

Influences on huck finn

Literature, American Literature



Mark Twain's novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is the story of a young boy who is just beginning to mature into an adult. He and his friend Tom Sawyer gain a small fortune of \$6,000 and Huck's father, Pap, who has been absent for virtually all of Huck's life, is seeking it. Because of the constant abuse from his father, he is forced to run away and start on an adventure down the Mississippi River with his companion, Jim, a runaway slave. Although he leaves his home, it still has an influence on him. Both Pap and the two women he lives with, Widow Douglas and Miss Watson, have great influences on him. The women influence him positively while Pap provides a much more negative influence. Widow Douglas and Miss Watson try to be positive influences on Huck's life. Both women are sisters living together, and the widow adopts Huck, taking him into their home. They are doing their best to teach Huck good manners and so educate him etiquette, academics, and religion. Widow Douglas is much more understanding towards Huck. She is more compassionate and Huck feels much more inclined to listen to the widow, rather than the sterner Miss Watson. INSERT EXAMPLE ABOUT WANTING TO QUIT SCHOOL. Because he does respect the widow's wishes, Huck does try, or at least pretend to listen to the widow, while rejecting the advice of Miss Watson. The beginning of the novel displays an evening in the house and how influential the ladies try to be on Huck's life and how he reacts to their attempts. When the family sat to dinner, Huck wanted to start eating right away, but he knew "When you got to the table, you couldn't go right to eating, but you had to wait for the widow to tuck down her head and grumble a little over the victuals" (2). The widow is forcing Huck to acknowledge prayer before a meal and the

importance of religion. This point is made further when after supper; the widow read Huck the story of Moses in the bulrushes. At first Huck was interested, but he eventually decided it wasn't worth his while, thinking, " I was in a sweat to find out all about him; but by and by she let it out that Moses had been dead a considerable long time; so then I didn't care no more about him, because I don't take no stock in dead people. " (2). Huck clearly does not care deeply about the grace before dinner or biblical stories, but he is willing to at least be willing to tolerate them. On the other hand, Miss Watson makes Huck angry and he openly defies her, but she does influence his life. She is the one who is in charge of making sure Huck gets his education and acts well in society. On the same evening of the dinner and religious readings, Miss Watson gives Huck a spelling lesson. Although Huck fights and tells her he wants to go to hell, during the lesson, she still makes sure he sits up straight and scolds him for poor behavior. She teaches him vital knowledge and conduct to extend what he is taught in school, which both women makes sure he attends. Huck needs to have an education the women are making sure he gets it. Although Huck tries to avoid their influence, by constantly bombarding him with lessons, the women don't give Huck a choice as to whether he learns from them or not. Huck's father Pap has a large, bad influence on Huck that undoes all of the widow's and Miss Watson's teachings. Huck first introduces Pap early in the story and his appearance is noted right away. Huck describes him as; " most fifty, and he looked it. His hair was long and tangled and greasy, and hung down, and you could see his eyes shining through like he was behind vines. It was all black, no gray: so was his long, mixed-up whiskers. " (18). He is clearly described

as a filthy, horrid man. Twain later describes his clothes, and they are tatters and rags. However, the most intense part of Twain's description was the section devoted to Pap's face: " There warn't no color in his face, where his face showed; it was white; not like another man's white, but a white to make a body sick, a white to make a body's flesh crawl. " (19) Huck clearly depicts Pap as a very evil scary looking man, whose image is enough to make someone ill. His personality doesn't stray from this image. He is the town drunk, always stumbling around at night, ranting on about the injustices of the world. He also is illiterate which is why he tried to make the first big influence on Huck that we see. Pap tells Huck that he cannot go to school. He tells him, " You think you're better'n than your father, now, don't you, because he can't [read or write]? I'll take it out on you...you drop that school, you hear? " (19) Pap demands that Huck quits school, although it is obviously against the wishes of his guardian. Huck originally keeps going to school to both avoid disappointing the widow, and to spite Pap, who said Huck was only learning to become better than his father. Eventually, both to get custody of his son and his son's fortune, Pap kidnaps Huck. He keeps him locked in a barn all the time and is a constant bad influence. All of what was taught to him at his old home is being overridden by Pap. An example is Huck's swearing. At his old house, the women clearly would not allow it, but Pap's stance is different. Huck says, " I had stopped cussing, because the widow didn't like it; but now I took to it again because Pap hadn't no objections. " (24) Huck was clearly regressing to his father's ways. Even when Huck wanted to escape his father, he had done enough bad to make him not want to go home. He thought, " I didn't see how I ever got to like it

so well at the widow's, where you had to wash, and eat on a plate, and comb up, and go to bed and get up regular, and be forever bothering over a book... I didn't want to go back no more" (24). This idea shows how all the civilized behavior the women gave to Huck has been torn away by Pap. It has even gotten to the point where he resented having to eat off of a plate. Pap's influence makes Huck prefer living on the run over a nice home. He clearly has not been a good influence on Pap. Huck Finn is influenced by a multitude of things in the novel, but he is not easily influenced. Huck is naturally an uncivilized person. The way he resisted the widow and Miss Watson shows how he is not easily influenced by something that was not of his nature, while when he starts to act like his father, he is simply returning to his natural ways. The only new influence Huck truly faces during the story is his new guardians. He does listen to the women, Mrs. Watson especially, but he is never happy to be living their civilized lifestyle. This determination to stick to his roots is not a good quality in Huck's case. He does not want to change even for the better. This is shown by how quickly he returns to the hick lifestyle as soon as it is presented to him. He certainly acts like a hick at times with the women, but never acts civilized in the cabin with his father.