responsibility for something, anything. The duke rather nobly condemns the king for letting the slaves take responsibility for his actions. But just as the duke and king seem to grow out of their wicked ways, they get drunk and conspiratorial again. Like Pap, the two con men will always be morally stained.

CHAPTER 31

Huck, Jim, and the con men drift downriver for four days, at which point the duke and king feel safe enough to resume their scams in nearby villages, but they don’t have much luck in making money and become “dreadful blue and desperate.” The two whisper in private in the wigwam, which makes Huck and Jim so nervous that they resolve to leave the company of the duke and king once and for all.

The king goes up to a village to see if the people there have caught wind of The Royal Nonesuch. At noon, Huck and the duke, who’s been in a sour mood, set out to join the king, only to find him in a saloon getting cussed at and threatened. The duke begins berating the king (maybe for getting into such a bad situation, maybe to buy time in formulating an escape plan from the saloon for the two of them), at which point Huck, sensing his chance, makes his escape.

As Huck runs to the raft, he shouts with joy to Jim that they are free. But Jim, Huck soon discovers, is gone. Huck can’t help it: he sits and cries. Soon restless, he takes to the road and comes across a boy who tells him that Jim has been captured and taken to Silas Phelps’ farm. Huck also learns that it was the king who turned Jim in for forty dollars, using a handbill earlier printed by the duke.

Huck considers writing a letter to Tom Sawyer asking him to tell Miss Watson that Jim is at the Phelps farm so Jim can at least be with his family, but decides that Miss Watson would be cruel to Jim for running away and that Jim would be disgraced. Hopeless, Huck rebukes himself for helping Jim at all, and feels low and ornery. Huck prays, but no words come, at least not until he does what he thinks is most moral: writing a note to Miss Watson. But as Huck remembers Jim and how good Jim is, he pauses. At last, he rises up the note, and decides he’s going to help Jim to freedom, even if that means going to hell. Huck never regrets his choice.

This is maybe the most important passage in the novel in terms of Huck’s moral development, where the boy decides that he would rather subvert all societal values and do what others think bad than do what society endorses and betray the inclinations of his own heart. Huck thinks that betraying the humanity of good people like Jim is a worse fate than being condemned to hell. Of course, Huck’s decision is more Christian and loving in spirit than the alternative, and it is a testament to the way that slavery has warped Christianity in the south that Huck thinks that freeing a man from slavery will send him to hell.

The duke and king’s moral epiphany is short-lived. Mere days after the duke gives his speech in favor of taking responsibility for oneself, he and the king, chained to their debauched lifestyle, begin scheming again. Huck and Jim worry because they know the duke and king have no qualms about harming them if push comes to shove.
As Huck makes his way to save Jim, he runs into the duke. Over the course of their conversation, the duke tells Huck that the king did indeed turn Jim in. The duke eventually tells Huck that if he and Jim promise not to turn in him or the king, he’ll tell Huck where Jim is. Huck agrees, and the duke begins to disclose Jim’s location, when, mid-word, he changes his mind and lies to Huck about where Jim is. Huck sets out at first for the false place the duke gives him, and once he’s sure the duke is no longer watching, Huck turns around and heads for the Phelps’ farm.

CHAPTER 32

Huck arrives at the Phelps’ and feels lonesome, because the droning of bugs and quivering of leaves make it feel “like everybody’s dead and gone.” He says that, generally, such a feeling makes a person wish he were dead too. As he approaches the Phelps’ kitchen, he hears the wailing of a spinning wheel and wishes that he himself were dead, thinking it the “lonesomest sound” in the world.

Dogs swarm around Huck, but soon a slave comes out and yells at the dogs to scarm. The slave is followed by two black children, a white woman (Aunt Sally), and two white children, who, Huck notes, respond to him in the same way the black children do. The white woman welcomes Huck, thinking that he is none other than her expected guest and nephew…a boy named Tom. Huck plays along.

