

# The Adventures of Tom Sawyer | Chapter 1 |

## Summary

[Tom Sawyer](#) lives with his [Aunt Polly](#) and half-brother, Sidney, in the town of St. Petersburg, Missouri. In the novel's opening scene, Tom's aunt finds him hiding in a closet with jam on his face, proof that he's broken a rule. She worries that she isn't doing "her duty by him" and notes that he's "full of the Old Scratch" (the devil), but she also admits that his antics amuse her.

Tom plays hooky and goes swimming, but he covers up his actions by resewing his shirt collar, which he would have had to detach to remove the shirt. It seems as if he'll get away with it until his brother points out that the thread color is wrong. After noting that he's going to get his revenge on Sid, Tom goes out and ends up in a quarrel with another boy. Tom wins his fight, sneaks back into his house, and is caught by Aunt Polly. His punishment is to spend his Saturday working for her.

## Analysis

St. Petersburg, Missouri, is closely influenced by [Twain](#)'s childhood home of Hannibal, Missouri. The town was situated along the Mississippi River, and the experiences that Twain had there in his own life appear in the text in fictional ways. As revealed in both Twain's letters and the autobiography he dictated in the first decade of the 1900s, people and events in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* were drawn directly from Twain's childhood in Missouri. While *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is not truly autobiographical, Twain used his experiences to create both this novel and another of his novels, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Twain revealed that his brother Henry was the basis of Sid in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and the event with the thread color of Tom's collar was drawn from Twain's life. He makes a point to tell readers that "Henry was a very much finer and better boy than Sid ever was." Tom's antics in this opening chapter give readers a sense of his cleverness and troublemaking tendencies and of [Aunt Polly](#)'s affection and ineffectual concern for him.

# The Adventures of Tom Sawyer | Chapter 2 | Summary

## Summary

Saturday comes and, with it, Tom's punishment. His task is to whitewash the fence. It's a glorious day. Blossoms and brightness abound, but Tom is sad. He starts to work, sighing and weary. He perks up when he sees Jim, [Aunt Polly's](#) slave, who is skipping and singing as he heads to fetch water. Tom offers to get water in exchange for Jim doing some of the whitewashing, but Jim refuses by explaining that he was told not to fool around and that Aunt Polly warned him that Tom would ask him to whitewash the fence, and he was not to do it. However, Jim is tempted at seeing Tom's injured toe. Tom's ruse doesn't work though, and Aunt Polly catches them and chases Jim away.

But Tom does manage to make his friends help him whitewash the fence. He convinces Ben Rogers that whitewashing the fence is fun. He protests when Ben offers, explaining that Aunt Polly wouldn't let Jim help. In a matter of minutes, Ben is paying to do Tom's work, trading him a half-eaten apple for the privilege. He's followed by Billy Fisher (for a kite), Johnny Miller (for a dead rat), and so on. By the end of the day, he's collected a pile of treasures, and the boys have completed his work.

## Analysis

Tom is exceedingly clever. He is able to convince Ben and several other boys that it's not work to whitewash the fence. There is some truth to this since enjoying a thing makes it less of a chore and more of a pleasure. But Tom, who is clearly *not* enjoying painting the fence, uses deception and bandwagon persuasion to convince the boys to do his work. It is important to note that Tom does not appear to view any allegiance as sacred; he is as happy to deceive his friends as he is his family.

Tom's cleverness is something [Aunt Polly](#) and Jim both expect and are prepared to guard against. This would indicate that his friends should also be aware that Tom is capable of such manipulation. However, not only are they eager to believe that the opportunity to whitewash is fun, but they all pay for the right to do so. This chapter reveals a level of intelligence and ingenuity that will serve Tom well in the novel. Tom has precisely the right traits to set himself up for an interesting adventure.

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## Summary

Tom reports to [Aunt Polly](#) to let her know the chore is done. Not surprisingly, she doubts him. When she sees that the work is completed, she praises Tom and rewards him with an apple and an "improving lecture" and quote from the Bible. Tom also steals a doughnut on the way out and throws a clod of dirt at Sid in revenge for pointing out the thread to Aunt Polly.

In good spirits, Tom heads to the public square to meet his friends for a game of war. He and his friend [Joe Harper](#) each lead one "army." After their game Tom leaves and sees [Becky Thatcher](#) for the first time in the garden of a school friend. Becky is Tom's love interest from

this moment forward, and he tries to impress her by performing a series of gymnastic maneuvers while ignoring her. She tosses a pansy to him before going inside. Tom is in such a good mood when he returns home that Aunt Polly's lecture for "clodding" Sid and her knuckle raps for stealing sugar do not lessen his happiness. Sid is not punished for the same crime.

