

# THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER STUDY GUIDE

by Alisa Thomas

For the novel by  
Mark Twain



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**The Adventures of Tom Sawyer Study Guide**

A Progeny Press Study Guide

by Alisa Thomas

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## Synopsis

Tom Sawyer is one of the most popular protagonists in the history of American literature. Although Tom resides in a small, ordinary Missouri town, his daring exploits land him in the center of many thrilling adventures.

Tom lives with his Aunt Polly, an elderly woman who dearly loves her nephew but struggles to control her mischievous charge. Tom loathes going to school or church. He would rather spend time immersed in fictional plots or romancing Becky Thatcher, the new girl in town. Tom envies the life of Huckleberry Finn, the town outcast. Huck, homeless and essentially an orphan, can do whatever he pleases and doesn't have to obey anyone.

While testing a wart-removal cure in the town graveyard, Tom and Huck witness the brutal murder of Dr. Robinson. Both Tom and Huck wrestle with feelings of guilt when the wrong man, Muff Potter, is prosecuted for the crime. However, the boys initially hide their shared knowledge out of fear of retribution from the guilty party, Injun Joe.

Bothered by his conscience and the "unjust" treatment he receives at home, Tom plots an escape from his gloomy existence. Tom, his friend Joe Harper, and Huckleberry Finn run away to a nearby island where they decide to become pirates. The residents of St. Petersburg are convinced that the boys must have drowned in the Mississippi River and grief consumes the entire village. Tom's dramatic plan to walk into his own funeral causes him to become the focal point of community life.

The normally quiet town is brought to life again during Muff Potter's murder trial. Tom remains deeply troubled that an innocent man may face the ultimate punishment for the act and eventually makes a significant decision at great personal cost.

Though still worried that Injun Joe may seek revenge, Tom and Huck become distracted from their concern with a new exploit: they decide to search for buried treasure. But when an unexpected encounter with Injun Joe reveals a vast treasure, the two boys set aside their fears and focus their efforts on claiming Injun Joe's amazing treasure for themselves.

## Chapters 16–20

### Vocabulary:

For the following vocabulary selections, consider how each word is used in the context of the sentence. Write a brief definition of each term in your own words, then write down the dictionary definition.

1. “But Tom was uneasy nevertheless, and was alarmed to see Joe go sullenly on with his dressing. And then it was discomforting to see Huck eyeing Joe’s preparations so wistfully, and keeping up such an ominous silence. Presently, without a parting word, Joe began to wade off towards the Illinois shore.”

**sullenly**

Your Definition:

Dictionary Definition:

**wistfully**

Your Definition:

Dictionary Definition:

**ominous**

Your Definition:

Dictionary Definition:

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2. “So Huck made pipes and filled them. These novices had never smoked anything before but cigars made of grape-vine, and they ‘bit’ the tongue, and were not considered manly, anyway.”

Your Definition:

Dictionary Definition:

3. “Beyond the light of the fire, everything was swallowed up in the blackness of darkness. Presently there came a quivering glow that vaguely revealed the foliage for a moment and then vanished. By-and-by another came, a little stronger. Then another. Then a faint moan came sighing through the branches of the forest, and the boys felt a fleeting breath upon their cheeks, and shuddered with the fancy that the Spirit of the Night had gone by.”

Your Definition:

Dictionary Definition:

4. “The villagers began to gather, loitering a moment in the vestibule to converse in whispers about the sad event.”

Your Definition:

Dictionary Definition:

5. “Aunt Polly, Mary, and the Harpers threw themselves upon their restored ones, smothered them with kisses and poured out thanksgivings, while poor Huck stood abashed and uncomfortable, not knowing exactly what to do or where to hide from so many unwelcoming eyes.”

Your Definition:

Dictionary Definition:

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6. “At school the children made so much of him and Joe, and delivered such eloquent admiration from their eyes, that the two heroes were not long in becoming insufferably ‘stuck-up.’”

Your Definition:

Dictionary Definition:

7. “Then she sat moody, with wounded pride, till the bell rang. She roused up, now, with a vindictive cast in her eye, and gave her plaited tails a shake, and said she knew what she’d do.”