The woman who welcomes Huck is called Aunt Sally. She takes Huck inside where she questions him about his trip, such that Huck is forced to lie to keep his cover from being blown. Huck gets especially nervous when Aunt Sally asks him about his family, but is saved when a man, Uncle Silas, enters the room. Aunt Sally hides Huck behind a bed and pretends as though “Tom” hasn’t arrived yet. But Aunt Sally is playing a trick on Uncle Silas: while he’s not looking, she pulls Huck out from behind the bed and introduces him to Uncle Silas as Tom Sawyer.

Huck is finally free, but has no one like Jim to enjoy his freedom with. Alone, then, he experiences freedom as a meaningless blank populated only with the empty sounds of nature, and he would rather be dead than exist in that blank.

Just as Huck despairs of loneliness, he is greeted by a microcosm of society. He notices the fact that there is no difference between how white children greet him and how black children greet him, reflecting his maturation into a knowledge of racial equality.

Huck returns to the Phelps’ too quickly after meeting Tom, but Uncle Silas, whom Huck considers the “innocentest, best old soul,” and who is not only a farmer but also a preacher, is merely pleased that his mule could go to town and back so quickly. Soon after Huck, Tom arrives. He pretends to be looking for a different house, but, after being invited by the Phelps to dinner, he accepts.

Over dinner, Tom chats and chats, lying very fluently, and at one point he goes so far as to kiss Aunt Sally on the mouth. Aunt Sally jumps up and scolds Tom, even picking up her spinning-stick as if to thwack him with it. Tom says that they told her to kiss her. Aunt Sally has no idea what Tom is talking about, but then he introduces himself as Sid Sawyer, Tom’s half-brother. Aunt Sally is delighted to see him.

Aunt Sally and Uncle Silas question Huck, thinking him Tom, about their relatives, and Huck answers their questions with ease. As they’re talking, Huck hears a steamboat coughing down the river. The real Tom could be aboard, Huck thinks, and he could accidentally blow Huck’s cover, so Huck decides to meet him. He tells the Phelps that he’s going to fetch his baggage from where he hid it, and heads out.

CHAPTER 33

As Huck walks to town, he sees a wagon coming toward him, riding in which is Tom Sawyer. Huck stops the wagon, but Tom is afraid of Huck, thinking him a ghost. Huck tells Tom that he isn’t, and Tom, satisfied, begins to ask Huck about his recent adventures. Huck tells Tom that he’s at the Phelps’ farm to rescue Jim, and Tom, after thinking a bit, enthusiastically decides to help Huck rescue him. That Tom would help a black slave lowers Huck’s opinion of his friend, and he thinks Tom must be joking, but Tom assures Huck that he is serious.

Huck printed the handbill he and the king used to turn Jim in long ago, suggesting that he had at least entertained the possibility of betraying Jim for profit. It is ironic, then, that after he earlier charges the king with not taking responsibility for himself, the duke blames the king and only the king for selling out Jim, even though he is obviously complicit. The duke is as hypocritical as the society he exploits and defrauds.

Note that Huck’s impersonation of Tom is similar to the duke and king’s impersonation of the Wilks brothers. Huck, however, is not exploitative as the con men were. He even feels comfortable impersonating Tom, suggesting that, in his deep, empathetic knowledge of Tom, Huck is most easy and free.

Uncle Silas is an upstanding member of society and a person whom Huck respects very much, and yet he thinks it acceptable, even moral, to hold Jim prisoner. It’s surprising that Huck still thinks he’s doing wrong by helping Jim, but, even so, he is much more morally free than Uncle Silas.

As Aunt Sally pranked Uncle Silas about Tom’s arrival, so does Tom prank Aunt Sally. This sketch of a family shows how behaviors and beliefs are passed from one generation to the next, behaviors as benign as pulling pranks, and beliefs as perniciously serious as the inferiority of one race to another.
CHAPTER 34

Tom deduces that Jim must be imprisoned in a hunt on the Phelps’ property, based on the fact that a slave (Nat) goes to that hut with human food every day. Huck is impressed with Tom’s reasoning, and thinks that he wouldn’t trade Tom Sawyer’s mind for anything. Tom and Huck begin to devise plans for helping Jim to escape.

