

The idea of moral development in the novel "adventures of huckleberry finn" by ma...

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Maturing and developing a set of moral standards is a difficult process for young individuals; independence is often sought after, but the realization of being truly alone has a drastic impact on a person's decisions. In the novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain explores the idea of moral development through the character Huckleberry, who is a young teenager battling with the ideas of right and wrong. One of the many dilemmas Huck faces on his journey is whether or not he is right to be assisting the slave Jim in his escape from bondage. The moment at which Huck makes the decision to free Jim at all costs is representative of one of Twain's most prevalent themes, morality; the main character undergoes an extreme transformation of character when he debates over the right step to take regarding Jim.

Huck's struggle to find the right action to take reaches a peak near the end of the story; this is also where his character comes a profound realization that shapes the way he sees the world. This moment is the most pivotal point in Huck's ethical progression; he is finally challenging the societal rules dictating his and Jim's lives and attempting to formulate his own standards. After escaping a strict household where his life was essentially controlled by the Widow Douglas, he finds it difficult to break the law and help a runaway slave escape. However, Huck finds it ironic that even though the Widow is a devout Christian that preaches love and mercy, she and her equally faithful sister have nothing against slave ownership whatsoever.

Upon reaching a conclusion, he tears up a letter written to Jim's owner about the runaway's whereabouts and simply says, "All right, then, I'll go to hell." Huck recognizes that his former guardians, who attempted to instill Christian

values within him, would recognize it as immoral, but he believes that what he is doing is proper. Assisting a runaway slave in the mid-nineteenth century is not a simple matter, but Huck is willing to take an extreme risk and do so. By tearing up the letter, Huck is in effect tearing the societal institutions that deem his actions improper. At this point, Huck realizes that he is in control of his own life; he should not rely on any higher power or older person to tell him what to do or how to live. After being forced to live in a “civilized” manner for so long, he finally got the chance to experience life away from his previously mundane one. The fact that he is willing to “go to hell” shows quite a bit about his personality at this point; he dictates the rules of his own life and he will do whatever he wants.

A drastic difference is seen between the rebellious, uncivilized boy at the beginning and the upstanding individual near the end of the novel. Huck began by mindlessly following in the footsteps of his friend Tom Sawyer without thinking twice about his decisions. At one point, he even suggested that the rest of his gang should murder his guardians if he broke one of their agreements. His lack of compassion in the beginning sharply contrasts with how empathetic Huck is at the end. Throughout his journey, he feels sympathy for all manner of people: thieves, drunks, robbers, swindlers, murderers, and even the wealthy; interestingly, Huck rarely shows concern for Jim’s situation as a runaway slave. Although he once showed regret after pulling a prank on his friend, he hardly considered what Jim might have been going through. Huck then recalls how Jim would care for him and protect him under all circumstances without fear.

When Huck makes the final decision to free Jim, he also realizes how much he has neglected the slave; up until that point, he had shown less care for his friend than he had for other, more well-situated groups of people. This is the moment where Huck becomes aware of the nature of society he was raised in; the rules that are enforced by the people around him are fundamentally flawed. While others may see Jim as a criminal or piece of property, he sees him as a friend and a unique human being. This is perhaps one of the most crucial pieces of his character development; after all the time he spent with Jim in the cruel outdoors, he finally sees his companion's value in his own life. Huck's understanding of right and wrong is drastically changed by this single moment in the story. He knows that society is wrong for upholding such fallacious rules, and he refuses to abide by them any longer out of love for Jim.

Twain's entire novel shows the slow progression of an ignorant juvenile as he is molded into a wise young man through his experiences away from civilization. Refusing to be a pawn of society, Huck wholly represents what Twain perceives as a true American: a proactive individual that independently distinguishes between right and wrong, living life according to his own laws.