Once Aunt Polly is no longer in the room, Sid again steals sugar, but this time he breaks the bowl. Aunt Polly assumes Tom is guilty and strikes him for it. When he points out that he's innocent, she pauses for a moment before asserting that he was surely guilty of something else she didn't know.

## Analysis

As with the incident with the shirt collar in [Chapter 1](#), both the clodding and the sugar-stealing are also drawn from [Twain's](#) own life. Twain wrote, "Henry never stole sugar. He took it openly from the bowl. His mother knew he wouldn't take sugar when she wasn't looking, but she had her doubts about me. Not her doubts, either. She knew very well that I would." Twain goes on to explain that on the day when Henry broke the sugar bowl, he waited and "allowed the silence to work." However, instead of having a chance to say that Henry was to blame, Twain's silence was greeted by his mother striking him. When he pointed out his innocence, his mother—like [Aunt Polly](#) in the novel—noted, "It isn't any matter. You deserve for something you've done that I didn't know about; and if you haven't done it, why then you deserve for something that you're going to do."

Aunt Polly is presented as someone who is susceptible to deception but also shrewd when it comes to Tom's behavior, as Becky is later in the novel. She is aware that Tom lies and regularly makes choices that lead to trouble, but she also continues to trust in his goodness.

# The Adventures of Tom Sawyer | Chapter 4 |

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The next day, Sunday, Tom is to prepare the verses he was meant to have memorized. He hasn't done so, unlike Sid. After trying to quickly memorize them, Tom attempts to recite them to his cousin Mary. She encourages him by way of bribery, promising him a prize if he succeeds. He does so and is rewarded with a Barlow knife (a pocketknife). Shortly thereafter she convinces him to wash and tidy himself. Mary takes over and brushes his hair and convinces him to put on nicer clothes and even to wear shoes.

Tom goes to sabbath-school with Mary and Sid. Along the way, he proceeds to buy tickets from his classmates. These tickets are the result of successful recitation of verses, and with enough tickets, a student earns a prize.

The superintendent, Mr. Walters, appears and makes a speech. Present also are three guests, including Judge Thatcher. Mr. Walters and the teachers and students show off for the guests, and Mr. Walters wishes that he had a student with enough tickets to claim a prize. Then, shockingly, Tom goes forward with enough tickets to claim a prize. Those who know Tom are suspicious, but he still receives the prize.

Tom, for his part, is lost for words. The judge is Becky's father. Tom stutters at saying his own name. Then the judge asks Tom a question that he should be able to answer—the names of the first two disciples—but he obviously has no idea. Instead, he answers, "David and Goliath!"

### Analysis

As with several of the earlier incidents, Tom's ingenuity is again on display. He could work to earn the prize in the way the other students have done, but his plan is more complicated. He wants the prize, so he purchases the tickets from the children who have earned them by reciting their verses.

[Twain](#) makes sure the reader knows Tom is able to complete the task. When Mary offers him a reward for recitation, he is able to memorize and repeat the verses. However, he has chosen not to do so. The prize she offers (a knife) provides incentive. The prize offered at the school (the tickets) does not. Tom's interest is in winning the bigger, more coveted prize, and he does so by gaming the system. Tom is always thinking, always planning, and in this case that plan results in both a prize and embarrassment.

# The Adventures of Tom Sawyer | Chapter 5 |

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While at church, Tom spends his time watching the congregants rather than paying attention to the service. Through his observations, the reader gets a glimpse of villagers who do not figure otherwise into the story (the belle of the village, for example, and the "Model Boy" who takes "heedful care of his mother as if she were cut glass"). The minister's sermon ("when the lion and the lamb should lie down together and a little child should lead them") catches Tom's interest but only in the sense that he wishes he could be the child to lead a lion.

Tom's interest shifts to a beetle, a so-called "pinch-bug." Along with other congregants, Tom watches the beetle, especially when a poodle wanders in and studies the beetle. By the end of the sermon the poodle sits on the beetle, which pinches him, and the entire church is "red-faced and suffocating with suppressed laughter."

### Analysis

The novel has both action-driven chapters that advance the plot and chapters such as this one that provide character and comic sketches. This chapter highlights many members of the village we do not see regularly. As is common in Southern literature (as with William Faulkner, who set several novels in the fictional Yoknapatawpha County), the world of the novel is larger than the cast of characters. Twain's descriptions here show us vibrant character types whose presence hints at their own stories: a beautiful girl with numerous men trying to catch her attention, the "Model Boy" with his mother.