Huck suggests that he and Tom bring up the raft, steal the key to Jim’s hut, and rescue Jim in the night. Tom concedes that Huck’s plan will work, but insists that it is far too simple. He proposes a plan which Huck doesn’t explain in his book, because, he says, Tom will just change the plan all the time anyway, throwing in flair whenever he can, which is exactly what he does. Huck still can’t believe that a respectable, well-raised, ethically intelligent, kind boy like himself could help to steal a slave out of bondage, and he begins to tell Tom as much, but Tom hushes him and says he knows what he’s about.

Huck and Tom survey the Phelps’ farm and think of ways to bust Jim out of the hut. Tom decides that it would be grand to dig Jim out, which will take about a week. Huck and Tom also follow Nat, who brings food to the hut where Jim is presumably kept. Nat claims that witches have been pestering him and also lets the boys take a look at the prisoner locked up there, who is, as Tom deduced, none other than Jim.

Despite all the wrong they did him, Huck tries to save the duke and king from capture, revealing his commitment to freedom for all over even societal justice. Huck also wants to save the duke and king because he knows how disgustingly cruel people can be. Indeed, the nastiness of the punishment the townspeople inflict on the frauds—tarring and feathering—is a crime in itself. Huck, in his empathy, forgives the pitiful wretches.

Huck’s experience of the duke and king’s punishment enables him to once and for all grow out of his enslavement to socialized conscience, which he comes to think of as a bad gauge of whether or not we’re actually doing right or wrong. Free of conscience, Huck is better able to follow the intuitions of his heart.

CHAPTER 35

Tom is dissatisfied that liberating Jim will be so easy. He wishes there were guards to drug, or a guard-dog, or that Jim were better chained down. He sighs that he and Huck will have to invent difficulties; for he wants the escape to be as grand as one of those carried out in the romantic books he likes to read.

Tom also proposes that he and Huck make Jim a rope ladder by tearing and tying up their sheets, and that they then bake it into a pie so it can be delivered to Jim. Huck thinks this plan is unnecessary, but Tom disagrees. Huck gives in, but cautions Tom that Aunt Sally will be greatly displeased to find that the boys have torn up her sheets. Huck suggests that he and Tom steal a sheet off of the clotheslines, and Tom agrees.

Tom also says that Huck should steal a shirt off the clothesline, so that Jim can use it to keep a journal. Huck exclaims that Jim doesn’t even know how to write, to which Tom responds that Jim can at least make marks on the shirt. He also proposes Jim be given something like a candlestick to file into a pen, that he use his own blood as ink, and that he be smuggled tin plates to write little messages on before throwing them out of the window to be read. Huck thinks all this is impractical.

That morning, Huck steals things to give Jim, as well as a watermelon from the slave’s watermelon patch. Tom, however, tells Huck that he can only steal what he needs to help set Jim free, and he demands that Huck give the slaves a dime without telling them that it is in exchange for the stolen watermelon. Huck doesn’t see what good it does him to represent a prisoner if he means he can’t even steal a watermelon.

Jim greets Huck and Tom by name, which startles Nat. He asks how it is that Jim knows who the two are. Tom pretends as though he didn’t hear Jim say anything, and Huck and Jim play along, such that the slave is forced to believe that the witches made him hear things. Tom whispers to Jim that he and Huck are going to set him free.

Even though Tom and Huck will needlessly exploit Nat later, here it is necessary that they do so, lest Nat learn that Jim knows the boys, which might compromise the whole rescue attempt. Jim obviously thinks it necessary to trick Nat as well for the sake of his freedom.

It is a sign of Huck’s vestigial immaturity that he listens to Tom instead of his own heart. To his credit, he tries to reason with Tom, but we think that Huck would do better to just act independently and rescue Jim as soon as he can, without Tom’s childish insistence on making a game out of a human being’s freedom.

