

# THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN STUDY GUIDE

by Greg Power

For the novel by  
Mark Twain



## Table of Contents

Note to Instructor .....	4
Synopsis .....	5
About the Author .....	7
Suggestions for Pre-reading Activities .....	11
Chapters 1–5 .....	13
Chapters 6 & 7 .....	20
Chapters 8–11 .....	22
Chapters 12–16 .....	27
Chapters 17 & 18 .....	35
Chapters 19 & 20 .....	38
Chapters 21–23 .....	42
Chapters 24–30 .....	45
Chapter 31 .....	51
Chapters 32–43 .....	55
Essays .....	60
Ideas for Final Projects .....	63
Additional Resources .....	65
Answer Key .....	Separate File

## Synopsis

Huckleberry Finn, the outcast of the Mississippi River town of St. Petersburg, Missouri, son of a drunkard, habitual truant, smoker and liar, is going to be civilized by the widow and her sister, Miss Watson, even if it kills him. Though he chafes under their regime, bit by bit Huck reforms: he stops smoking in the house, he eats with a fork, lays off swearing around the widow, learns to read and write, sleeps in a bed, and even wears shoes when the weather warrants it. When Huck's Pap returns from downriver somewhere, all the widow's good work is undone. Pap takes Huck off to a cabin in the woods and he soon backslides into his wild ways. Huck would be happy if it weren't for Pap's drinking, his beatings, and his threats to kill Huck.

One day when Pap leaves Huck alone and heads to town to see about getting his hands on Huck's \$6,000.00 (Huck's share of the money he and Tom Sawyer took from the robbers in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*), Huck escapes. He makes it seem as though he has been murdered and his body thrown into the river. On Jackson's Island he meets Miss Watson's slave, Jim. Fearful that Miss Watson was going to sell him down river to New Orleans, Jim has escaped. Together the two fugitives find a raft and drift downstream. Their plan is to drift to the mouth of the Ohio River at Cairo, Illinois. There they will sell the raft and buy riverboat passage up the Ohio to freedom.

Their plans founder when they bypass Cairo in the fog. Unable to take the raft upstream, they continue drifting south. When the raft is run over by a steamboat, Huck swims to shore and soon finds himself caught in the crossfire of a decades-old feud between the Grangerford and the Shepherdson families.

Eventually, both Huck and Jim find their way back to the raft and continue downstream. Their idyllic world, seemingly safe from the violence and hypocrisy of the little river towns they pass, is soon invaded by two con men, "the king" and "the duke," who promptly drag Huck and Jim into their swindles. Stealing from camp-meetings, staging grotesque or obscene parodies of Shakespeare, the two charlatans appeal to and profit from the worst in human nature. Huck grows increasingly disgusted with them, but not until they plan to defraud three orphan girls out of their

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn Study Guide*

late uncle's money does Huck act. Although he informs on them, the plan fails, and the two escape again to Huck and Jim's raft, one step ahead of the mob.

Eventually, the king and the duke betray even Huck and Jim. They sell Jim to a local farmer, Silas Phelps, who plans to return him to his owner and collect the reward. "After all this long journey, and after all we'd done for them scoundrels, here was it all come to nothing," bemoans Huck, "everything all busted up and ruined, because they could have the heart to serve Jim such a trick as that, and make him a slave again, and amongst strangers, too, for forty dirty dollars."

The last fifth of the novel describes Huck's attempts to rescue Jim from a return to slavery. Though his conscience bothers him about breaking a central taboo of southern society, that against freeing slaves, Huck's heart sends him a different message: that Jim is a man with all the emotions and hopes of any man, white or black, and as such Jim is as deserving of freedom as Huck is.

## Chapters 12–16

### Vocabulary:

#### *Part 1: Riverboat Jargon*

It is said that the Eskimo have thirty different names for snow. Since the Eskimo depend for their livelihood on a close knowledge of the workings of nature, this specialized vocabulary helps them to understand and communicate clearly about their world. Such a specialized vocabulary is called a group's *lexicon* or *jargon*. Many of the vocabulary words in *Huckleberry Finn* are jargon that deal with the river and steamboats. Having grown up along the river, Jim and Huck would be familiar with these terms.

Using a dictionary, write the definition of the technical terms below in the blanks provided. Several have been done for you.

1. Aft: At, in, toward, or near a ship's stern.
2. Backwater (verb): Paddle backwards
3. Berth:
4. Bilgewater:
5. Bitt: Posts to which lines are tied
6. Boiler Deck: The first deck above the main deck on a riverboat; it contained staterooms and was primarily for passenger use.