Also, a glimpse of the characters in the church makes clear that the main characters of the story are not the focus of the village. An entire community beyond the main characters exists in St. Petersburg. The orphan and his aunt, the son of a drunk, and the newcomers are not the center of the community. Twain doesn't suggest that Tom and Aunt Polly, Huck Finn, and the Thatchers are outsiders, but they are not prominent members of the community. Tom is not interacting with the villagers seen in the church, either in this scene or the previous scenes. Neither is Huck. The characters the reader has met thus far in the novel live in the village, but Twain points out to the reader here that village life is much larger than them.

# The Adventures of Tom Sawyer | Chapter 6 |

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The following morning finds Tom in low spirits. He alarms his aunt by telling her that his toe is "mortified" (severely infected). She discovers that this is untrue, but in the conversation, Tom slips and reveals his sore tooth. Rather than let him stay home from school, she pulls his tooth.

On the way to school, Tom meets [Huck Finn](#). They discuss a wart cure that involves taking a dead cat to a graveyard, and they plan to go to the graveyard that night to try it. The devils are expected to come for the recently deceased Hoss Williams, according to Huck. Tom trades his tooth to Huck for a tick and goes on to school, where he is in trouble for tardiness. After Mr. Dobbins strikes him, Tom is sent to sit with the girls. This, however, ends up being a reward, as Tom begins to talk to [Becky Thatcher](#). Becky is impressed by Tom's drawings, and after some flirtation he writes "I love you" to Becky.

## Analysis

One of the traits of the 19th-century "boy book" is the love interest. [Becky Thatcher](#) provides the required schoolboy crush that is a mainstay of the genre. Becky is drawn to Tom not because of his antics or his manipulation but because of his drawing.

Also evident in this chapter is the prevalence of superstitious narratives among the boys. Readers have already seen Tom's interest in stories through play (acting out armies in the center of town with [Joe Harper](#) in [Chapter 3](#)) and in the narrative aspect of the minister's sermon. Here readers see his interest in Huck's tales about the presence of devils in the graveyard and about ways to remove warts with a dead cat.

# The Adventures of Tom Sawyer | Chapter 7 |

## Summary

### Summary

Tom spends the morning in school toying with the tick and waiting for noon. At noon break, he is again able to talk to Becky. As promised, he shows her how to draw, holding her hand to help her. He then says they ought to get engaged. He explains that she has to tell him she loves him, which she does, and then says, "It's all over but the kiss."

Unfortunately for Tom, he slips and reveals that Becky is not the first girl to whom he has been engaged. He offers her a gift—an andiron knob, a metal hearth support for firewood—but she knocks it to the floor. In response Tom walks out. When she calls him back he's already gone.

### Analysis

Becky's rejection comes because of Tom's unplanned admission. As with [Aunt Polly](#), Becky sees his affection and cares for him in return; however, his lies upset her. Becky is not as trusting as his friends. Jim, Aunt Polly, Sid, and Becky have all seen the truth behind Tom's words, but his friends and classmates are more easily duped by Tom's stories.

The andiron knob (the decorative top on the metal frame that holds logs in a fireplace) Tom offers Becky is symbolic of the truth of his affections. Offering a physical token of intent along with an engagement is traditional; rings were used as early as the 15th century. While this is neither a ring nor an offer to her father, the andiron knob is—to Tom, who loves to collect odd objects—a sign of his regard for Becky. Her rejection of it is a rejection of him, and his departure is not surprising in that context.

# The Adventures of Tom Sawyer | Chapter 8 |

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Tom doesn't return to school after the noon break. Instead he goes into the woods, where he is faced with another disappointment. His trick of burying a marble to draw out all of the ones he's lost (a superstition among Tom and his friends) has been a failure. Upon consulting with a "doodle-bug" who offers no answer, Tom suspects a witch. He throws a marble, looking for its match (another superstition). This, too, is unsuccessful. Two more tries follow, and the final one is successful at finding the missing marble.

Not long after, [Joe Harper](#) arrives, and the boys play Robin Hood.

### Analysis

Here again readers see a reliance upon superstitions. This builds upon Tom's belief that a dead cat can be part of a cure for warts and that devils appear in the graveyard. Whereas [Aunt Polly](#) refers to the Bible, Tom and Huck are more likely to use superstitious beliefs as a guide, and they seem largely immune to the Christian beliefs constantly preached by their elders.

Tom also consults Robin Hood here and elsewhere in the novel as a source of authority. At this point in life Tom is an orphan being raised by his aunt; he lacks a father figure and gets many of his ideas about the world from reading and other fanciful sources. In any case the reader sees in this chapter that Tom is studying the actions of the characters in the Robin Hood story. His playacting here and his playing army with Joe and the boys at the onset of the novel both involve taking on the role of men trying to overcome great odds. His playacting also connects the novel to the larger genre of boy books.