***The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn***

***Chapter 1:***

***Translation:***

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| **ORIGINAL TEXT** | **MODERN TEXT** |
| You don’t know about me without you have read a book by the name of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer; but that ain’t no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing. I never seen anybody but lied one time or another, without it was Aunt Polly, or the widow, or maybe Mary. Aunt Polly—Tom’s Aunt Polly, she is—and Mary, and the Widow Douglas is all told about in that book, which is mostly a true book, with some stretchers, as I said before. | You wouldn’t have heard of me unless you’ve read a book called *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. But that’s okay. Mr. Mark Twain wrote that book, and what he wrote was mostly true. He exaggerated some things, but most of it was true. That’s not a big deal. I never met anybody who hasn’t lied at one time or another, except for maybe Aunt Polly, the widow, or Mary. Aunt Polly—Tom’s Aunt Polly, that is—and Mary and the Widow Douglas are all in that book, which was mostly true, except for some exaggerations, as I said before. |
| Now the way that the book winds up is this: Tom and me found the money that the robbers hid in the cave, and it made us rich. We got six thousand dollars apiece—all gold. It was an awful sight of money when it was piled up. Well, Judge Thatcher he took it and put it out at interest, and it fetched us a dollar a day apiece all the year round—more than a body could tell what to do with. The Widow Douglas she took me for her son, and allowed she would sivilize me; but 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. But Tom Sawyer he hunted me up and said he was going to start a band of robbers, and I might join if I would go back to the widow and be respectable. So I went back. | Now at the end of that book, Tom and I had found the money that the robbers hid in the cave. That money made us rich. We got six thousand dollars each, all in gold. It looked awesome when it was all piled up. Well, Judge Thatcher took that money and invested it. It earned each of us a dollar a day for every day of the year, which was more money than we knew what to do with. The Widow Douglas adopted me and said she’d teach me manners, but it was really hard for me to live in her house because she was so prim and proper. When I couldn’t stand it any longer, I ran away. I put on my old ratty clothes and hung out in my favorite sugar barrel. I was happy and free again. But then Tom Sawyer found me. He said he was forming a band of robbers and that I could join if I returned to the widow’s house and acted respectably. So I went back. |
| The widow she cried over me, and called me a poor lost lamb, and she called me a lot of other names, too, but she never meant no harm by it. She put me in them new clothes again, and I couldn’t do nothing but sweat and sweat, and feel all cramped up. Well, then, the old thing commenced again. The widow rung a bell for supper, and you had to come to time. When you got to the table you couldn’t go right to eating, but you had to wait for the widow to tuck down her head and grumble a little over the victuals, though there warn’t really anything the matter with them,—that is, nothing only everything was cooked by itself. In a barrel of odds and ends it is different; things get mixed up, and the juice kind of swaps around, and the things go better. | The widow cried when I came back. She called me a poor lost lamb and a lot of other names, but she didn’t mean any harm. She made me wear those new clothes, which made me sweat and feel cooped up all over again. Then all the fuss over rules started up again. For example, whenever the widow rang the supper bell, you had to drop what you were doing and come to the table. When you sat down to eat, you had to wait for her to bow her head and pray, even though there wasn’t anything wrong with the food—except for the fact that she separated everything on the plate, which doesn’t make the food taste as good as it does when it gets jumbled together and the flavors mix. |
| After supper she got out her book and learned me about Moses and the Bulrushers, and I was in a sweat to find out all about him; but by and by she let it out that Moses had been dead a considerable long time; so then I didn’t care no more about him, because I don’t take no stock in dead people. | After supper she got out her Bible and taught me all about Moses and the [Bulrushers](javascript:void(0);). I was pretty excited to hear about him, until she told me that he’d been dead a long time. After that, I didn’t really care to hear more, since I’m not interested in dead people. |
| Pretty soon I wanted to smoke, and asked the widow to let me. But she wouldn’t. She said it was a mean practice and wasn’t clean, and I must try to not do it any more. That is just the way with some people. They get down on a thing when they don’t know nothing about it. Here she was a-bothering about Moses, which was no kin to her, and no use to anybody, being gone, you see, yet finding a power of fault with me for doing a thing that had some good in it. And she took snuff, too; of course that was all right, because she done it herself. | Pretty soon, I wanted a smoke, and I asked the widow if that would be okay, but she said no. She said that smoking was filthy and disgusting, and that I had to stop. That’s just the way it is with some people—they badmouth things they don’t know anything about. Here she was going on and on about Moses, who wasn’t related to her and couldn’t help anybody since he’s dead. But then she picks on me for trying to do something that would have done me some good. And she even takes snuff. Of course, she thought that was okay because it was something she liked to do. |