Tom’s plan is as big a farce as anything the duke and king perpetrated, and it devalues human life to a similar if subtler extent. Tom has inherited a new set of conventions from his books and madly sets about satisfying them, even if absurdly so, e.g., he gives Jim things to write with even though Jim can’t write.

Huck’s lack of resistance here calls into question the permanence of his earlier moral development.

Ironically, nothing Tom and Huck steal is needed to help set Jim free. Tom’s insistence to the contrary suggests that he is not living in the real world. It is also disturbingly uncharacteristic that Huck would steal the watermelon without needing it. something he hasn’t done since he was in Pap’s care.
Finally, Tom tells Huck that they need to steal tools to dig Jim out of the hut with. Huck asks why they don’t use some picks and shovels, and that what they need for digging are knives. Tom calculates it would take 37 years to dig to Jim with knives, and, knowing that he and Huck can’t take that long, he proposes that he and Huck pretend amongst themselves that it takes them 37 years to save Jim. Huck says that pretending isn’t impractical and doesn’t hurt anyone, so he agrees. Tom tells Huck to steal three knives and, after a little protest, Huck agrees to do so.

CHAPTER 36

In the night, Huck and Tom begin digging with their knives to rescue Jim, but after a while are tired, blistered, and realize they haven’t gotten hardly anywhere. The boys switch to digging with picks instead, but agree to pretend that those are knives.

The next day, Huck and Tom steal a spoon and candlestick from the house for Jim to use as pens, as well as some plates for Jim to write messages on. Later, at night, the boys dig into the hut where Jim is imprisoned and wake him, much to Jim’s pleasant surprise. Jim asks the boys to help him cut the chain off his leg that he might escape immediately, but Tom explains to Jim his romantically stylish, time-consuming plan, which Jim accepts.

Jim tells the boys that Uncle Silas comes into the hut once in a while to pray with him, and that Aunt Sally does likewise to make sure he’s comfortable. This gives Tom an idea: he wants to trick Nat, the slave who brings Jim food, into bringing Jim a rope-ladder that’s been baked into a pie. The boys talk with Jim for a while before leaving him. Tom says he is having the most fun of his life, and yet remains oblivious to the fact that Jim has human needs, and yet remain oblivious to the fact that they are hypocritically violating those needs in keeping Jim in the first place. Tom is likewise a hypocrite: he knows Jim needs to be freed, but selfishly wishes he could draw out the rescue attempt for childish pleasure. Huck doesn’t buy into any of this, save insofar as he passively accepts it.

Uncle Silas and Aunt Sally clearly recognize that Jim has human needs, and yet remain oblivious to the fact that they are hypocritically violating those needs in keeping Jim in the first place. Tom exploits Nat’s superstitions in playing out his romantic game of rescuing Jim. We wonder what’s worse: Huck stealing from the slave’s watermelon patch, or Tom playing on a person’s fears, to which there is a racial component, for the sake of personal pleasure.

CHAPTER 37

Huck and Tom get what they need to bake the witch-pie. Afterwards, the boys go down to breakfast, hiding a spoon for Jim to write with in Uncle Silas’s pocket and nails in his hat, only to find Aunt Sally livid that things in the house are going missing. Uncle Silas suggests ways things could go missing, like rats getting them, but Aunt Sally dismisses them all. She is irritated and suspicious. Uncle Silas goes on to sheepishly produce the spoon hidden in his pocket by Huck and Tom. Aunt Sally hotly dismisses him.

Tom’s plan is time-consuming to execute, but it’s also problematic in raising so many suspicions. Aunt Sally is at wit’s end and, far from accepting Uncle Silas’s charmingly naïve explanations as to how things were going missing, she seems to suspect that the children in the household are involved. But, even though Aunt Sally is on high alert for funny business, Tom does not change his plan.

