

# [The boy’s coming of age in the mark when the novel begins, huck is not](https://assignbuster.com/the-boys-coming-of-age-in-the-mark-when-the-novel-begins-huck-is-not/)

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, by Mark Twain, is a novel about ayoung boy’s coming of age in the Missouri of the mid-1800’s.

The maincharacter, Huckleberry Finn, spends much time in the novel floatingdown the Mississippi River on a raft with a runaway slave named Jim. Before he does so, however, Huck spends some time in the fictional townof St. Petersburg where a number of people attempt to influence him. Before the novel begins, Huck Finn has led a life of absolutefreedom. His drunken and often missing father has never paid muchattention to him; his mother is dead and so, when the novel begins, Huckis not used to following any rules. The book’s opening finds Huck livingwith the Widow Douglas and her sister, Miss Watson. Both women arefairly old and are really somewhat incapable of raising a rebellious boylike Huck Finn. Nevertheless, they attempt to make Huck into what theybelieve will be a better boy.

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Huck, who has never had to follow many rules in his life, finds the demands the women place upon him constraining and the life withthem lonely. As a result, soon after he first moves in with them, he runsaway. He soon comes back, but, even though he becomes somewhat comfortablewith his new life as the months go by, Huck never really enjoys the life ofmanners, religion, and education that the Widow and her sister impose uponhim. Huck believes he will find some freedom with Tom Sawyer. Tomis a boy of Huck’s age who promises Huck and other boys of the town a lifeof adventure. Huck is eager to join Tom Sawyer’s Gang because he feelsthat doing so will allow him to escape the somewhat boring life he leadswith the Widow Douglas.

Unfortunately, such an escape does not occur. TomSawyer promises much–robbing stages, murdering and ransoming people, kidnaping beautiful women–but none of this comes to pass. Huck finds outtoo late that Tom’s adventures are imaginary: that raiding a caravan of” A-rabs” really means terrorizing young children on a Sunday school picnic, that stolen “ joolry” is nothing more than turnips or rocks. Huck isdisappointed that the adventures Tom promises are not real and so, alongwith the other members, he resigns from the gang. Another person who tries to get Huckleberry Finn to change isPap, Huck’s father.

Pap is one of the most astonishing figures in all ofAmerican literature as he is completely antisocial and wishes to undo allof the civilizing effects that the Widow and Miss Watson have attempted toinstill in Huck. Pap is a mess: he is unshaven; his hair is uncut andhangs like vines in front of his face; his skin, Huck says, is white like afish’s belly or like a tree toad’s. Pap’s savage appearance reflects hisfeelings as he demands that Huck quit school, stop reading, and avoidchurch. Huck is able to stay away from Pap for a while, but Pap kidnapsHuck three or four months after Huck starts to live with the Widow andtakes him to a lonely cabin deep in the Missouri woods. Here, Huck enjoys, once again, the freedom that he had prior to the beginning of the book.

Hecan smoke, “ laze around,” swear, and, in general, do what he wants to do. However, as he did with the Widow and with Tom, Huck begins to becomedissatisfied with this life. Pap is “ too handy with the hickory” and Hucksoon realizes that he will have to escape from the cabin if he wishes toremain alive. As a result of his concern, Huck makes it appear as if he iskilled in the cabin while Pap is away, and leaves to go to a remote islandin the Mississippi River, Jackson’s Island.

It is after he leaves his father’s cabin that Huck joins yetanother important influence in his life: Miss Watson’s slave, Jim. Priorto Huck’s leaving, Jim has been a minor character in the novel–he has beenshown being fooled by Tom Sawyer and telling Huck’s fortune. Huck findsJim on Jackson’s Island because the slave has run away–he has overheard aconversation that he will soon be sold to New Orleans. Soon after joiningJim on Jackson’s Island, Huck begins to realize that Jim has more talentsand intelligence than Huck has been aware of. Jim knows “ all kinds ofsigns” about the future, people’s personalities, and weather forecasting. Huck finds this kind of information necessary as he and Jim drift down theMississippi on a raft. As important, Huck feels a comfort with Jim that hehas not felt with the other major characters in the novel. With Jim, Huckcan enjoy the best aspects of his earlier influences.

As does the Widow, Jim allows Huck security, but Jim is not as confining as is the Widow. Like Tom Sawyer, Jim is intelligent but his intelligence is not asintimidating or as imaginary as is Tom’s. As does Pap, Jim allows Huckfreedom, but he does it in a loving, rather than an uncaring, fashion. Thus, early, in their relationship on Jackson’s Island, Huck says to Jim,” This is nice.

I wouldn’t want to be nowhere else but here.” This feelingis in marked contrast with Huck’s feelings concerning other people in theearly part of the novel where he always is uncomfortable and wishes toleave them. At the conclusion of chapter 11 in The Adventures ofHuckleberry Finn, Huck and Jim are forced to leave Jackson’s Island becauseHuck discovers that people are looking for the runaway slave. Prior toleaving, Huck tells Jim, “ They’re after us.” Clearly, the people are afterJim, but Huck has already identified with Jim and has begun to care forhim. This stated empathy shows that the two outcasts will have asuccessful and rewarding friendship as they drift down the river as thenovel continues.