Your Definition:

Dictionary Definition:

8. “At recess Tom continued his flirtation with Amy with jubilant self-satisfaction. And he kept drifting about to find Becky and lacerate her with the performance.”

Your Definition:

Dictionary Definition:

### **Descriptive Writing:**

Twain’s description of the storm in Chapter 17 is one of the most intense passages in the novel. Twain expertly describes the gradual approach of the storm, the storm’s increase in intensity, the climax of the storm, and the gradual retreat as the storm diminishes. Notice, however, that in his description, Twain rarely uses the words “thunder,” “lightning,” “wind,” or even “storm.”

Reread this passage noting the words Twain uses in his description. For each of the elements below, write down a different word or phrase Twain uses to describe this thing.

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1. **Thunder:**

- 
- 
- 

2. **Lightning:**

- 
- 
- 

3. **Wind:**

- 
- 
- 

4. **Storm:**

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- 
- 

**Questions:**

1. What sentiment begins to undermine the joy of living on the island?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Why does Tom attempt to persuade Joe and Huck to remain on the island for a longer span of time?



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3. What makes Huck feel “abashed and uncomfortable” at the funeral? What does Tom do when he notices Huck’s discomfort? How does Aunt Polly respond?
  
4. What does this small scene tell us about the characters of Tom and Aunt Polly?
  
5. Why does Aunt Polly hesitate before looking in Tom’s jacket for the piece of bark? How does she respond when she finds the bark?

**Analysis:**

6. From what do Tom and Joe get the greatest pleasure when they experiment with smoking? Why do you think this is?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. How does Tom treat Becky when they meet after the funeral? Why?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. How do Tom and Becky each attempt to make the other feel jealous? Do these attempts work?

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9. What does Alfred Temple do when he realizes that Becky “had simply made a convenience of him to vent her spite on Tom Sawyer”?

**Dig Deeper:**

10. What do each of the following verses say about jealousy?
  - a. Proverbs 27:4—
  - b. 1 Corinthians 3:1–3—
  - c. Galatians 5:19–23—
11. Because jealousy is a feeling, (as opposed to an action) it’s sometimes hard for us to have control over it. We can, however, control how we choose to respond to these feelings. Think of a time you felt jealous. What caused this feeling? What was your response?
12. We need to learn to recognize feelings of jealousy as they arise. What are some proper responses to feelings of jealousy?

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13. Tom describes his visit home to Aunt Polly as a dream he'd had while he was on the island. Though this pleases Aunt Polly, she confronts him later when she discovers that he had lied about the dream.

His smartness of the morning had seemed to Tom a good joke before, and very ingenious. It merely looked mean and shabby now. He hung his head and could not think of anything to say for a moment; then he said:

“Auntie, I wish I hadn't done it—but I didn't think.”

“Oh, child, you never think. You never think of anything but your own selfishness.”

Consider Tom's actions so far in the novel. Is Aunt Polly right? Does Tom carefully weigh the consequences before acting or does he act on a whim, as Aunt Polly says, without thinking? Use examples from the text to support your answer. As you continue reading the novel, pay attention to how Tom makes decisions, comes to conclusions, or decides to act.

**For Discussion:**

Aunt Polly is reluctant to believe Tom when he tells her that he had planned to leave her a message on a piece a bark, and had kissed her while she slept.

“Poor boy, I reckon he's lied about it—but it's a blessed, blessed lie, there's such comfort in it. I hope the Lord—I *know* the Lord will forgive him because it was such good-heartedness in him to tell it. . . . It's a good lie—it's a good lie. I won't let it grieve me.”

Aunt Polly declares that if Tom was lying, then it is a “blessed lie” and a “good lie.” Is it always wrong to lie? Do you think lies can be good? If so, under what circumstances?

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**Optional Writing Project:**

Write the pastor's sermon for the boys' funeral. You may write it either as you feel he *should* have given it, or write it as he is described as having given it.

