

# Huckleberry finn: an american classic, past and present

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Huckleberry Finn: An American Classic, Past and Present The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, by Mark Twain, is and has been one of the most widely praised, widely criticized novels of American Literature of all time.

Suzanne Bilyeu states, " In March 1885, the Library Committee in Concord, Massachusetts, reached a decision: Mark Twain's new book - Adventures of Huckleberry Finn - would be banned from the town's public library," (Bilyeu 18). This represents only one of myriad cases of Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn being banned from public libraries over the years. The novel has been one of the most controversial stories in American Literature, due to debates over its use of coarse language and, by today's standards, extremely demeaning racial slurs (Bilyeu 18). Critics of teaching the novel state that it can be extremely offensive to young black students today, seeing the repetition of the word " nigger" throughout the text, and cite the use of coarse linguistics as a criticism of the novel (Alberti 919). Huckleberry Finn must be taught in schools today because the use of the word " nigger" was not intended to be a racial slur, its use of coarse language adds to it being a classic piece of American literature, and young people can learn many life lessons from the novel.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn must continue to be taught in schools because the use, and repetition, of the word " nigger" is not meant to be a racial slur. The Education Digest article The teacher's Lounge: Why we still Need Huckleberry Finn, states: " Remember, first [and foremost], that ' nigger' is Huck's, not Twain's, label for blacks," (Why we still Need Huckleberry Finn 31). Quite simply, far too often we forget that it is not out of hatred that Twain uses this word, but rather to enhance the " realness" of <https://assignbuster.com/huckleberry-finn-an-american-classic-past-and-present/>

the story; Huck was raised in the deep American south, and calling a black man a “nigger” was not thought of as a racial slur in those times. The word “nigger” was just the only label for a black person at the time (Why We still Need Huckleberry Finn 31). In the novel, Huck states, “He was a mighty good nigger, Jim was,” (Twain 117). Huck complements Jim here, and calls him a “nigger”, in the same sentence.

If the use of the word “nigger” were intended as a racial slur, then why would Huck call him one when complementing Jim? Simple answer is, he would not do that. To add to that, this is the turning point in Huck’s inner psyche in which he finally starts to think of Jim as an equal. In addition to this, the overall theme of the work is important as well. Twain broke new ground through Huckleberry Finn, showing blacks for the first time as real people, with feelings and emotions. Saying that Twain had any motives of racial discrimination is ridiculous, when his novel took so many strides toward equality for blacks. Twain was being satirical of the American psyche of the time because throughout the story Huck, a mere teenage boy, realizes that black people are people too, and they have feelings just like white people.

The satire comes in when one contemplates the fact that the rest of the country still has not completely come to terms with that fact. Second, Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* must be taught in schools because the use of coarse language throughout the story adds to, rather than detracts from, the effectiveness of the work. Twain set off writing *Huckleberry Finn* with one goal in mind, write a true American piece of

literature. The use of coarse language and speech written in dialects adds to the essence of this being an American piece of literature. If the entire book were written in proper English, the feel of the book would be lost and the connection with the time severed. Not to mention, the story would be totally unbelievable.

People do not speak in perfect English all the time and especially in this novel if they did the back-story just would not make sense. Bilyeu states, "The committee [of Libraries of Massachusetts] was appalled by the author's use of bad grammar and rough language," (Bilyeu 18). The fact of the matter is, while this committee's ruling is still commonly cited today in attack of the novel, who cares what a committee in Massachusetts said over 125 years ago? The Teacher's Digest sums this point up well when it asserts that, "We can be sure that Huckleberry Finn can be found in Boston libraries today," (Why We still Need Huckleberry Finn 31). So if Boston can move on, why can't we all? We must move on, and in order to do that we must continue to teach Huckleberry Finn in all schools. Finally, Huckleberry Finn must be taught in schools because the story has many life lessons to teach, which young people can relate to especially well since the entire story is told by a teenage boy. First and foremost of these life lessons is Huck's showing compassion and trust towards Jim.

He shows this when he says, "All right, then, I'll GO to hell," (Twain 162). What the modern reader must understand is that Huck's entire belief system hinges on these words. He truly believes that if he chooses to help Jim escape, rather than send off the letter, he will go to hell. This shows how

much he cares for Jim, and this is an important lesson for young people to learn, i. e.

, when you have as good a friend as Jim, treat him (or her) the way you would want to be treated no matter what. Also, Huck learns that no matter what you expect to come out of playing a prank on someone at their expense, it is never worth the pain you cause them. After Huck plays the trick on Jim in the fog, Jim says that Huck is trash because he tried to make his friend feel ashamed by telling him lies. Huck panics, thinking he might have ruined their friendship. Huck feels so bad about this that he says “ I could almost kissed HIS foot to get him to take it back,” (Twain 65). Overall, Twain was trying to get the idea across that a friend is still a friend no matter what color he is.

Also, a friend is something special, and should be treated that way. This is how Huck learns the lesson that he must treat his friends better, and Twain is trying to get Huck’s lesson to the reader as well. The text, Huckleberry Finn, must be taught in classrooms across the country. In order to do this however, it would be beneficial for them to explain the possible misinterpretations of the text, the text is often misinterpreted as racist, and then the children will be able to read it. If we do not preface the book with a talk about how to read it properly in order to appreciate its language, rather than attack it, then how can children be expected to get anything out of it? Also, stressing the life lessons and mistakes Huck learns from throughout the book would maximize its effect on the minds of young people as well.

Relating problems Huck and Jim have in the book to more real-life situations today would also help.

In conclusion, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn must be taught in schools because it truly is the classic work of American literature, past and present.