

# [St. petersburg essay](https://assignbuster.com/st-petersburg-essay/)

As the story opens, Huck Finn has been adopted by the Widow Douglaswho wants to make him conform to the way and views of society. It is withthis forced learning that Huck finds that he is not comfortable with thesituation. Huck Finn, a boy of approximately 12 years, is the son of thetown drunk. Widow Douglas adopts him so that she can civilize him and raisehim to be a gentleman. Huck does not like the dull ways of the Widow.

Though she is nurturing to him, he feels confined and uncomfortable in herhouse. He does not like going to school, attending church, or wearing neatclothes and he despises being tortured by Miss Watson. When is becomes fedup with the ways of the Widow, he decides to run away, but is found by TomSawyer, who convinces him to come back. Earlier, Huck and Tom found atreasure and were allowed to keep it. Huck’s father comes to know of hisson’s prosperity and returns to St. Petersburg. Widow Douglas’ has littlesuccess with her attempts to reform Huck; he is just not the type of personwho can tolerate civilized life. He longs for a life of freedom, withoutworry or constraint from society’s rules. It is also the earnest wish ofmost adolescents to be left to their own devices, untroubled by the adultworld of rules and etiquette. Later instances, with Huck and Jim afloat onthe Mississippi, are indicative of the freedom that Huck is prevented fromattaining this early in the story. Huck’s concept of religion is alsoeccentric. The Widow Douglas and Miss Watson attempt to teach him thedifference between good and bad, but he has trouble accepting what hehears. He is told that smoking is bad by the Widow Douglas, and yet sheuses snuff. Huck sees the hypocrisy in this and decides that he prefers tobe “ bad.” This discussion is significant to later events in the novel whenHuck will have to deal with much larger issues of good and bad as theyrelate to the slave Jim.

At this point Jim is introduced as Mrs. Watson’s slave. Jim hears anoise, made during Huck and Tom’s escape attempt, and decides to check tomake sure everything is ok. He does not see anything, but he is notsatisfied and sits to wait; he soon falls asleep. Tom decides to tie him upas a joke. Ignoring Huck’s protest, Tom simply takes his hat and hangs itoverhead from a tree branch. Jim awakes and he is certain that he has beencarried away and back by witches. He spreads the story throughout the slavecommunity, enhancing the tale each time it is told. Each time he tells it, a sense of pride comes over him. Several key facts are shown in this briefdescription of Jim. He is the slave of Miss Watson, who has already beenpictured as nagging and mean in the way she treated Huck. Though she hadbeen harsh on Huck, it could only be assumed that she was much more severewith Jim. As Huck was superstitious, Jim was also. Since he could come tono logical conclusion for his hat being in the tree, he blames it onwitches and proudly spins the tale for his friends.

It is important to notice two things surrounding the body foundfloating in the river. It introduces the Mississippi as a powerful andawesome force, which Huck and Jim will fully feel as they escape down theriver. Additionally, Huck takes a very pragmatic approach to the news thatthe body may be his Pap. His father represents only instability and crueltyto Huck; he is not bothered by the fact that perhaps it is his father whohas drowned. Also Huck does not really think his dad is dead, but feelscertain that he will appear again, which foreshadows Pap’s later appearancein the novel. Pap hears that Huck has gained riches and comes to St.

Petersburg to confirm the rumors. Huck denies any involvement, but Pap isnot fooled and goes to Judge Thatcher’s to get the money. With JudgeThatcher’s help, Widow Douglas seeks to become Huck’s legal guardian. Thenew judge denies the Widows petition as he does not want to separate Huckfrom his father. The irony in this thought is that the new Judge assumesthat Huck will be better off with his natural father than a kind and lovingguardian. Regardless of Pap’s behavioral pattern and reputation, the newjudge deems it best for Huck to live with his father. It is distressingthat “ proper society” thinks that Huck should be forced to live with atotally corrupt and evil person, just because he is a blood relative. Huck, in fact, does not fret and moan over Pap’s return; rather he is delightedto realize that he no longer fears his father and can just accept the stateof affairs at face value. This means, however that he must sometimes obeyPap, because if he does not, he knows he will be beaten.

