

# Reflection essay on huck finn



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Daved Najarian American literature II 9: 00am Huck, The Duke and Pinocchio

One of the primary themes Mark Twain uses throughout *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is that of deception. Twain uses many forms and styles of deception not only to illustrate varying degrees of it, but also to draw a distinction between morally permissible and morally corrupt lies. Twain introduces different forms of deception brought about by a myriad of catalysts. Throughout the book, Twain uses Huck, the Duke and the King to compare and contrast different forms of lying, and to illustrate how context plays a large role in the moral weight of a deception.

By portraying each of these characters actions and reactions to their environment, Twain is able to explore the moral importance of familiar circumstances. Huck takes on a more innocent and playful approach to deception and only uses morally weighted lies as a means to protect. While the Duke plays with good intentions, too often the endgoals of his deceptions are for monetary gain. Finally the King is presented as possessing little redeeming quality and is by far the most morally corrupt of the characters. Huck seems to primarily formulate deceptions in two circumstances throughout the novel.

The first of these is for an innocent, or even jestful reason, with little or no mal-intent. The second of these is the use of a deception in a more serious manner, but generally used only to preserve the wellbeing of Jim or himself. Unlike the more serious and character damaging lies of the King and the Duke, Huck's deceptions are, for the most part, spur of the moment rather than premeditated. Towards the beginning of the adventure, Huck seems to deceive for relatively harmless reasons. When Huck goes ashore dressed as

a girl to attain town gossip, he lies about who he is, but the moral implications of this lie are slight.

He has no malicious motive in mind, and is “taking advantage” of the newcomers for information alone. In this scene, Huck is very nervous and un-savvy of his character, which leads to him being caught in his deception. Although Huck uses lavish deceptions he is still relatively novice at it, and for this reason his lies depend heavily on the intended victims perception and relationship to him. These sorts of lies seem to represent a sort of “game” to Huck and he is accordingly unaware of their effects on others. When Huck plays a trick on Jim these effects become apparent. “Well, this is too many for me, Jim.

I hain't seen no fog, nor no islands, nor no troubles, nor nothing.” When Huck tricks Jim into thinking he dreamt up a whole night of troubles, he holds no ill intent. Like his “girl deception” this lie takes advantage of Jim for his own lighthearted enjoyment, and not for material benefit. Through this depiction, Twain illustrates that it is not just the content of a lie but the intended recipient that determines its moral severity. Once Huck realizes the effects of this style of fib and the repercussions of tricking those close to him, he discontinues it for the rest of the novel.

The second form of deception in Huck’s arsenal is a sort of “deception for preservation”. The first time Huck lies in this manner is to avoid a dangerous situation with Pap. When Pap awakes to find Huck sleeping with a gun, Huck is quick to fabricate a story about a potential intruder he was “laying for”. The purpose of this form of a lie is clearly self-preservation, and unlike Huck’s other form of deception, it is brought about by necessity and is spur

the moment. Huck uses this level of deception throughout the adventure and therefore gains a mastery of it.

Twain seems to suggest that Huck's circumstances justify some of his lies and deception, playing with the notion of "necessary lies" Huck is in many ways "forced" into situations where a lie becomes necessary to preserve a life. As Huck and Jim grow as friends Huck not only is unable to turn Jim in, but finds himself fabricating elaborate deceptions to keep him safe. In one scene in particular, Huck uses "reversepsychology" to trick men into believing he wants help on the raft when in fact he wants the opposite. "I will, sir, I will, honest – but don't leave us, please.

It's the – the – Gentlemen, if you'll only pull ahead, and let me heave you the headline, you won't have to come a-near the raft – please do. " In this encounter, Huck is able to create the illusion that he is desperate for help; with a sub lie that those aboard the raft are ill with small pox. What is important to recognize here, is that this level of lie is to protect Jim (and himself) from the greed of slave hunters, not to gain additional benefit from them. Most of the deception created by Huck is simply to maintain the status quo.

