

# Examination of freedom as an overall theme in adventures of huckleberry finn

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



“ The Widow Douglas, she took me for her son, and allowed she would civilize me; but it was rough living in the house all the time, considering how dismal regular and decent the widow was in all her ways; and so when I couldn’t stand it no longer, I lit out.” The aforementioned quotation best describes Huck’s philosophy when faced with ties that bind. When he is unable to take the restrictions of life any longer, whether they be emotional or physical, he simply releases himself and goes back to what he feels is right and what makes him happy. Hence, one of the most prominent and important themes of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is freedom. Freedom not only from Huck’s internal paradoxical struggle in defining right and wrong, but also freedom from Huck’s personal relationships with the Widow Douglas and his father, as well as freedom from the societal institutions of government, religion, and prejudices. Throughout the story Huck is plagued with an internal moral dilemma of what he feels is right and what he is taught is right. Huck is possibly the only character in the story that operates solely on his own moral convictions. This produces significant conflict when the accepted rules of society, often corrupt in nature, are imposed upon him. The best example of this internal conflict is Huck’s brief experiences with organized religion. The teachings by the Widow Douglas of the pathways to heaven are in constant conflict with Huck’s own beliefs. Because of this, Huck readily rejects the teachings of organized religion, and therefore must often grapple with the undue guilt that this hypocritical heresy places on him. Such is the case when Huck must decide on whether to protect the whereabouts of Jim or to do the “ Christian” thing and return Miss Watson her “ property”. Although Huck ultimately does what he feels is right, the

reader is left with a sense that the issue is not completely eradicated from Huck's conscience. Another freedom Huck struggles for is freedom from the two unhealthy family ties he has. The first being the attempted civilization of Huck by the Widow Douglas, and the second being Huck's desire to escape the wrath of his dangerous and abusive father. Whereby the Widow Douglas tries to better Huck as a person, Huck's father tries to drag Huck down to his level. Because these forces are pulling Huck in opposing directions Huck is forced to find freedom from each differently. The fact that Huck gives a valid attempt at conformity signifies that he has somewhat of an interest in becoming what is considered "normal", and thereby pleasing the Widow Douglas. There is a sense that Huck has a genuine gratitude towards the Widow Douglas for taking an interest in his well being, especially since she appears to be the only one that does so. However, given that his attempts are short-lived, it can be assumed that Huck's desire to adhere to his personal virtues overpowers his desire to become civilized or to please the Widow Douglas. In contrast, Huck appears to have no desire to have a relationship with his father. At one point in the story Huck does not even know if his father is alive or not, and apparently does not care to know. Because of his father's alcoholism and unpredictable behavior, emotional freedom from him is easily achieved by Huck. However, it is the physical freedom from his father that Huck must accomplish in the story. Because of his jealousy of Huck, Huck's father adopts the belief that Huck is attempting to make a fool of him. Consequently, Huck's father uses this belief as justification to imprison Huck and use him for his own personal gain. For a boy like Huck, physical constriction is undoubtedly the most miserable

condition he could be put in. At this point in the story freedom is not only a desire of Huck – it is a necessity. Lastly, and possibly most importantly of Huck's search for freedom is the struggle for freedom from the deep-rooted and well-established societal institutions of prejudice at that time. Of all the societal lessons Huck has fought to learn, the most damaging has been that blacks are not people. This is exemplified in several ways throughout the novel. One way is through the constant referral of Jim, by others to Huck, as "property". The second and most disturbing way is through the overheard conversation explaining the wreck of the steamboat into the raft, by which the question of whether or not anyone was hurt is answered with a "no, killed a nigger, that's all". Undoubtedly, it would be easier for Huck to accept these beliefs had he not got to know Jim as a person and as a friend. This is known because before Huck's experiences with Jim, Huck held the same attitudes towards slaves as everyone else at that time. However, because of the friendship that developed with Jim, Huck once again is forced to find freedom, this time from the strongest of all oppressors of freedom – racism. Huck's desire to continue his forbidden friendship and his desire for freedom from society's racism proves to be Huck's most difficult struggle yet. He quickly finds that he cannot simply ignore it as he did with the rules and teachings of the Widow Douglas, and he cannot simply run away from it as he did with his father. Huck eventually learns the lesson of racism that people even today must learn; it is not going to go away and you cannot single-handedly change it, all you can do is follow your heart and do what you know is the right thing to do. Throughout the novel Huck overcomes numerous obstacles and endures various negative repercussions to attain

both emotional and physical freedom, thus unquestionably establishing freedom as a major theme in this work. Twain's implied lesson expressed within this theme is that true freedom is essential to happiness. Twain ends the novel with a frustrated Huck stating; " Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can't stand it. I been there before." Although the novel ends leaving the reader a sense that Huck is truly free, this concluding phrase subtlety, yet clearly, implies that the struggle for freedom is a never-ending one.