Pap’s CabinAside from the beatings and the lock-ups, Huck adjusts to life in thecabin with his father. Truthfully, Huck finds that he is more comfortablewith being in the wilderness, out of society’s grasp and away from theconstraints of the Widow. Huck feels, however, that he must get away fromhis father’s cruelty; he must run away. Carefully, he plans his escape. Helocates a rusty saw and uses it to cut a hole in the back wall of thecabin. He knows that he must wait for the appropriate time to leave andworks only when his father is away. In a drunken fit one night, Pap triesto murder Huck. In order to ensure that he lives, Huck knows that he mustescape now. His method of escape shows that he is both smart and quick-thinking. These traits save him numerous times throughout the novel. Thetraits also prove to the reader that Huck Finn will be able to take care ofhimself in the world beyond St. Petersburg, for he has a good head on hisshoulders.

Jackson IslandHuck decides to take a canoe to Jackson Island, where he spends threeidyllic days. On one of his explorations of the island, he meets theWidow’s slave, Jim. Jim decides to run away when he hears news that theWidow is planning on selling him down the river for eight hundred dollars.

From this point, the Huck and Jim decide to travel by raft down theMississippi. On the river, the “ initiation” of Huck is completed. Eventhough he has been taught that black slaves are only a piece of property, he rejects the values of society and accepts Jim as his friend. He learnsto think independently and to be compassionate.

In Huck’s desire to know what reaction was provoked by hisdisappearance, he dresses up like a girl and goes to the mainland. JudithLoftus informs this “ girl” that everyone is convinced that Jim has killedHuck because they both disappeared the same day. Upset by the revelation, Huck rushes back to the island and tells Jim. The two of them board a raftand head down the river to New Orleans.

Sinking SteamboatOn the fifth night, it rains heavily. Leaving the raft to take careof itself, Huck and Jim seek shelter under a tent. In the glare oflightning, they see a steamboat knocked against the rocks. Huck wishes toinvestigate and see if they can salvage anything of value; even though hedoes not want to, Jim follows Huck’s lead.

They hear voices, as they board the steamboat, that are in disputeover splitting some loot. Not waiting to hear more of the conversation, Jimbacks away, but Huck is curious to learn more. He advances, looks through awindow, and sees three men inside. One man is lying on the floor with hishands and feet tied. Two other men are standing over him, one holding agun. The man on the floor, Jim Turner, is begging the other two to sparehis life. The second man, Bill, wants to kill him, but Jake Pickard, theother man, does not want to. Once Huck realizes that the three men areobviously scoundrels, he rushes back and asks Jim to untie their boat sothe men will be unable to escape. When Huck tells Jim that they should geton their raft and leave, Jim says that the raft has drifted away.

Huck shows his basic kindness in this part of the story. In hopes ofsaving Jim Turner from being murdered by the other two scoundrels, he wantsto notify the authorities quickly about the wreck. He makes up a tale toinsure that the watchman will go in search of the wrecked steamboat andfind the three men before they all die. Though Jim, Jake, and Bill arescoundrels, Huck has sympathy for them being stranded out on the steamboat.

When the wreckage floats by, he paddles around and calls out to anyonestill on board; he wants to make sure that there is no one alive andtrapped. In this he shows that he values all of humanity, regardless oftheir social class; this is the trait that allows Huck to totally acceptJim as his friend later in the novel.

CairoHuck, revealing his immaturity, plays another cruel trick on Jim.

Thinking still of Jim as a piece of property, it has not dawned on Huckthat Jim has real human feelings. When Jim tells Huck how hurt he is by thetrick and reveals how much he has worried about him, Huck feels terribleand asks for forgiveness; this apology to Jim is the first sign of realresponsibility in Huck. Though he still does not view Jim as an equal, inHuck’s mind he has at least begun to receive a human status, and Huck vowsnever to be cruel to him again.