*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn Study Guide*

**Questions:**

1. In Chapter 12 Huck and Jim do some serious thinking about the morality of “borrowing.” What conclusion do they come to? Do you find any flaws in their reasoning? What point do you think Twain was trying to make in this passage?
2. On board the sinking *Walter Scott*, Twain presents the reader with another moral dilemma in progress: Huck hears Jake and Bill discussing whether to murder Jim Turner, who is himself a murderer. What decision does Jake Packard make? Is it really a “moral” decision, as he claims it is? What point do you think Twain is trying to make in this passage?
3. In dealing with the thieves on board the *Walter Scott*, how does Huck demonstrate to the reader that he has a good heart, that he is compassionate? What moral reasoning does he use in choosing to help the thieves?
4. When Huck talks to the watchman in Chapter 13, what story about himself does he make up? (This is the second persona that Huck adopts in the novel.)
5. What is the apparent fate of the thieves?

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn Study Guide*

14. Huck concludes that whether he does “right” (turning in Jim to the slave hunters) or “wrong” (continuing to help Jim to escape) his conscience will still make him feel bad. What does Huck conclude he ought to do? Why do you think that either way Huck’s conscience bothers him ?
  
15. How do you, personally, tell right from wrong?

Have you been in a situation where it was hard for you to tell right from wrong? Describe the situation. How did you decide what to do or what to conclude about right and wrong?

16. Read Job 32:7–9; Psalm 25:8, 9; and Romans 2:12–16. According to these verses, how can we tell right from wrong?

**Writing Project:**

Twain set aside the manuscript for *Huckleberry Finn* after the sinking of the raft. It was not clear to the author where the story ought to go from this point. He did not resume writing for several years. If you were Mark Twain, where would you take the story from this point? In two or three paragraphs, summarize how you would finish the novel. Remember, Huck and Jim’s reason for traveling down river was to escape the Widow Douglas, Pap, and slavery.

## *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn Study Guide Answer Key*

temperance, a dancing school, yellocution [elocution or public speaking], missionarying, mesmerizing, doctoring, and fortune-telling, none of which are successful.

2. Supposedly, Providence is showing Huck that God is always watching him, and that eventually his sins will be found out and punished.

3. Huck blames his “wickedness” in helping Jim to escape to a poor upbringing: he’d never been properly taught that stealing is a sin. The passage is ironic because it is precisely because he has not been totally schooled in the values of southern, slave-holding society that he is able to see Jim as a person and not as someone’s property. Twain again is saying that civilization is corrupting; Huck’s relative innocence is due to his being an outcast from civilization.

4. As Huck says, “You can’t pray a lie.” For him, to repent of helping Jim to escape would be a lie, because in his heart he does not think it is wrong. The passage could also be read as Twain’s rejection not only of southern values but of their god—the God of the Bible, southerners would insist. If Huck believes that he will “go to hell” for helping Jim escape, it suggests not only that the social order in which Huck lives is corrupt, but that the universe itself is fundamentally unjust.

5. Huck tells Miss Watson where she can find Jim, to return him to a life of slavery (or more specifically, to sell him in New Orleans, as she had initially said she would do). Huck hopes to ease his conscience by writing the letter.

6. Huck remembers their happiness together on the raft, Jim’s kindnesses to him, Jim’s friendship, and Huck’s kindness to Jim. “. . . somehow I couldn’t seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind.”

7. Huck has to decide between his upbringing and his heart. His upbringing tells him that all the moral, educated, Christian people, (and perhaps God himself) believe that owning slaves is decent and respectable. Huck’s heart and his experience tell him that slavery is evil. Huck’s upbringing tells him that people who do as he has done will go to hell. Twain pictures Huck’s battle as one between Huck’s “conscience” and his heart.

8. Huck chooses to follow his heart: he will help Jim to escape, and therefore he expects to be condemned to hell. He tears up the letter to Miss Watson.

### *Analysis:*

9. “All right, then, I’ll go to hell’—and tore it up.” It is the turning point of the novel because by his actions Huck has rejected several core values of southern civilization. He has, as it were, torn up his contract with civilization, rejecting its dictates in favor of the teachings of his heart. From this point on, the novel’s conclusion is inevitable; either Huck succeeds in freeing Jim, or he fails and he and Jim are punished. The hero of the novel has chosen sides, regardless of the outcome. Were Huck to send the letter, he would be reaffirming the values of his society (and incidentally, making the entire trip down river with Jim pointless).

10. A few questions to consider: 1) Will Jim be found and freed? How? 2) Where can Jim and Huck go after Jim is freed? 3) What about Pap, Miss Watson, and the widow? Do they simply disappear from the story? 4) What about Tom Sawyer? Will he always think Huck has been murdered? 5) What about Jim’s wife and children? 6) Do the king and the duke also simply fade out of the story?

11. Answers will vary.

12. Answers will vary.