| Her sister, Miss Watson, a tolerable slim old maid, with goggles on, had just come to live with her, and took a set at me now with a spelling-book. She worked me middling hard for about an hour, and then the widow made her ease up. I couldn’t stood it much longer. Then for an hour it was deadly dull, and I was fidgety. Miss Watson would say, “Don’t put your feet up there, Huckleberry;” and “Don’t scrunch up like that, Huckleberry—set up straight;” and pretty soon she would say, “Don’t gap and stretch like that, Huckleberry—why don’t you try to behave?” Then she told me all about the bad place, and I said I wished I was there. She got mad then, but I didn’t mean no harm. All I wanted was to go somewheres; all I wanted was a change, I warn’t particular. She said it was wicked to say what I said; said she wouldn’t say it for the whole world; she was going to live so as to go to the good place. Well, I couldn’t see no advantage in going where she was going, so I made up my mind I wouldn’t try for it. But I never said so, because it would only make trouble, and wouldn’t do no good. | The widow’s sister, Miss Watson, had just moved in with her. She was skinny old maid who wore glasses and was pretty nice, I guess. One day she sat me down and tried to teach me how to read out of a spelling book. She taught me for about an hour until the widow made her stop, which was good since I couldn’t take it any more. Another boring hour passed, and I started fidgeting. So Miss Watson would say things like “Don’t put your feet on the table, Huckleberry,” and “Don’t slouch, Huckleberry—sit up straight.” Then she’d say, “Don’t yawn and stretch like that, Huckleberry. Why don’t you behave?” Then she told me all about Hell, and I told her that I wished I were there already. That made her angry, but I didn’t really mean any harm. All I wanted was a change of scenery—to go anywhere else. She said it was wicked to say what I had said, and that she would never say such a thing because she wanted to live a good life and go to Heaven. Well, I didn’t see what going to Heaven would get me, so I decided not to even try to get there. I didn’t tell her this, though, because I figured it wouldn’t do any good and would only get me in trouble. |
| ORIGINAL TEXT | MODERN TEXT |
| Now she had got a start, and she went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was to go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn’t think much of it. But I never said so. I asked her if she reckoned Tom Sawyer would go there, and she said not by a considerable sight. I was glad about that, because I wanted him and me to be together. | Now that she had started, Miss Watson went on and on about Heaven. She said the only thing people do there is sing and play the harp forever and ever. This didn’t sound so great to me. I didn’t tell her this, though. I asked if she thought Tom Sawyer would go to Heaven, and she said not by a long shot. This made me happy, because I wanted the two of us to be together. |
| Miss Watson she kept pecking at me, and it got tiresome and lonesome. By and by they fetched the niggers in and had prayers, and then everybody was off to bed. I went up to my room with a piece of candle, and put it on the table. Then I set down in a chair by the window and tried to think of something cheerful, but it warn’t no use. I felt so lonesome I most wished I was dead. The stars were shining, and the leaves rustled in the woods ever so mournful; and I heard an owl, away off, who-whooing about somebody that was dead, and a whippowill and a dog crying about somebody that was going to die; and the wind was trying to whisper something to me, and I couldn’t make out what it was, and so it made the cold shivers run over me. Then away out in the woods I heard that kind of a sound that a ghost makes when it wants to tell about something that’s on its mind and can’t make itself understood, and so can’t rest easy in its grave, and has to go about that way every night grieving. I got so down-hearted and scared I did wish I had some company. Pretty soon a spider went crawling up my shoulder, and I flipped it off and it lit in the candle; and before I could budge it was all shriveled up. I didn’t need anybody to tell me that that was an awful bad sign and would fetch me some bad luck, so I was scared and most shook the clothes off of me. I got up and turned around in my tracks three times and crossed my breast every time; and then I tied up a little lock of my hair with a thread to keep witches away. But I hadn’t no confidence. You do that when you’ve lost a horseshoe that you’ve found, instead of nailing it up over the door, but I hadn’t ever heard anybody say it was any way to keep off bad luck when you’d killed a spider. | Miss Watson kept lecturing me, which made me tired and lonely. Pretty soon they called the n------ in to say their prayers, and then everybody went to off to bed. I took a candle up to my room, and put it on the table. Then I sat down in a chair by the window and tried to think of something cheerful, but it was no use. I felt so lonely I wished I were dead. The stars were out and the leaves were rustling sadly in the woods. I heard an owl in the distance, hooting as if someone had died, and a whippowill and a dog howling as if someone were going to die. I heard the wind blowing as if it was trying to tell me something I couldn’t understand. It gave me the creeps. Then way out in the woods I heard the kind of sound that a ghost makes when it wants to tell you something important but can’t make itself understood—this is why it can’t rest in peace and is doomed to haunt the living forever. All this made me feel so depressed and scared that I wished someone were with me. Pretty soon a spider crawled up my shoulder. I flicked it off, and it landed in the candle and shriveled up before I could save it. I didn’t need anyone to tell me that this was a bad sign and would bring me bad luck, and so I felt even more scared. I shivered so much that I nearly shook my clothes off. I stood up, turned around, and crossed myself three times. Then I used a piece of thread to tie a bit of my hair in a knot to keep away any witches. But this didn’t make me feel any better, since that trick only works when you’ve lost a horseshoe that you’ve found, instead of nailing it up over the doorway. I’d never heard anyone say it would work to keep away the bad luck when you’ve killed a spider. |
| I set down again, a-shaking all over, and got out my pipe for a smoke; for the house was all as still as death now, and so the widow wouldn’t know. Well, after a long time I heard the clock away off in the town go boom—boom—boom—twelve licks; and all still again—stiller than ever. Pretty soon I heard a twig snap down in the dark amongst the trees—something was a stirring. I set still and listened. Directly I could just barely hear a “me-yow! me-yow!” down there. That was good! Says I, “me-yow! me-yow!” as soft as I could, and then I put out the light and scrambled out of the window on to the shed. Then I slipped down to the ground and crawled in among the trees, and, sure enough, there was Tom Sawyer waiting for me. | I sat down again, shaking all over. I pulled out my pipe to have a smoke, since the house was quiet and the widow wouldn’t find out. After a long while, I heard the clock way off in the town chime twelve times. Then it was still again, stiller than ever. Pretty soon I heard a twig snap in the dark somewhere among the trees—something was moving around down there. I sat still and listened until I could just barely make out a “Me-yow! Me-yow!” That was good! I answered, “Me-yow! “Me-yow!” back and then scrambled out the window and down onto the shed. I slipped down to the ground and crawled into the woods. Sure enough, there was Tom Sawyer waiting for me. |