They slept most of the next day, but awake and head to Cairo, whereJim believes he will find freedom. Excited now, he begins to talk about howhe is going to work hard and save his money to buy back his wife andchildren; he says that he will steal his children out of slavery, ifnecessary. Suddenly, he is troubled over the fact that he is helping a run-away slave to gain freedom and he wonders what harm Miss Watson had done tohim that he is helping Jim to escape. He decides that he must ease hisconscious and take Jim ashore to turn him in. Just as he is about to leave, Jim tells him what a good friend he is and that for the first time in hislife, a white man has kept a promise to him. His kind words stop Huckinstantly.

Ironically, Huck and Jim float past Cairo, the point of freedom forJim. The canoe has been lost and there is no way to paddle back up-river.

To make matters even worse, their raft is hit by a steamboat. Jim and Huckare separated as they both go overboard. Huck swims to shore. It isimportant to notice the significant irony that Twain weaves throughout thisleg of the journey. It is ironic that Jim says he will steal his childrenif he cannot buy them. Twain makes it so that the reader realizes the sinof enslaving people, especially young ones, is much greater than any “ sin” a father can commit in order to regain custody of his own children.

Unfortunately, the childish Huck does not realize this.

Steamboat Crashes into RaftA skiff comes along with two armed slave hunters, but Huck cannotbring himself to betray Jim. One of the men asks Huck if he belongs on theraft and he replies that he does. When they ask him who else is on board, Huck says that his father is on board and suffering from smallpox and needsimmediate attention. When they hear of the smallpox, the slave hunters arefrightened; they quickly give Huck twenty dollars and depart. Huck againfinds himself feeling miserable when he saves Jim, not because he ishelping him escape, but he feels he has done something wrong; he wonders ifhe would have felt better if he had given Jim up. He returns to the raftand does not see Jim. To hide from the slave hunters, Jim has concealedhimself in the water. He comes out and says that he will never forget Huckfor saving him.

FeudOne day when Huck and Buck are out in the woods hunting, theyencounter Harvey Shephardson. Buck shoots at Harvey, but misses his mark.

Harvey chases after them and fires in their direction; Huck and Buck manageto escape unharmed and reach home safely. Huck asks Buck the reason hefired the first shot because he is confused at this unnecessary exchange offire. Buck replies that they and the Shephardsons have been involved in afeud for nearly thirty years, but he does recall how or why it started. Afew months earlier there had been a death as a result of the feud, but thekillings had caused a great deal of loss for both families. The nextSunday, the Shephardson and Grangerford families attend church with theirguns. The sermon ironically about brotherly love, leads Huck to think thatit is one of the most bizarre Sundays of his life.

Towards the end of his involvement with the feud, Huck is totallydisgusted when he learns all the Grangerford men, including his friendBuck, have been murdered by the Shephardsons. The task of pulling Buck’sbody from the river is left up to him. Huck does not comment on hisfeelings about Buck, but this is one of the most touching scenes in thenovel. Twain takes this opportunity to criticize the senseless violence andthe ridiculous sense of honor.

It is important to notice that while Huck is on land, he again takes afalse identity, George Jackson. He can see society through the eyes of thisassumed person and sharply criticize it. In contrast to society, Huck seesthe river as pure. It is also important to notice Jim’s devotion to Huck inthis experience. He remains in the woods, as to not intrude on Huck’spersonal life, receiving news and food from Huck’s servant. Though he couldeasily have taken the raft and headed down the river on his own, he isfaithful to Huck and depends on him for safety. With this devotion, hewaits on the young boy to return.

Camp MeetingHuck again shows his sympathetic nature when the Duke and Dauphin arebeingchased. Huck wants to help them and advises them to run toward the river.

He is unaware that the two men will join Jim and himself on the raft. Thetwo frauds and liars quickly take charge of things, telling preposterousstories about who they are. Huck shows his practical side once again whenhe decides it is best not to interfere with this sort. He also realizesthat, if given the opportunity, they would sell Jim.