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### *Dig Deeper:*

12. These verses teach that it is important to discipline a child—even using corporal punishment if necessary—in order to keep him from sin.
13. Answers will vary. Parents are also commanded to raise their children to know what is right. (See, for example, Proverbs 22:6.) Aunt Polly sees it as her duty to bring Tom up right. If Tom misbehaves, she sees it as her own failing.
14. Answers may vary. Regardless of their biological relationship, Aunt Polly is the person responsible for raising Tom. Therefore, Tom should obey her as he would a parent.
15. Answers will vary.
16. Answers may vary. This is the first place—but not the last—where Twain employs a satirical tone in his novel. He depicts a congregation preoccupied with appearing pious by humorously overemphasizing their piety. (“ . . . the ladies would lift up their hands and let them fall helplessly in their laps, and ‘wall’ their eyes, and shake their heads, as much as to say, ‘Words cannot express it; it is too beautiful, *too* beautiful for this mortal earth.’”) He jokes about the behavior of the choir. (“There was once a church choir that was not ill-bred, but I have forgotten where it was, now.”) He points out the “queer custom” of the lengthy reading of the church bulletin “till it seemed that the list would stretch out to the crack of doom.” He emphasizes Tom’s restlessness during the long, detailed prayer, and the entire congregation’s boredom during the sermon. It takes the arrival of a dog to bring any real joy to the congregation.
17. Answers will vary.
18. a. This verse clarifies the value of sacrificial giving as a means of glorifying the Lord’s holy nature. b. Humility is necessary to truly give honor to God. This passage emphasizes the value of acknowledging His complete sovereignty over all aspects of our lives. c. This verse discusses the need for pure motivation as one comes before the Lord.

### *Chapters 6–10*

#### *Vocabulary:*

1. ~~fringes~~, fetters; 2. ~~appeasing~~, lugubrious; 3. ~~smelly~~, odious; 4. ~~outrigger~~, pariah; 5. ~~generosity~~, ostentation; 6. ~~clumsily~~, stealthily; 7. ~~expectations~~, incantations; 8. ~~place~~, juncture

#### *Similes and Metaphors:*

1. (as) The way Tom felt is being compared to the feelings of an astronomer.
2. (like) Clods of dirt being thrown at Sid are being compared to a hailstorm.
3. (like) The rising sun beaming on the village is being compared to the giving of a benediction.
4. (as) The size of his cravat (necktie) is being compared to the size of a bank note.
5. (like) The shape of his boot-toes is being compared to the turned-up tips of sleigh-runners.
6. The looks Aunt Polly is giving are being compared to lightning.
7. There are actually two metaphors in this sentence. First, Tom’s mood is compared to storm clouds, and then Mary’s disposition is being compared to sunshine and song.
8. The attention people are giving to Judge Thatcher, or his feeling of importance, is being compared to the sun.
9. The surprise of Tom’s request is being compared to the appearance of a thunderbolt out of a clear sky.
10. Tom’s infatuation with Becky Thatcher is being compared to an act of religious devotion. Becky Thatcher is described as a “sacred presence.” The quiet of the scene is “holy calm.” Candles add to the sacred atmosphere. The maid-servant’s voice is said to “profane” the calm. Tom Sawyer is described as a “prone martyr.”
11. Aunt Polly’s family worship time is being compared to the building of a large mountainous structure. Twain describes the prayer as being “built from the ground up” and being built with “solid courses” of scripture. The scripture is wedded together with a “thin mortar” of originality, and Aunt Polly is described as delivering her words from “the summit” of this structure.

#### *Questions:*

1. Tom pretends to be sick as a result of a sore toe. When this doesn’t convince his aunt, he tells her that his loose tooth aches. She solves the problem by pulling the tooth.
2. Tom finds himself preoccupied by thoughts of Becky Thatcher and his attempts to woo her. Later, he and Joe Harper occupy themselves by playing with a tick.
3. He admits that he was previously engaged to Amy Lawrence.
4. Tom and Huck go to the graveyard to try out Huck’s cure for warts.
5. The three men are graverobbing.