Tom goes out of his way to compensate Uncle Silas for helping him and Huck cover up their plans, even though he did so unintentionally. While this is not really mature of Tom, it reflects that his heart, at least, is in the right place. He may live in a fantasy-world, but he does have a sense of what it means to be good.

Huck and Tom’s pranks seem harmless enough, and also serve to prevent the Phelps from discovering the boys’ plan to help Jim, but it must be remembered that, while Huck and Jim play their ridiculous games, Jim is enchained in a hut, separated from his family.

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CHAPTER 38

Tom insists that Jim make an inscription with his coat of arms on the wall of his hut, because all the prisoners in romances do. Jim says he doesn’t have a coat of arms, so Tom designs him one, which he describes using technical jargon that he doesn’t even really understand. Tom also writes inscriptions for Jim’s wall, all of which make him cry, so that he decides to have Jim carve them all into the wall.

Tom changes his mind. Jim can’t carve inscriptions onto the wooden walls of his hut; he must carve them into stone. Tom proposes, then, that he and Huck steal a grindstone to carve the inscriptions into, and which can also be used to file the pens and saw. Huck and Tom set out to the mill to get the grindstone and role it back to the hut.

When they have the grindstone halfway home, Tom and Huck realize that they can’t roll it all the way without help, because it is too heavy, so they go back to Jim’s hut. There, they make it so that Jim can walk freely even though he still has a chain around his ankle, and he goes out and helps Huck roll the grindstone the rest of the way home. Tom superintends with great skill. Huck notes: “He knewed how to do everything.”

Having gotten the grindstone home and re-chained Jim to his bed, the boys are ready to go to sleep. But before leaving Tom asks Jim if he could bring some spiders, rats, and snakes into Jim’s hut, so that Jim can befriend them as the prisoners do in the books. Jim begs Tom not to, but Tom insists. Jim faults Tom’s plan, to which Tom responds by saying that Jim is wasting his opportunity to be the best, most famous prisoner of all time. Jim apologizes to Tom, and the boys shoo off for bed.

CHAPTER 39

Jim is agitated by the creatures that Tom and Huck introduce to his hut. He says that there isn’t hardly any room for him, and that the creatures are very lively when he tries to sleep. The spiders and rats bite him (he uses his blood afterward to write in his journal); he says he never wants to be a prisoner again, especially after the boys saw the legs of his bed and all three eat the sawdust together to hide the evidence, which gives them all terrible stomachaches.

Tom and Huck dehumanize Jim in this scene by ignoring his pleas and cramping his room with various, dangerous creatures. That said, they also endanger themselves by catching the creatures and eating sawdust and the like, which suggests that their disregard of human safety is less a factor of racism, say, than general immaturity.

CHAPTER 40

The Phelps family is troubled and anxious after receiving the anonymous letter Tom wrote. Tom and Huck are sent to bed early, where they get ready to take a lunch they have prepared, along with a dress, to Jim. Tom notices there’s no butter with the lunch, so he sends Huck to get some. As he’s returning with the butter, though, Aunt Sally discovers Huck. She questions him and sends him to the sitting room for further questioning.

In the sitting room, Huck is surprised to see fifteen farmers, all with guns. Huck wishes Aunt Sally would get through with him so he can tell Tom about the farmers and commence rescuing Jim before it’s too late. Aunt Sally questions Huck, but he’s so nervous because the farmers are talking about heading out and there to lie in wait for the gang that he becomes feverish. The farmer’s rush over to make sure Huck is alright, snatching off his hat as they do, out from under which comes the bread and butter he took. Aunt Sally is grateful Huck is okay and sends him to bed.

Huck hurries to meet Tom inside Jim’s hut to tell him about the farmers. Tom is elated, but assures Huck that Jim is disguised as a woman and ready to make a run for it. Just then, the farmers come outside to the hut and open the door. Tom, Huck, and Jim escape through a hole they had made, and soon begin to make a run for the fence. However, Tom’s pants catch a splinter. When he frees himself, a ripping noise alerts the gun-toting farmers who, after asking whoever’s there to identify themselves without response, begin to rush over, shooting as they do.