The Duke and Dauphin wonder if Jim is a runaway slave and questionHuck as to why he is trekking down river on a raft. Huck refuses to givethem answers but poses them with a question: why would a run-away slavehead further south? To appease the two frauds, he concocts a story aboutthe death of most of his family after which his father, brother, and Jimstart on their journey south. He continues that both his father and brotherdrowned in the river after being struck by a steamboat. Since then, hesays, people have been trying to take Jim from his custody because theybelieve he is a run-away. So, he says, this is why they are trying to avoidbeing seen on the river during the day and travel only after dark.

The Duke and Dauphin continue to act as masters of the raft. Huck andJim have to spend the nights alternately keeping watch as they continuedown the river. The Duke and the Dauphin spend their time trying to come upwith a plan to fool the people when they reach the shore. When they reachthe next village, all four go ashore. The Dauphin poses as a reformedpirate, who is trying to help change other pirates; he takes up an offeringfor his cause. When he goes back to the raft, he learns that he is richerby eighty-seven dollars and seventy-five cents. The Duke makes fakeadvertisements to sell and prints a picture of a run-away slave that fitsJim’s description, offering a reward of two hundred dollars. Now they cantravel during the day because anyone questions them, they can tie Jim upand that they are returning him to his owner to collect their reward.

Colonel Sherburn Shoots BoggsEvening approaches and Huck overhears someone call out that Boggs, the jovial town drunk, is coming. He calls out to Sherburn, who hasswindled him. A crowd of people follow Boggs as he progresses down thestreet, waiting to see what will happen. Colonel Sherburn comes out withhis pistol, aims at Boggs, and shoots him in full view of his daughter andother villagers. Later, a Bible is placed on the man’s chest, but Huckseems to be the only one who notices. Huck witnesses the whole scene as aninnocent observer.

Someone in the crowd suggested that Sherburn should be lynched for hisaction. The crowd agreed and go yelling and screaming towards Sherburn’shouse. Sherburn comes out and stands on the patio without uttering a simpleword. The crowd quiets down. Sherburn, in a voice filled with scorn, callsthe mob cowards and pitiful people who do not fight with courage. The crowdbreaks up under this attack and goes its separate ways. Huck shows hisrevulsion when he describes the morbid curiosity of the crowd in recountingthe murder and crowding around the body to get a better glimpse. This ismerely one incidence that convinces Huck that life on the raft is morepeaceful and happy than living in town.

Royal Nonesuch PlayThe house is crammed with people and the play begins. The Dukeaugments the expectations of the audience and then hoists up the curtain.

Naked and painted wildly, the Dauphin comes onto the stage. The audiencegoes wild as he prances around and they cannot stop laughing. The Dukelowers the curtain and instructs the audience not to mention the “ greattragedy” to anybody, for they will be performing for two more nights. Infact, they repeat their act on the next two nights and flee the town, making a profit of four hundred and sixty-five dollars. It is important tonote that Huck is not a participant, only an observer.

He also realizes that the townspeople are gullible and easily swayed, causing some of their own problems. It is also important to note Huck’sdescriptions of royalty. He often mixes up history with fiction. Histelling is quite comic and his point is satiric. He makes the decision thatall kings and politicians are “ mighty ornery” and seemingly no differentfrom the scoundrels, Duke and Dauphin.

Finally it is important to note the tenderness in Jim’s story abouthis child. It amazes Huck to know that Jim has such deep feelings. “ I dobelieve he cared just as much for his people as white folks does fortheir’n,” Huck thinks to himself. This realization deepens the closenessthat Huck feels for Jim.

Wilks FuneralIn an attempt to make it possible for Jim to stay on the raft byhimself and not be judged a runaway slave, the Duke disguises Jim as a sickArab. The Dauphin tells Huck to row him out to the steamboat. They meet ayoung man on their way to the steamboat and the Dauphin introduces himselfas the Reverend Alexander Boldgette. Mr. Wilk’s brother Peter has justpassed away, and the man was hoping the one of them was Mr. Wilk’s. Acouple of months before, when Peter turned ill, word was sent to hisbrothers to return immediately. Harvey, one of Peter’s bothers, is apreacher, and the second, William, is deaf and dumb; they stood to receivea great inheritance from Peter.

