

# Huckleberry finn themes essay



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Throughout his novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain discusses many themes. The most important theme within this novel is Huck's struggle between society and his own conscience. Twain shows us what is going on inside of the young boy's head many times within this novel. Although Huck battles with society for long periods of time; and on most occasions, his conscience seems to win the fight, helping Huck choose the right thing. The primary theme of the novel is the conflict between civilization and "natural life."

Huck represents natural life through his freedom of spirit, uncivilized ways, and desire to escape from civilization. He was raised without any rules or discipline and has a strong resistance to anything that might "civilize" him. This conflict is introduced in the first chapter through the efforts of the Widow Douglas: she tries to force Huck to wear new clothes, give up smoking, and learn the Bible. Throughout the novel, Twain seems to suggest that the uncivilized way of life is more desirable and morally superior. Drawing on the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Twain suggests that civilization corrupts, rather than improves, human beings.

The theme of honor permeates the novel after first being introduced in the second chapter, where Tom Sawyer expresses his belief that there is a great deal of honor associated with thieving. Robbery appears throughout the novel, specifically when Huck and Jim encounter robbers on the shipwrecked boat and are forced to put up with the King and Dauphin, both of whom "rob" everyone they meet. Tom's original robber band is paralleled later in the novel when Tom and Huck become true thieves, but honorable ones, at the end of the novel.

They resolve to steal Jim, freeing him from the bonds of slavery, which is an honorable act. Thus, the concept of honor and acting to earn it becomes a central theme in Huck's adventures. Food plays a prominent role in the novel. In Huck's childhood, he often fights pigs for food, and eats out of " a barrel of odds and ends. " Thus, providing Huck with food becomes a symbol of people caring for and protecting him. For example, in the first chapter, the Widow Douglas feeds Huck, and later on Jim becomes his symbolic caretaker, feeding and watching over him on Jackson's Island.

Food is again discussed fairly prominently when Huck lives with the Grangerford's and the Wilks's. The theme of slavery is perhaps the most well known aspect of this novel. Since it's first publication, Twain's perspective on slavery and ideas surrounding racism have been hotly debated. In his personal and public life, Twain was vehemently anti-slavery. Considering this information, it is easy to see that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* provides an allegory to explain how and why slavery is wrong. Twain uses Jim, a main character and a slave, to demonstrate the humanity of slaves.

Jim expresses the complicated human emotions and struggles with the path of his life. To prevent being sold and forced to separate from his family, Jim runs away from his owner, Miss Watson, and works towards obtaining freedom so he can buy his family's freedom. All along their journey downriver, Jim cares for and protects of Huck, not as a servant, but as a friend. Thus, Twain's encourages the reader to feel sympathy and empathy for Jim and outrage at the society that has enslaved him and threatened his life. However, although Twain attacks slavery through is portrayal of Jim, he never directly addresses the issue.

Huck and Jim never debate slavery, and all the other slaves in the novel are very minor characters. Only in the final section of the novel does Twain develop the central conflict concerning slavery: should Huck free Jim and then be condemned to hell? This decision is life-altering for Huck, as it forces him to reject everything “ civilization” has taught him. Huck chooses to free Jim, based on his personal experiences rather than social norms, thus choosing the morality of the “ natural life” over that of civilization. The majority of the plot takes place on the river or its banks.

For Huck and Jim, the river represents freedom. On the raft, they are completely independent and determine their own courses of action. Jim looks forward to reaching the free states, and Huck is eager to escape his abusive, drunkard of a father and the “ civilization” of Miss Watson. However, the towns along the river bank begin to exert influence upon them, and eventually Huck and Jim meet criminals, shipwrecks, dishonesty, and great danger. Finally, a fog forces them to miss the town of Cairo, at which point they were planning to head up the Ohio River, towards the free states, in a steamboat.