***Summary in Brief:***

Huckleberry Finn introduces himself as one of the protagonists in The Adventures of Tom Sawyer. He tells how he and Tom recovered six thousand dollars in gold and became rich. The Widow Douglas took Huckleberry as a son and tried to civilize him by subjecting him to a life of made beds, dinner bells and prayer. She also introduced him to the story of Moses, whose basket was hidden in the bulrushes, but Huck didn't think the story very practical. Her sister, Miss Watson, tried to introduce Huck to reading and manners, both of which he didn't take to easily. After having a shaking fit following his accidental murder of a spy, he heard something outside. It was Tom Sawyer.

***Analysis in Brief:***

Twain's masterful use of language in this book underscores his portrayal of an ignorant, country boy possessed by a lot of superstition and a wonderful sense of irony and adventure. Huckleberry Finn is a wonderful narrator with his own sense of humor and commonsensical attempts to accommodate himself as a young man brought up half-wild and desperately poor, who is suddenly exposed to a normal, middle-class life in the country.

***Summary:***

* Meet Huck.
* You probably already know him from a little book called [***The Adventures of Tom Sawyer***](https://www.shmoop.com/tom-sawyer/).
* But it's cool if you don't, because you're about to get to know him really well.
* Like, you've probably already noticed that he's a kid, and that he doesn't talk too good.
* He's a rich kid, though. Not long ago, he and Tom found $12,000 in a cave.
* These days, $12,000 could hardly buy you a used car—but back then, it was a boatload of money. So much money that they gave it all over to the town official, Judge Thatcher, for safe-keeping.
* Huck is currently living with the Widow Douglas and her sister Miss Watson near the Mississippi River.
* These women are trying to "sivilize" Huck, in the no-elbows-on-the-table, prayers-before-supper, doff-your-hat kind of way. Huck takes to this "civilizing" like a cow to the sun on a poppin' hot day in July.
* We're not sure what that means exactly, but it sounds like something Huck would say.
* Part of this "civilizing" involves teaching Huck about religion. At first he's all gung-ho to learn about [**Moses**](https://www.shmoop.com/exodus/moses.html), until he realizes Moses is dead. Huck "[doesn't] take no stock in dead people," so there goes his religious fervor.
* Miss Watson takes this whole [**civilizing process**](http://www.amazon.com/Civilizing-Process-Sociogenetic-Psychogenetic-Investigations/dp/0631221611) seriously, though, and she threatens that Huck will go to hell if he doesn't start behaving himself, i.e., sitting up straight at the dinner table.
* Apparently Hell is full of slouchers.
* Huck thinks this sounds just fine to him. Heaven sounds awfully boring. Plus, he's pretty sure Tom Sawyer is going straight to hell, and he wants to keep hanging out with his friend.
* After dinner, Huck lights a candle in his bedroom. He can't sleep and sits awake listening to the sounds of the woods outside, imagining ghosts and all sorts of spooky things.
* A spider crawls up Huck's shoulder and he flips it off—straight in to the candle.
* Oops.
* This is an "awful bad sign." After performing various good-luck ceremonies to counteract the bad luck that comes from killing a spider, Huck resigns himself to his approaching fate.
* In fact, he pulls out his pipe for a relaxing smoke.
* Uh, don't try this at home, Shmoopers.
* Just after the clock strikes midnight, Huck hears a *"me-yow! me-yow!"*
* He meows back softly.
* Don't worry—Huck isn't talking to a cat. He scrambles out of the window and down a shed and, sure enough, there's Tom waiting for him.