The Dauphin inquires about the Wilks family and the town, and theyoung man willingly supplies all the information. Immediately, the Dauphindecides to try and gain the Wilks fortune. He concocted a plan that hewould pretend to be the preacher and the Duke would pretend to be the dumbbrother. Huck is sent to retrieve the Duke. Huck realizes what they are upto, but knows that he can do nothing about it. When they come to shore, theDauphin asks if anyone knows where Peter Wilks lives. They tell him thatPeter has passed away and he pretends to be heart-broken, making wild signswith his hands to the Duke.

Huck turns moralist in this chapter. His concern falls on the threenieces, whom he sees as simple, honest people who are being exploited. Hejudges the Duke and Dauphin’s actions as being immoral and unethical. It isironic that Huck gets drawn into the episode with the Wilks girls due tomonetary considerations because he never before associated with any concernof money. The girls will be destitute if he fails to help, and he knowsthis. Once again, Huck’s instinctive understanding and kindness areevident. Because he sees how trusting and innocent the girls are, hechooses to help them by stealing the bag of gold from the Duke and Dauphin, hiding it only until he can return it to the girls. An essential goodnessis seen here in Huck’s genuine effort to help these three girls indistress. This instance is also important because Huck no longer chooses tobe a blameless onlooker; though it may put him in danger, he commitshimself to the girls. Twain is foreshadowing the fact that Huck will laterhelp Jim.

The girls receive their first jolt only a day after the funeral. Atransaction handled but the Dauphin, Slave traders come and buy theirservants. Huck keeps silent because he knows that the sale is not one ofvalidity, which means the slaves can be returned to the farm in a matter ofdays. Another day passes and the Dauphin decides to hold an auction to sellthe farm. Huck is awakened by the noise made when the Dauphin and the Dukediscover that their gold is missing. He is asked if he has seen anyone nearthe room where the gold was kept, or if, perhaps, he might have wandered inthere. After a short time of thinking, Huck replies that the servants havegone in there several times. The Duke and Dauphin make the assumption thatthe Negroes have stolen the money and become furious with themselves fornot adequately safeguarding the gold. The clever Huck is happy that he hasshifted the blame to the black servants, who are no longer around to behurt by his insinuation.

When Huck sees Mary Jane in tears he breaks down and cannot hold backthe truth any longer; he reveals everything to her. He does not want her tobe tempted to give the secret away, or even accidentally reveal the truth, so he asks her to go away for a few days. Even with her gone, he must stillpersuade Mary Jane’s sisters not to reveal their sister’s whereabouts anddoes so by weaving a plausible story. Huck plans most of his movesvigilantly and leaves little to chance.

Robinson and a lawyer, Levi Bell, conduct an investigation as the trueheirs are waiting for their bags. They are convinced that the Duke andDauphin are frauds, even to go so far to say that Huck conspires with them.

The Duke is asked by the doctor to hand over the bag of gold and is toldthat he has no idea where it is, for one of the servants has stolen it.

Huck tries to lie his way through it, when he is questioned, but he iscaught. They also question them about the tattoo marks on Peter Wilks’chest. To determine who the real Wilks brothers are, they decide to dig upthe grave.

The group begins to dig up the coffin. To their surprise, when theyopen the coffin, they find the bag of gold. In the ensuing confusion, Huckis able to escape and runs towards the river. He meets Jim on the way, andthey both manage to escape and avoid confrontation. The Duke and theDauphin, however, soon follow them again. The Duke and the Dauphin begin toargue, marring the carefree life on the raft. One accuses the other ofdeception but neither of them suspects Huck. Rather, they find solace intheir failure by getting drunk.

The Phelps’ FarmThe final action in the journey takes place at the Phelps’ farm, where Jim is detained in captivity as a runaway slave. Huck makes his wayto the Phelps’ farm in an attempt to save Jim once again. He is delightedto discover that Mrs. Phelps is Tom’s aunt and that she is expecting Tomvisit soon. She mistakes Huck to be Tom and welcomes him.