Huck and Jim do not wish to gain anything material from others but simply want to be left alone. Unlike the King and Duke who look ashore to interact and take with deceit, Huck and Jim lie to distance themselves from those on shore. Twain compares and contrasts the King and the Duke from the moment of their arrival. "These liars warn't no kings nor dukes, at all, but just low-down humbugs and frauds. " Although Huck sees through the King

and Duke's lies right away, there is importance and foreshadowing in their first deception.

The very fact that the King places himself higher than the Duke with an outlandish introduction, " Bilgewater, I am the late Dauphin! " foreshadows that the King is the worse of the two con men. Throughout the trip the Duke utilizes two forms of deception, the first of which focuses on the betterment of the group as a whole. This is illustrated by his attempts to make it easier for them to " run during the day" rather than the shadow of night. This lie involved the faking of Jim's capture and deception of reward seeking in order to avoid the attention of others.

Like Huck, this lie helps to protect the group but unlike Huck it involves premeditation and a change in the status quo. While Huck lies to protect Jim rather than for selfish intent, the Duke does not. The second form or level of deception the Duke emphasizes is the fabrication of legitimacy to his illegitimate forms of entertainment. In the end, these attempts are commendable but pathetic, " To be, or not to be; that is the bare bodkin that makes calamity of so long life".

Although many of the Dukes offerings (such as Shakespeare) tender some level of legitimacy, his back-story and quality of performance are shrouded with deception. What differentiates these lies from others is the emphasis on greed; as the end goal of the Duke's deceptions often-involved monetary gain and taking from others. Twain paints the King as not only less intelligent than the Duke, but also more cruel. As the tale progresses the King's lies and deception escalate from a moral grey area to out right. From the start, the Kings lies target the innocent, ignorant, and emotionally compromised.

In contrast to the Duke, the King's first performance takes advantage of the kind and empathetic attendees at a religious gathering. From this point on the King's greed is insatiable, and his lust for money and material goods causes him to be irrational. The King gets so lie crazy at one point that he even lies about lying about who took the gold, saying that he took it, "Nough! - I OWN UP! " These deceptions finally peak during the Wilks' impersonation when the King is unsatisfied with the \$6, 000 and wants to sell the girl's properties.

While many of the Duke's stunts were simply to get by, the King lets his greed completely overwhelm his character. The intellectually superior Duke even looks to get out of the long con while they still can, but he is talked back in to it by the King and his greed. Twain uses this character to not only illustrate how, " One can become the company they keep," (as all were dragged into the con), but that greed can turn most men to sin. The lies and deceptions portrayed in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* introduce ethical and moral issues that are relevant to the reader.

Twain does an excellent job of utilizing context to explore the morality of deception. By exploring intent and the inner workings of Huck, the Duke and the King, Twain is able to illustrate how lies can be permissible or damning. The concept of " necessary lies" carries a great deal of weight when analyzing the morality of a deception, and Twain uses the ethical framework of Utilitarianism to justify this. For Twain it seems as though the morality of a lie is tied to the consequence of that lie, rather than the lie itself.

Rather than making deception universally " wrong", Twain leaves the door open for moral interpretation. Twain suggests, that by looking at the result of

a lie and who is affected, one can determine the “rightness” or “wrongness” of that particular lie. The ethical framework of utilitarianism of course brings with it a slue of objections, however; in the context the novel it is intuitive. The most “morally corrupt lie” in the text negatively effects the largest number of people, whereas many of Huck’s lies positively effect Jim or himself and carry little negative effect to others.

The King’s Wilks impersonation, along with others, affected not just those that survived the deceased but the entire town. These “large scale” deceptions clearly would be considered morally corrupt by Utilitarians; whereas many of Huck’s lies were small scale and produced the smallest ripples. Twain masterfully incorporates ethics into a realistic story, resulting in this multi-layered tale. ----- [ 1 ]. pg. 122 [ 2 ]. pg. 166 [ 3 ]. pg. 165 [ 4 ]. 182 [ 5 ]. 276