***Summary in Detai:***

The novel begins as the narrator (later identified as Huckleberry Finn) states that we may know of him from another book, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,* written by “Mr. Mark Twain.” Huck quickly asserts that it “ain’t no matter” if we haven’t heard of him. According to Huck, Twain mostly told the truth in the previous tale, with some “stretchers” thrown in, although everyone—except Tom’s Aunt Polly, the Widow Douglas, and maybe a few other girls—tells lies once in a while.

We learn that *Tom Sawyer*ended with Tom and Huckleberry finding a stash of gold some robbers had hidden in a cave. The boys received $6,000 apiece, which the local judge, Judge Thatcher, put into a trust The money in the bank now accrues a dollar a day from interest. Then, the Widow Douglas adopted and tried to “sivilize” Huck. Huck couldn’t stand it, so he threw on his old rags and ran away. He has since returned because Tom Sawyer told him he could join his new band of robbers if he would return to the Widow “and be respectable.”

The Widow frequently bemoans her failure to reform Huck. He particularly cringes at the fact that he has to “grumble” (i.e., pray) over the food before every meal. The Widow tries to teach Huck about Moses, but Huck loses interest when he realizes that Moses is dead. The Widow will not let Huck smoke but approves of snuff since she uses it herself. Her sister, Miss Watson, tries to give Huck spelling lessons. These efforts are not in vain, as Huck does in fact learn to read.

Huck feels especially restless because the Widow and Miss Watson constantly attempt to improve his behavior. When Miss Watson tells him about the “bad place”—hell—he blurts out that he would like to go there, for a change of scenery. This proclamation causes an uproar. Huck doesn’t see the point of going to the “good place” and resolves not to bother trying to get there. He keeps this sentiment a secret, however, because he doesn’t want to cause more trouble. When Huck asks, Miss Watson tells him that there is no chance that Tom Sawyer will end up in heaven. Huck is glad “because I wanted him and me to be together.”

One night, after Miss Watson leads a prayer session with Huck and the household slaves, Huck goes to bed feeling “so lonesome I most wished I was dead.” He gets shivers hearing the sounds of nature through his window. Huck accidentally flicks a spider into a candle, and the bad omen frightens him. Just after midnight, Huck hears movement below the window and hears a “me-yow” sound, to which he responds with another “me-yow.” Climbing out the window onto the shed, Huck finds Tom Sawyer waiting for him in the yard.

***Analysis in Detail:***

In the opening pages of Huckleberry Finn, we feel the presence of both Huck’s narrative voice and Twain’s voice as author. From the start, Huck speaks to us in a conversational tone that is very much his own but that also serves as a mouthpiece for Twain. When Huck mentions “Mr. Mark Twain” by name, he immediately gains an independence from his author: if he can mention his author, then in some sense he must exist on the same level that the author does. At the same time, Huck links Twain’s new novel to The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, although he is careful to note that the two works are independent of one another and that we do not need to have read the previous novel to understand this one. Nevertheless, Twain does seek to take advantage of Tom Sawyer’s popularity by featuring the earlier novel’s characters in this one.

Beyond establishing a voice, the first paragraph also conveys Huck’s deeper personality. Huck is not just a poor boy with a humorous way of speaking and thinking; he is also a thoughtful young man who is willing and eager to question the “facts” of life and facets of human personality, such as the tendency to lie. The events in Tom Sawyer have already established Huck as a somewhat marginal character in the town of St. Petersburg. Although he is white, he is poor and therefore out of touch with civilized society. The novelty of practices like “grumbling” over food lends Huck’s observations a humorous, fresh perspective on the foibles of society. Though Huck always remains open to learning, he never accepts new ideas without thinking, and he remains untainted by the rules and assumptions of the white society in which he finds himself. Though quick to comment on the absurdity of much of the world around him, Huck is not mean-spirited. He is equally quick to tell us that though the “widow cried over me, and called me a poor lost lamb . . . she never meant no harm by it.”

