

Don quixote, king
lear, huck finn, a doll
house essay sample



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Disagreements can cause wars and bitter feelings. They can also cause people to ignore or avoid one another. To run away from a disagreement within the self however, is not as easy. It haunts a person in their sleep, and without acquiring an adequate knowledge of the self, peace within is hard to obtain. Many literary works address the journey of discovering the self, and they use different characters to explore various circumstances surrounding this journey. In his book, *Don Quixote*, Cervantes explores the adventures of Don Quixote as he pursues his chivalric dreams.

Throughout the book, Don Quixote has renamed everything in order to make everyday people and animals into chivalric characters. The act of renaming himself shows his decision to reject his identity as farmer and to embrace what he believes to be his real identity as a chivalric knight. He is convinced that he is helping the people he encounters. From Don Quixote's point of view, he believes fiercely in the authenticity of his identity. Yet everyone he is close to is trying to stop him from his chivalric endeavors telling him it is doing more harm than good.

His motives may be pure, but anyone outside his perspective sees that his new identity is misguided. By the end of the book, Don Quixote has returned home and has stopped his chivalric adventures, but it is still uncertain if he has realized the disillusioned identity he represents. Unlike Don Quixote, King Lear from William Shakespeare's *King Lear* quickly realizes he has an erroneous view of himself and spends the remainder of the play coming to terms with his new identity.

In the beginning, he thinks that his daughters love him and that he deserves the praise he gets from his followers. His sense of entitlement is dismantled as his daughters betray him and strip him of his power. At this point King Lear almost goes mad with the harsh reality of his real identity. By the end of the play, King Lear sees himself as a human being closer to everyone else in his kingdom than he thought before. In Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck Finn is in immediate conflict with the identity that Widow Douglas and Miss Watson have assigned him.

His immense discomfort for their "civilized [sic]" ways, coupled by the need to escape from his abusive father, prompts Huck to embark on a journey he discovers more about his identity. Free from the Widow Douglas, Huck now assumes what he believes to be his authentic identity. This identity is a combination of his pragmatic attitude along with the morals society has taught him and some of the grandiose imagination of Tom Sawyer. When Huck is trying to rescue Jim from the Phelps farm, Tom keeps suggesting elaborate ideas like digging Jim out with a fork, or baking a rope into a cake.

The impracticality of these ideas challenges Huck to reject the Tom Sawyer side of his identity. His views on whether it is right to free a slave also changes as he spends more time with Jim, and Huck starts to discover more of his own identity and reject the things society has taught him. Much like Huck, Nora in *A Doll House* by Henrik Ibsen has an identity forced upon her, but she does not recognize it until some time has passed in the play. When his reputation is on the line, Nora's husband, Torvald Helmer blames Nora for ruining him and tells her that their marriage must now just be an appearance kept for the public.

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At this moment, Nora realizes that the role she has been playing for Torvald is not her true self. She tells Torvald that she has been performing tricks for him and her father. With the realization that her entire identity has been a masquerade for the sole purpose of appeasing the men in her life, Nora leaves Torvald in order to find her identity. It is hard to tell whether Nora will succeed at finding her identity, especially because she is not taking any money or help from Torvald.

Ibsen seems to imply that if she completely isolates herself from other people's opinions then her resolution to educate herself will be enough for her to succeed. Most of the characters discussed so far succeed in discovering their identity at least in part. Like Nora, Don Quixote also has a speculative final identity when it comes to his success in finding himself. In Cervantes's work, the characters may be perpetually in between two extremes of identity. Don Quixote has most likely absorbed some of Sancho Panzo's realism and is somewhere in between extreme romanticism and realism.

It is impossible to tell if Huck Finn has successfully discovered his identity by the end of the book. He is still very young, so he will most likely continue to discover new things about himself especially if he continues to experience things on his own. King Lear has definite success in discovering his new identity as a humbled man, yet this successful transformation cost him a great deal of suffering. Nora also makes some sacrifices in order to discover herself, but King Lear suffers the biggest loss.

Along with the books mentioned so far, many other literary works address the issue of identity. This common theme is repeated because everyone is shaped by society and his or her surroundings. Often times a person will be passive while they are being shaped, until they realize they have become someone they do not want to be. Different characters react differently to such realizations and have different circumstances they must overcome to resolve this conflict. In all cases, taking the journey to discover oneself is an important step towards achieving inner peace.