After all preparations are completed, Tom says that he and Huck need to write an anonymous letter to warn the Phelps that someone is going to try to rescue Jim. Huck mildly protests but soon gives in to Tom’s plan. The boys leave notes and ominous warnings around the Phelps house that terrify the family. Tom also writes a note saying that a gang of cutthroats will try to steal Jim.

Tom’s plan of the anonymous letter is supremely immature and irresponsible: it terrifies his family needlessly, and it jeopardizes the success of Jim’s escape, which would be much better conducted in total secrecy. What is clear by now is that while Huck wants to free Jim, Tom is playing a game. For Tom, his games come before other people. For Huck, people always come first.
Chased by both men and dogs, the three run toward the river and at last arrive at their raft. Everybody’s glad to be safe and free, especially Tom, because he had the honor of being shot in the calf of his leg. He is in considerable pain and bleeding. After some deliberation, Jim says he will not leave Tom’s side. Huck knew that Jim would say that, because he knows that Jim “was white inside,” and, while Jim tends to Tom, Huck goes off to fetch a doctor.

Tom idiotically reveals in his wound, which he thinks is fun and exciting. It was his plan that endangered his friends and got him shot, and it’s because he got shot that Jim feels duty-bound to risk his own freedom by staying with Tom. Huck’s comment that Jim is white inside at once acknowledges Jim’s equality, but also insidiously suggests that people who are “black inside,” “so to speak, are bad. Huck is able to see past society’s rules to see Jim’s basic humanity, but he still accepts his society’s larger social laws that to be human means to be white. This dichotomy strikes the reader as ridiculous—the reader can generalize from the fact of Jim’s basic humanity to all slave’s basic humanity. Twain uses Huck’s inability to do the same to actually underscore the point, and further condemn Southern society for its cruel, ridiculous blindness.

CHAPTER 41

Huck fetches a nice old doctor, telling him that Tom is his brother and that, while the two were out hunting, Tom had a bad dream and kicked his gun, which shot him. When the doctor asks Huck to tell him again how Tom was wounded, Huck says that “He had a dream...and it shot him.” The doctor replies: “Singular dream.”

The doctor assumes that Huck misspeaks when he says that it was Tom’s dream that shot him, but in a sense this is exactly what happened: Tom’s fealty to his romantic, impractical dream of Jim’s escape led the farmers who shot Tom to be on the lookout in the first place.

It is noble that Huck is always concerned with protecting Jim whenever he can, just as Jim protected him during their journey on the river. But Huck is not always free to act as he will. For example, he would go with the doctor, but the canoe can only carry one person. Huck’s freedom is limited in part by external circumstances.

The neighbors are right to think that a person who follow’s Tom escape plan is crazy, or at least, in Tom’s case, disastrously immature. Note, also, that the neighbors demonstrate their racism in thinking it must have been other slaves who helped Jim, not even considering that Huck and Tom could be responsible.

Aunt Sally grows increasingly worried that “Sid” (i.e., Tom) hasn’t come home yet. Huck volunteers to fetch him, but Aunt Sally tells him he’ll do no such thing. Uncle Silas goes out to look for “Sid,” but he doesn’t even come across his path. After Aunt Sally tucks Huck into bed, she speaks with him and begins to cry. Huck feels so bad about making her worry that he promises her that he won’t go off to look for “Sid” despite himself, and he keeps his word.

CHAPTER 42

The next morning, as Huck and the Phelps sit around the breakfast table, Aunt Sally sees Tom on a mattress along with the doctor. Jim with his hands tied, and a bunch of people. Aunt Sally is profoundly relieved to find that Tom is alive. Men in the mob say they should hang Jim as a warning to other slaves, but others say his owner might come and then they would have to pay for him; so they all refrain.