The first chapter begins Twain’s exploration of race and society, two of the major thematic concerns in Huckleberry Finn. We see quickly that, in the town of St. Petersburg, owning slaves is considered normal and unremarkable—even the Widow Douglas, a pious Christian, owns slaves. The slaves depicted in the novel are “household slaves,” slaves who worked on small farms and in homes in which the master owned only a few slaves. Twain implicitly contrasts this type of slavery with the more brutal form of plantation slavery, in which hundreds of slaves worked for a single master, creating greater anonymity between slave and master, which in turn led to more backbreaking labor—and, often, extreme cruelty. Some critics have accused Twain of painting too soft a picture of slavery by not writing about plantation slaves. However, by depicting the “better” version of slavery, Twain is able to make a sharper criticism of the insidious dehumanization that accompanies all forms of slavery: the “lucky” household slaves, just like their counterparts on the plantations, are also in danger of having their families torn apart and are never considered fully human. Twain’s portrayal suggests that if the “better” slavery is this terrible, the horrors of the “worse” type must be even more awful and dehumanizing. It is important to note here that Twain uses the word nigger, which has gotten Huckleberry Finn in trouble with many twentieth-century school boards, with a nonchalance that is certainly troubling to us today. The word would not have been disturbing in Twain’s time, however, and is sadly necessary to any novel claiming to paint a realistic portrait of the slaveholding South at the time.

Twain’s portrayal of slaveholding in this first chapter also raises questions about the hypocrisy and moral vacuity of society. Throughout the novel, Huck encounters seemingly good people who happen to own slaves—an incongruity that is never easily resolved. We are not meant to think that the Widow Douglas, for example, is thoroughly evil. People like the Widow serve as foils for Huck throughout the novel, as he tries to sort out the value of civilizing influences. Huck is a kind of natural philosopher, skeptical of social doctrines like religion and willing to set forth new ideas—for example, his idea that hell might actually be a better place than the Widow Douglas’s heaven. Beneath the adventure story, Huckleberry Finn is a tale of Huck’s moral development and of what his realizations can teach us about race, slavery, Southern society, and morality.

***Critical study:***

The novel begins with [Huck Finn](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/a/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/character-analysis/huckleberry-finn) introducing himself and referencing [The Adventures of Tom Sawyer](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/a/the-adventures-of-tom-sawyer/book-summary). "You don't know about me," Huck narrates, "without you have read a book by the name of "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer," but that ain't no matter." He tells readers that, for the most part, [Twain](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/a/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/mark-twain-biography) told the truth in *Tom Sawyer* but that everyone tells some lies, even people like Aunt Polly and the Widow Douglas.

Huck gives a brief summary of how he and [Tom](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/a/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/character-analysis/tom-sawyer) got six thousand dollars each at the end of *Tom Sawyer*. Judge Thatcher has taken Huck's money and invested it with a dollar of interest coming in each day, and Huck now lives with the Widow Douglas and her sister, Miss Watson. The sisters are, as Huck puts it, trying to "sivilize" him, and his frustration at living in a clean house and minding his manners starts to grow. Miss Watson tells Huck he will go to "the bad place" if he does not behave, and Huck thinks that will be okay as long as Miss Watson is not there.

During the evening, Huck accidentally kills a spider that was on his shoulder and worries that bad luck will follow. When the town clock strikes twelve midnight, Huck hears a noise outside his window and climbs out to find Tom Sawyer waiting for him.

The opening sentence of the novel notifies readers that Huck Finn is the narrator and will tell his story in his own words, in his own language and dialect (complete with grammatical errors and misspellings), and from his own point of view. By using the first person narrative point of view, Twain carries on the southwestern humor tradition of vernacular language; that is, Huck sounds as a young, uneducated boy from Missouri should sound.

This first sentence also alludes to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. The allusion reminds the reader of a novel about boys and their adventures, the purpose of which, according to Twain, was to rekindle in adults memories "of how they felt and thought and talked, and what queer enterprises they sometimes engaged in." Then Huck — and Twain — dismiss the work with "But that ain't no matter." Although the boyish type adventure episodes tend to reappear as a plot motif in *Huck Finn*, especially in the sections including Tom, their primary purpose is more to communicate criticism of Twain's contemporary society than to evoke fond memories. This statement also makes clear that it does not matter whether readers have read Twain's earlier book or not. *Huck Finn*is Huck's story, and he will tell it from his natural, unsophisticated perspective.

This first chapter introduces several major literary elements. Humor is used in various ways in the novel, but Huck's deadpan narration and pragmatic personality juxtaposed to events and beliefs that make no logical or practical sense to him provide much of the novel's humor. Because Huck is young and uncivilized, he describes events and people in a direct manner without any extensive commentary. Huck does not laugh at humorous situations and statements simply because his literal approach does not find them to be funny; he fails to see the irony. He does not project social, religious, cultural, or conceptual nuances into situations because he has never learned them. For example, when Miss Watson tells Huck that "*she* was going to live so as to go to the good place [heaven]," Huck, applying what he knows about Miss Watson and the obvious lifestyle that makes her happy, responds that he "couldn't see no advantage in going where she was going," and makes up his mind to not try to get there. Huck does not intend his comment to be disrespectful or sarcastic; it is simply a statement of fact and is indicative of the literal, practical approach to life that he exhibits throughout the novel.