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6. Injun Joe and Muff Potter demand more money from Dr. Robinson for digging up Hoss Williams' body. Dr. Robinson refuses. Injun Joe threatens Dr. Robinson, and the doctor strikes him. Muff Potter struggles with the doctor. When the doctor knocks down Muff Potter, Injun Joe stabs and kills the doctor with Muff Potter's knife.

7. Though Tom didn't know it, Sid was awake when he came home. Sid must have told Aunt Polly that Tom was out all night.

### *Analysis:*

8. Tom envies Huckleberry Finn's independent lifestyle. Huckleberry does not have to answer to any authority regarding his behavior. "In a word, everything that goes to make life precious, [Huckleberry Finn] had."

9. Answers will vary. Huckleberry Finn's father is a drunkard. He has no family who cares for him. He has no home. He is treated poorly by members of the community. The only clothes he gets are cast-offs, and it shows.

10. Answers may vary. Twain is foreshadowing Tom's "temporary death" when it is assumed that he has drowned in the river. (Chapters 14–18.)

11. The mood of Chapter 9 is one of fear and foreboding. Students' examples will vary. Some suggestions: "Old beams began to crack mysteriously. The stairs creaked faintly." The "howl of a far-off dog rose on the night air." A cat begins a "melancholy caterwauling." The grass and weeds at the cemetery "grew rank." The old graves were "sunken in." The markers were "worm-eaten boards," that "staggered" over the graves. Wind "moaned through the trees." The solemnity and silence "oppressed" Tom and Huck. The moon exposes the "pallid face" of a corpse.

12. Tom and Huck are concerned that if either of them talks about what they saw, Injun Joe would kill them both.

13. It's easy to understand why Tom and Huck desire to keep this matter to themselves as a result of intense fear. However, if they keep silent, a murderer will be in a position to strike again and an innocent man may lose his life.

### *Dig Deeper:*

14. Superstition is defined as a belief or practice resulting from ignorance, fear of the unknown, trust in magic or chance, or a false conception of causation.

15. Answers will vary. Some suggestions follow: Huckleberry Finn thinks that a dead cat can serve as a wart remover and that old Mother Hopkins is a witch. Tom says that dipping your hand in a "spunk-water stump" and saying the proper words will remove warts. Tom also suggests using a bean to remove warts. Again, the proper words must be said. Tom believes that if one buries a marble with the proper incantations, then leaves it alone for a fortnight, all the marbles one ever lost will be gathered together in that spot. When it doesn't work, he believes that a witch has interfered. Tom attempts to gain knowledge from a "doodle-bug." Tom and Huck believe that when a stray dog howls near someone, then it means that person is going to die.

16. Answers will vary. You may need to prompt students by suggesting that there are some things considered to be omens of good luck or bad luck.

17. Like the other superstitions, their blood oath has no genuine substance, yet for them it is the most serious commitment they can make to one another. Simply promising wasn't enough. "Oh, no, that wouldn't do for this. That's good enough for little rubbishy common things . . . but there orter be writing 'bout a big thing like this. And blood." As with the other superstitions, Tom is concerned that the blood oath be done right to make it binding.

18. These verses command us not to swear by anything to add weight to our promises, but rather to let our words alone be sufficient.

19. The verses from 1 Timothy command us to have nothing to do with godless myths, or "old wives' tales." We should neither believe superstitions nor pass them along to others. The passage from Philippians encourages us to concentrate on those things we know to be true, noble, right, pure, etc. Paul challenges believers to put into practice anything they have learned or seen in him.

### *For Discussion:*

20. Some things to consider: Is a specific practice commanded by or supported by scripture? Are people putting their faith in the practice or object, or are they putting their faith in God?

## *Chapters 11–15*

### *Vocabulary:*

Sentences will vary. Accept sentences that demonstrate understanding of the word. 1. unemotional or stoic; 2. gaunt or excessively wearied; 3. a wicked figure; 4. inspiring fear or wonder; 5. blatantly disrespectful; 6. stolen; 7. bold or lacking taste; 8. excessively hungry; 9. ornamental dress; 10. noteworthy or distinguished