Huck meets Tom as he is coming back to the Phelps’ farm and tells himthe entire story. He says that he intends to rescue Jim, who is being heldprisoner by Mr. Phelps. At the mere mention of excitement, Tom is elated.

All that they have to do to free Jim is, but Tom sets up an elaborate planfor adventure. While trying to free Jim, Tom gets injured and becomes ill.

Later in the story, Huck realizes that Jim was truly free the wholetime, because Widow Douglas had willed him freedom. He learns, also, thatAunt Sally is looking to adopt him so she can bring him furthercivilization. He decides, again, to run away so he can be “ free”.

Huck no longer has to create an identity or a family for himself, forthe first time in the novel. At the Phelps’, he is handed one. In all ofhis former identities, Huck has made up large, fictional families. He hasnow been placed in a family well known to him. He relaxes and truthfullyanswers all of Sally’s questions, from the perspective of Tom. He goes outon the pretext of bringing his luggage as to prevent any confusion when thereal Tom arrives. He waits on the road to warn Tom of the situation intowhich he had been brought.

The entirety of the last section of the novel takes on a farcicaltone, set by Aunt Sally. She makes Huck conceal himself when Uncle Silasarrives so they can play a trick on him. Later, though, many jokes areplayed on her in return.

Tom takes on the role of a leader when he realizes there can be agreat deal of adventure in rescuing Jim. Huck agrees to do as Tom says andgoes along with his plans. Somehow, Huck still feels that Tom is muchstronger and wiser than he. Huck is greatly astounded that his friend wouldbe so “ noble” as to help him in the illegal activity of helping a runawayslave. Huck has trouble believing that such “ respectable” people, as Tom, can do evil things, but easily accepts that the wicked people such as heare capable of evil.

Tom’s fondness of dramatic, elaborate solutions is contrasted clearlyto Huck’s yearning for the simple and practical things in life. Huck foldsto Tom and depends on him to make the decisions now. As the boys plan Jim’sescape, Huck recalls his escape in the early part of the novel when hesuccessfully flees from Pap. Huck forgets that while the boys are planningtheir grand adventure that Jim is suffering, just as Huck has suffered thebeating from his father. Tom informs Jim of the plan and Jim goes alongwith it, as he sees he has no other choice. Twain is drawing the reader’sattention to the state of which the slaves were in. They fear being treatedwith cruelty and being beaten for disapproval, so they go along with whatthe white man says, even when they are wrong.

Huck and Tom have left Jim a prisoner for three weeks while they carryout Tom’s “ grandiose” plans for his escape. It is the ultimate thoughtlesscruelty. Tom and Huck manage to free Jim through the hole, the same mannerin which Huck escaped his father. In a melodramatic scene, they are chasedby dogs and men as they head for the river. Tom is struck by a bullet, butis surprisingly glad, because he will have something permanent to remindhim of his adventure. Jim is horrified that he has been hit and refuses togo any further, losing his freedom to help Tom. Because of the help givento Tom by Jim, the doctor is able to save his life.

Tom reveals, the next morning, the Jim was indeed a free man as itwere willed by Miss Watson. Tom admits that he concealed the informationbecause he wanted to have a grand adventure. At this point, Tom’sselfishness shines more clearly than it has throughout the book. He doesnot care about anyone except himself and his romanticized pretensions.

In the melodramatic and complicated ending, the boys’ assumedidentities are cleared up by Aunt Polly. Huck is delighted to finally behimself. Aunt Polly also verifies Tom’s claim that Jim has been granted hisfreedom. The novel ends with Huck deciding to “ light out to territoryahead” so he could escape from the grasp of society. It is clear to thereader why Huck hates “ civilized” life. In his trip down the river he hasseen that hatred, violence, brutality, and filth are the characteristics ofthe society on shore.

Twain ends the story just as he started; he opens with story sayingthat Huck is afraid that he will be civilized by Widow Douglas and now thathe realizes that Aunt Sally wants to adopt and civilize him, and he decidesto run away to the west, to uncharted territory. As luck would have it, itis the corrupting influence of civilization that makes Huck “ uncivilized.”