The first chapter also serves to introduce an important thematic image that pervades the work: natural, free individualism contrasted with the expectations of society. Huck feels confined by the social expectations of civilization and wants to return to his simple, carefree life. He dislikes the social and cultural trappings of clean clothes, Bible studies, spelling lessons, and manners that he is forced to follow. Huck cannot understand why people would want to live under such circumstances, and he longs to be able to return to his previous life where no one tries to "sivilize" him.

The contrast between freedom and civilization permeates the novel, and Huck's struggle for natural freedom (freedom from society) mirrors the more important struggle of [Jim](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/a/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/character-analysis/jim), who struggles for social freedom (freedom within the society). Both Huck and Jim search for freedom during their adventure down the Mississippi, and both find that civilization presents a large obstacle to obtaining their dream. From the beginning, readers realize that civilization is filled with certain hypocrisies, including religion and the practice of slavery.

Huck's candid narration gives Twain the opportunity to make barbed comments about literary and social institutions of the nineteenth century. The barbed comments range from his literary aversion to the novels of authors such as [James Fenimore Cooper](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/l/the-last-of-the-mohicans/james-fenimore-cooper-biography) ([Last of the Mohicans](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/l/the-last-of-the-mohicans/book-summary)) to overt religious hypocrisies such as the Christian acceptance of slavery in his boyhood town.

The historical realities of slavery and racial division are, without doubt, the most important and most controversial elements in *Huck Finn*. Imbedded in the contrast between freedom and civilization is the issue of slavery, and the inclusion of the pejorative slang term "niggars" in the first chapter prepares readers for the similar coarse language that will follow. In order to depict the region and the attitude in a realistic manner, Twain makes a conscious choice not to edit regional bigotry and the language that accompanies it.

The reader should remain aware of two major points while reading this novel: First, the novel is a satire; that is, irony, sarcasm, or caustic wit are used to attack or expose folly, vice, or stupidity. Second, the novel is first person narrative (told from Huck's point of view). Confusing either of these issues can lead the unsophisticated reader to drastic misinterpretations. The feelings and interpretations of situations, issues, and events advanced by Huck are not necessarily those the author is advocating.

By the end of this first chapter, the reader has gathered a good deal of data about Huck: his mother is dead, his father is the town drunk, he has "a dollar a day . . . all the year round" income, he lacks "book learning," hates the "sivilized" ways, is keenly observant of details around him, and is a realist.

Glossary

**sugar-hogshead**a large barrel used to store sugar.

**niggers**niggar, originally a dialectal variant of *Negro*, the term is a derogatory and vulgar racial slur directed primarily toward African Americans.

***Critical Analysis:***

[The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn) begins where the [The Adventures of Tom Sawyer](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-adventures-of-tom-sawyer) leaves off. At the end of the previous novel, Huck and Tom find a treasure of twelve thousand dollars, which they divide. [Judge Thatcher](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/study-guide/character-list#judge-thatcher) takes their money and invests it in the bank at six percent interest, so that each boy earns a dollar a day on their money. Huck Finn moves in with the [Widow Douglas](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/study-guide/character-list#widow-douglas), who has agreed to care for him.

[Huckleberry Finn](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/study-guide/character-list#huckleberry-finn) is the narrator of this story, and he starts off by describing his life to the reader. After moving in with the Widow Douglas, who buys him new clothes and begins teaching him the Bible. Huck is uncomfortable with all of these "restrictions" on his life, and soon runs away to avoid being "civilized". [Tom Sawyer](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/study-guide/character-list#tom-sawyer) goes after Huck and convinces him to return to the Widow's house after promising that they will start a band of robbers together. Huck agrees to return, but still complains about having to wear new clothes and eat only when the dinner bell rings, something he was not used to while growing up with his [Pap](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/study-guide/character-list#pap).

The Widow Douglas teaches Huck the Bible and forbids him from smoking. Her attentions towards him are complemented by her sister, [Miss Watson](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/study-guide/character-list#miss-watson), who also lives in the house. Miss Watson is a spinster who decides that Huck must get an education. She tries to teach him spelling and lectures him on how to behave well so that he will be welcomed into heaven. Miss Watson warns Huck that if he does not change his ways, he will go to hell. Ironically, Huck finds the description of hell far more enticing and exciting than the description of heaven, and decides he would rather go to hell, but doesn't tell Miss Watson of his decision.