The men in the mob also cuss at Jim and strike him and put him back in the cabin enchained, but Tom’s doctor tells them they shouldn’t be rougher with Jim than they have to be, because Jim faithfully helped to treat Tom and risked his own freedom to do it. The men in the mob soften up on Jim and thank him for helping the doctor.

Tom begins to recover, and comes fully to as Aunt Sally and Huck sit at his bedside. He joyfully recounts to an incredulous Aunt Sally how he and Huck helped Jim to escape. However, Tom’s joy gives way to grave disappointment when he learns that Jim is back in bondage; he tells Aunt Sally that Jim is as free as any creature that walks this earth. He also reveals that he’s known all along that Miss Watson had set Jim free two months ago in her will.

Tom’s insistence that Jim is as free as any creature on earth seems to be the product of a change of heart, one maybe brought about by Jim’s self-sacrifice for Tom. But then we learn that Tom is speaking in a legal sense. Not only has he delayed Jim’s freedom with his plan, Tom has also treated Jim like a slave even though he was legally free, all for the sake of self-indulgent adventure. It really was a game for Tom, with no stakes. Tom was freeing a man who was already free.

At last, Tom and Huck’s mess is sorted out by Aunt Polly’s arrival. If Tom is an agent of deception and dangerous fancies, Aunt Polly is his opposite, an agent of truth and cold hard facts. It is good that Aunt Polly is back in Tom’s life, we think, because he could benefit from a stern reality check.

When not in the company of Tom, Huck is restored to his good senses. He realizes how needlessly stressful Tom’s plan has been for the Phelps, and with noble self-discipline he declining to act on his own impulse to go to Tom for Aunt Sally’s sake. Tom is a good friend, but not a good influence, on Huck.
CHAPTER 43

When Huck catches Tom in private, he asks Tom what his plan was if they had successfully escaped with Jim. Tom says he planned to have more adventures with Huck and Jim before revealing to Jim that he was free. After that, he would have compensated Jim for his lost time and reunited him with his family in style. Huck thinks it’s just as well that things turned out as they did.

It is small comfort that Tom recognizes he was denying Jim precious time with his family as a free man, but that does not change the fact that Tom exploited Jim. Huck recognizes all of this, and that they are better off having cut the games short so that Jim can enjoy his true freedom with dignity.

When Jim is unchained, and the Phelpses and Aunt Polly, upon learning how Jim helped Tom, take very good care of the newly freed man, Tom also gives Jim forty dollars for being such a patient prisoner, such that Jim can remind Huck that he predicted he would be rich, and now he is.

Jim’s rewards for helping Tom seem paltry in comparison to the time he lost and the hardships he suffered. Jim, however, rejoices, maybe because it is in his character to make the best out of a bad situation, or maybe because Twain’s representation of Jim here is in some ways racist and dehumanizing. (There are many critics by the way, who would argue that the novel is fantastic up until the appearance of Tom Sawyer, and who argue that Twain didn’t really know how to end the novel and ended up reintroducing Tom and focusing more on the broad comedy of the escape, and mocking Tom’s romantic ideas, than with his earlier focus on Huck’s development and poking holes in the institution of slavery).

Eventually, Tom heals completely. Huck is glad he doesn’t have anything more to write about, because, he says, making a book was hard work. He says that he needs to head out to the Territory soon; Aunt Sally is going to “sivilize” him, which he can’t stand, because, he says, “I been there before.”

Just as Jim is freed, so too is Huck with the knowledge that he has enough money to get away from society and do what he wants in the Territory, which, note, as a region not yet transformed into states has fewer rules, including rules of slavery. He also learns that he is once and for all free of Pap’s tyranny, because Pap, through his own debauchery, has passed away.

Huck ends his book where he began: with the prospect of being “sivilized.” But, being the restless and freedom-loving spirit he is, Huck refuses to do what he’s already done, and so he decides to pursue freedom in a place he hasn’t been yet, a place that is itself half-formed and semi-lawless, a place where a quick-witted boy can adapt to situations as needed and follow his own heart.

Summary & Analysis