

Life on land and life on river: analysis of mark twain's

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The novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was first published in 1884 and is written by a man named Samuel L. Clemens more popularly known by his pen name Mark Twain.

The novel centers on the life of a young boy named Huckleberry Finn and his Negro friend Jim during the time when there is still slavery in America. In the novel, Huck and Jim uses the Mississippi River towards their goal of freedom from the oppressive society on land.

The Mississippi River is central to the work of Mark Twain because it plays an important role in his life. When Mark Twain was still young, he became a steamboat pilot traversing the Mississippi River (“ Biography of Mark Twain”).

For the protagonist of the novel, Huck, life on land and the civilization that goes with it represent constrictive rules and inhumanity. Life on the river on the other hand and the wildness that goes with it represent freedom and humanity.

The life and realizations of Huckleberry Finn in the novel show that the life that we thought is clean and organized on the outside is actually very pretentious and inhumane inside and the life that we thought as dangerous and wild is the one that gives us the peace, freedom and sense of humanity.

As the literary critic Brodwin says, “ in *Huckleberry Finn* it (the river) takes on its fullest symbolic weight as the road to freedom and as a force of nature integrating both beauty. . . safety. . . good” (Par. 11).

Life on Land

At the start of the novel, we find the protagonist and the narrator Huck telling us that he does not like being adopted in the household of the Widow Douglas and her sister Miss Watson. He says that they adopted him to “civilize” him (Twain, Chapter I, Par. 2). What Huck means by this is that in the house of Widow Douglas, he is being molded into a prim and proper young man.

He is not comfortable with it. He is not comfortable with wearing clothes because they make him sweat. He does not like that he has to strictly follow the time for his activities specially when it is time for supper. And he is not used to the “grumble” of the two sisters before eating supper which is his way of saying he feels that supper is very ceremonial.

He is also not interested in learning about the characters in the Bible such as Moses because he says that it is a waste of time to learn about dead people. Clearly, even as a young boy, Huck feels that he is not meant to live indoors:

It was rough living in the house all the time, considering how dismal regular and decent the widow was in all her ways; and so when I couldn't stand it no longer I lit out. I got into my old rags and my sugar-hogshead again, and was free and satisfied (Twain, Chapter I, Par. 2).

When his drunkard father suddenly arrives from nowhere, Huck's life on land continue to make it oppressive for him. His father Pap does not show any affection for Huck. The only thing that is important for Pap and the reason for his sudden appearance is to get Huck's money that Huck got as a reward for finding some robbers' loot (Twain, Chapter I, Par. 2).

When Pap kidnaps Huck, Huck's life becomes worse than his life with the Widow Douglas. He is locked in a cabin in the woods for the whole day while Pap drinks all the liquor he can drink on Huck's money (Twain, Chapter VI). What redeems him from his life with his father on land is the river. Huck escapes the cabin by devising of a way by which Pap will think that he is dead. Huck escapes by way of the river to the Jackson's Island (Twain, Chapter VII).