That night, Huck goes into his bedroom and lights a candle before falling asleep. He starts to feel very lonely and equates every night sound, including an owl, dog and whippowill, with death. At one point, Huck flicks a spider away, and accidentally burns it up in the candle flame, which he thinks is a very bad omen. Huck lies awake until midnight, at which time he hears a soft meow from below his window. The meow is a signal from Tom Sawyer, and Huck replies with a similar meow. He climbs out of the bedroom window and drops to the ground to meet his friend.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

Huck introduces himself as a character from Mark Twain’s earlier novel, “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.” Huck says that, while the book is mostly true, Twain told some “stretchers,” or lies, but that that’s okay, because most people tell lies one time or another. Huck explains how, at the end of the adventure recounted in the earlier book, he and Tom Sawyer both became rich, and that the [Widow Douglas](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-widow-douglas-and-miss-watson) adopted him and tried to “sivilize” him. However, Huck became bored with the Widow’s decency and regularity and ran away, but, at last, reluctantly returned when Tom told Huck that, if he returned, he could be part of Tom’s gang of robbers.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Though society, as represented by the Widow Douglas and Miss Watson, would condemn all instances of lying, Huck is a realist, able to look beyond the rigid rules of society in forming moral judgments. He recognizes that people lie and that, in some situations, lying is okay. Huck grows bored of societal rigidity and runs away, only to be convinced to return by Tom Sawyer's imaginative games, which promise a kind of adventure (if not "real" adventure).

***Summary Part 2:***

After Huck returned to the [Widow Douglas](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-widow-douglas-and-miss-watson), she wept, dressed Huck in new clothes that made him uncomfortable, and again imposed on him a life of punctuality and manners. For example, the Widow Douglas requires that Huck not begin eating his dinner immediately after it is served, but that he wait until she “grumble,” or pray, over it. Huck says, though, that the food is good, even though each dish is served by itself. He prefers it when dishes are served together so that the juice “swaps around.” The Widow also imposes Christian values on Huck. However, Huck complains that the Bible is irrelevant to him because all of its characters are dead, and he doesn’t take any stock in dead people.

***Analysis Part 2:***

The rules of society are sometimes ridiculous to Huck, like praying before a meal, especially when one’s prayer sounds less like thanks than a grumbling complaint. Huck is also intuitively against how society separates things with arbitrary boundaries, like food here, but, later, classes and races. Just as Huck likes the juices of his food to mingle, so too is he inclined to cross societal boundaries in service of what his heart tells him is right. Such boundaries, like religion, serve the dead. Huck cares about the living—about life.

***Summary Part 3:***

The Widow Douglas forbade [Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) from smoking in the house as well. Huck points out that the Widow condones useless things like studying the Bible, but forbids Huck from doing good and useful things, like smoking. Furthermore, he points out that the Widow herself takes snuff, a tobacco product, and says that this is alright, not on principle, but only because she herself does it.

***Analysis Part 3:***

The Widow Douglas is good and kind, and yet, like many members of society, she can be a hypocrite. What motivates her hypocrisy is self-interest: though she condemns Huck for smoking, the Widow doesn’t condemn snuff because she herself takes it.

***Summary Part 4:***

Meanwhile, the [Widow Douglas](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-widow-douglas-and-miss-watson)’s sister, [Miss Watson](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-widow-douglas-and-miss-watson), teaches [Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) how to spell, critiques his posture, and tells him about Heaven and Hell. Wanting a change in his circumstances, any change, Huck says he would rather be in Hell than in Heaven, much to Miss Watson’s consternation. She responds that she is living her life such that she can go to Heaven. Huck concludes that he’d certainly rather not go to wherever Miss Watson is going, but says nothing of this so as not to further upset her. He asks Miss Watson whether [Tom Sawyer](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/tom-sawyer) is going to Heaven or Hell. When Miss Watson says he’s going to Hell, Huck is glad, because that means he and his friend can be together.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Huck is frustrated with society as represented by Miss Watson’s lessons—by its strictness, its empty rules about how one must be and look—and he knows that society needs to change somehow. He wants to go to Hell because it sounds better than his current circumstances, less boring and more accepting. This choice foreshadows Huck’s later choice to be damned in saving Jim.

***Summary Part 5:***

After [Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn)’s talk with [Miss Watson](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-widow-douglas-and-miss-watson), Huck goes up to his bedroom. He sits, tries to think cheerful thoughts, but is so lonesome that he wishes he were dead. He looks out his window at nature, sees the stars, and hears mournful, ghostly sounds in the leaves and in the birdcalls. A spider crawls on Huck’s shoulder. Huck flicks the spider into a candle, where it burns. Huck, frightened, takes this as a sign of bad luck. Soon afterward, he hears a meowing outside. Huck meows back and goes outside, to find [Tom Sawyer](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/tom-sawyer) waiting for him.

***Analysis Part 5:***

When Huck is alone, away from society, free, he sometimes becomes lonesome, specifically when he perceives signs of death, like the sound of the dead leaves, as they are reflected in the natural world. Such a feeling is only exacerbated by Huck’s childish superstitions, like his reading of the burning spider as a sign of bad luck. This lonesomeness is relieved when Huck is with friends like Tom.

