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Literature, American Literature



27 February 2013 English 11 CC Huckleberry Finn is a novel set in the rural south of the United States during a period in history when slavery and racism were part of everyday life. The novel introduces two main characters: Huck Finn, an adventurous but naïve, white boy, and Jim, a runaway slave whom is travelling with Huck down the Mississippi River. Throughout the course of the novel, both characters are faced with their individual internal struggles; Huck in particular is faced with the pressing notion of whether or not he should turn Jim in to his rightful owner and do the “right” thing, or disobey the law and help Jim obtain his freedom. Being nothing more than a foolish and naïve boy, Huck does not know the meaning of true love and friendship, until Jim opens up to him and they begin to bond no longer as white boy and black slave, but as humans. Huck Finn is a character full of vivacity and personality who very much enjoys defying authority, being in nature, and being foolish with his best friend Tom Sawyer. However, once Huck and Jim steal away on a canoe and raft down the Mississippi River, Huck finds that he cannot pull off the same foolish pranks that he did beforehand; he is faced with the challenge of having to grow up. The first of Huck’s attempts at tomfoolery occurs when Huck thinks it would be clever to kill a rattlesnake and put it in Jim’s knapsack. Unbeknownst to Huck, the dead rattlesnake’s mate had crawled inside Jim’s resting area and bit his ankle. Although the prank turned out to be rather harmless, it could have ended in a fatal disaster. Huck says “...I warn’t going to let Jim find out it was all my fault, not if I could help it” (64.) Huck is afraid of Jim finding out it was he who put Jim in this predicament; perhaps his intentions were unconscious, but I think Huck did not want to lose Jim’s respect because they are all one

another has. That loss of respect, however, comes soon enough. On the raft in the middle of the night, Jim and Huck are separated in a misty fog; when they are reunited however, Jim is delighted to see Huck well and alive but Huck takes this opportunity to fool Jim into looking unintelligent by making him believe he dreamt up the whole scenario. Jim is aware he is being tricked and is certainly hurt by Huck's actions. He tells Huck: "...my heart wuz mos' broke bekase you wuz los', en I didn' k'yer no mo' what become er me and de raf'.... en all you wuz thinkin ' bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie" (95.) This is the turning point in Huck and Jim's relationship because it took Huck fifteen minutes " to go and humble myself to a nigger..." (95.) Huck is aware of what he has done wrong because of the lesson Jim taught him; Huck makes the realization that Jim is a human being, despite his race, and he has hurt his feelings. Huck apologizes to Jim for his actions and Jim's lesson seems to have made an impact on Huck. From then on, Huck takes notice every time Jim puts Huck's life ahead of his own or tries to teach him a lesson out of love, two things his father has never done for him. Jim's unconditional love and respect for Huck are what ultimately bring the two closer together and help Huck come to a conclusion about helping Jim. The novel's conclusion begins to take place once Huck has to make the decision between sending Jim back to the Watson plantation, or to further aid him in his escape to freedom. Huck recalls the memories he has shared with Jim throughout the journey and says to himself "...I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against him..." meaning that he cannot find one example of Jim putting Huck's life in danger or not showing him unconditional love, therefore Huck has no right to turn in a slave who

has been so good to him. Huck may not understand the true unethical practices of the "peculiar institution" but nevertheless he feels obligated to help Jim because of how he has treated him. Huck ultimately decides to do the "wrong" and proclaims "All right then, I'll go to hell" all for Jim's sake (223.) Not surprisingly, Jim obtains his freedom with the help of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, and Huck announces that he will most likely take to living with Native Americans now that his adventure with Jim has ended. The lessons Huck learned from Jim are lessons that he will, hopefully, carry with him throughout his life; Huck can apply the same unconditional love to every slave, Indian, and white master, he may encounter. Had it not been for Jim however, Huck would have never been able to see the flaw in his character and would not have grown and become a dynamic character. Ultimately, both characters learned something about love and trust from one another and that helped both of them grow as people.