

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn Analysis

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Intro to Topic/Thesis

- Twain frequently uses the Mississippi River as a symbol for events and ideas in Huck Finn
 - The main use of symbolization explored by this presentation is the 'illusion of freedom' Huck and Jim experience as a function of their adventures on the Mississippi River
 - The focus of this presentation is to support the presence of this symbol in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

Quote

- *“The lot of towheads was troubles we was going to get into with quarrelsome people and all kinds of mean folks, but if we minded our buisness and didn't talk back and aggravate them, we would pull through and get out of the fog and into the big clear river, which was the free states, and wouldn't have no more trouble.”*
 - Huck, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, page 59.
 - Huck narrates Jim's interpretation of his 'dream' to the reader and explains that the river is their path to freedom, and their escape from their abuse and slavery, respectively.
 - Jim expresses both his and Huck's naïvety by stating their expectation of the removal of their troubles.
 - Jim is a runaway slave. He would be free in the northern states where slavery is outlawed, however he still would not receive the same rights as white Americans. He is ignorant to the ever-present racism towards black people in the north.
 - Huck is a child. He may be able to get a job to support himself, but working conditions for children during this time period were harsh and often dangerous.
 - Huck and Jim express elements of ignorance, and their unfounded expectations of true freedom are allowed to oscillate and grow between them, decreasing their ability to perceive their circumstances accurately.

Related Episode 1

- *During chapter 15, Huck and Jim sail through thick fog, and become separated. When reunited, Huck manages to convince Jim that he has dreamt up the entire ordeal.*
 - Jim did not actually have a dream. Huck convinces Jim that he has, as an explanation for his disappearance. Huck does not intend malice with his lie, his morals just do not allow for him to see the insensitivity of his actions.
 - Jim is hurt when he catches Huck's bluff; the foundation of freedom and brotherhood they have developed together so far has been directly undercut, with little reason nor premeditation.
 - Jim is coming to realize he cannot predict Huck's juvenile, morally-ambiguous mind.
 - Jim cannot be certain that Huck's actions in the future will be aligned with his goals anymore.
 - The illusion of complete safety and therefore freedom on the raft has been lifted, and Jim can perceive his circumstances with more clarity, with the expense of his feeling of safety.

Related Episode 2

- *During chapter 12, Huck and Jim encounter a wrecked steamboat. Huck insists they explore the vessel, despite the danger of the steamboat being washed away while they are inside. Huck boards the vessel and encounters two bandits threatening to kill a third. Huck and Jim narrowly escape the wreck onboard the bandit's boat after discovering their own raft has washed away.*
 - Huck and Jim see the river as their source of freedom, and at many times, their escape from danger. However, these dangerous instances are very commonly brought on by the river itself, as in this case.
 - As they float southwards, and more encounters like this one occur, it becomes clearer to Huck and Jim that the river is not as safe as they initially thought. For as long as they are on the river, they are not free of danger, however the danger on land only becomes greater as they travel farther south.

Twain's Point of View

- Twain reminds us that our decisions are often based off of incomplete or incorrect information.
 - At the very end of the novel, it is revealed that Jim has been a free man for almost the entire novel. Miss Watson has died and freed Jim as a provision of her will.
 - The illusion of freedom over Huck and Jim exists only because of the incomplete information provided to them.

Real Life Connection

- You cannot ignore your problems and hope for them to automatically be resolved.
 - You must have courage and take action to free yourself from the fear these problems give you.
 - You may reach the solution to your problem and realize the invalidity of the fear you had.

Conclusion

- Huck and Jim make their decisions to take action both at the beginning of the book and during almost all of their encounters based on incomplete information.
- Neither character can know what they will encounter during their descent of the Mississippi River, and they cannot know that their lives will improve as a result of their decisions, however ignorance and naïvety lead them to believe they will be absolutely safe.
- One can extrapolate that our perception of reality is just as fundamentally flawed as Huck and Jim's, based on misinformation, incomplete information, or missing information in every circumstance. Mistakes occur as a direct result of our inherent inability to know all the relevant information when making a decision.