***Quotations:***

***Quotation 1:***

Huckleberry Finn

After supper she got out her book and learned me about Moses and the Bulrushers, and I was in a sweat to find out all about him; but by and by she let it out that Moses had been dead a considerable long time; so then I didn't care no more about him, because I don't take no stock in dead people. (1.4)

***Explanation 1:***

Huck can't figure out why anyone would care about a bunch of long-dead people. (Hey! [Ask Shmoop](https://www.shmoop.com/bible/)!) For him, religion is about the day-to-day business of living.

***Quotation 2:***

Now she had got a start, and she went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was to go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn't think much of it. But I never said so. I asked her if she reckoned Tom Sawyer would go there, and she said not by a considerable sight. I was glad about that, because I wanted him and me to be together. (1.7)

***Explanation 2:***

Well, when you put it that way, wandering around all day with a harp doesn't sound like much fun at all. You can't blame a thirteen-year-old boy for thinking that Heaven sounds a little dull.

***Quotation 3:***

The widow rung a bell for supper, and you had to come to time. When you got to the table you couldn't go right to eating, but you had to wait for the widow to tuck down her head and grumble a little over the victuals, though there warn't really anything the matter with them (1.3)

***Explanation 3:***

Well, when you put it like that, it does seem silly. On the other hand, do we really want to be eating from a trough? Don't these rules help make us human—or, are they just silly examples of "sivilization"? What's the difference between these rules and the rules that let one half of humanity enslave or oppress the other half? Deep thoughts.

***Quotation 4:***

Huckleberry Finn

The stars were shining, and the leaves rustled in the woods ever so mournful; and I heard an owl, away off, who-whooing about somebody that was dead, and a whippowill and a dog crying about somebody that was going to die; and the wind was trying to whisper something to me, and I couldn't make out what it was, and so it made the cold shivers run over me. (1.8)

***Explanation 4:***

Notice how Huck hears voices in nature—and not in the creepy, out-of-his-mind way. Nature isn't a big blank to him; he seems to think of these animals as his friends, or at least acquaintances.

***Quotation 5:***

The Widow Douglas she took me for her son, and allowed she would sivilize me; but 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. (1.2)

***Explanation 5:***

Yes, it's so awful living in a "regular and decent" house, where all your meals are on time, your laundry's done, and you have your very own basement couch in front of the Xbox. (Or something like that.) Huck isn't having it: eventually, he has to get out into nature again.

***Quotation 6:***

She put me in them new clothes again, and I couldn't do nothing but sweat and sweat, and feel all cramped up. Well, then, the old thing commenced again. The widow rung a bell for supper, and you had to come to time. When you got to the table you couldn't go right to eating, but you had to wait for the widow to tuck down her head and grumble a little over the victuals (1.3)

***Explanation 6:***

Natural: falling on your food before someone or something else gets it. Unnatural: waiting until everyone has been served and prayed over their food. Well, he does have a point. Luckily, most of us don't have to guard our food from other predators at this point.

***Quotation 7:***

Huckleberry Finn

The widow she cried over me, and called me a poor lost lamb, and she called me a lot of other names, too, but she never meant no harm by it. (1.3)

***Explanation 7:***

We'll say she didn't mean any harm. In fact, it sounds a lot like the widow is really getting fond of Huck—like she feels like a mother to him. But Huck just can't get comfortable in the role of a son.

***Quotation 8:***

Huckleberry Finn

Now she had got a start, and she went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was to go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn't think much of it. But I never said so. I asked her if she reckoned Tom Sawyer would go there, and she said not by a considerable sight. I was glad about that, because I wanted him and me to be together. (1.7)

***Explanation 8:***

Aw. Huck likes Tom so much that he wants to stay with him even in Hell. Luckily for him (we guess), Miss Watson seems pretty sure that they'll end up there together.

***Quotation 9:***

Pretty soon a spider went crawling up my shoulder, and I flipped it off and it lit in the candle; and before I could budge it was all shriveled up. I didn't need anybody to tell me that that was an awful bad sign and would fetch me some bad luck, so I was scared and most shook the clothes off of me. I got up and turned around in my tracks three times and crossed my breast every time; and then I tied up a little lock of my hair with a thread to keep witches away. But I hadn't no confidence. You do that when you've lost a horseshoe that you've found, instead of nailing it up over the door, but I hadn't ever heard anybody say it was any way to keep off bad luck when you'd killed a spider. (1.8)

***Explanation 9:***

From the very outset of the story, Huck reveals his superstitions: they have been ingrained in his mind through his upbringing and are a part of his surrounding culture. Other systems of beliefs (such as religion and social "rules") haven’t made such an impression on him.