***The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn***

***Chapter 16:***

***Translation:***

We slept most of the day and started out at night. We were a little ways behind a monstrously long raft that seemed as long as a funeral procession. It had four long oars at each end, so we figured it could probably carry about thirty men. On the deck were five big wigwams spaced widely apart and an open campfire in the middle. There were tall flagpoles at each end. It had an impressive style to it. You were really SOMEBODY if you were a raftsman on a raft like that.

As the night was getting hot and cloudy, we drifted down into a big bend. The river was very wide, and thick forests formed a wall along both banks. You could barely any light through the breaks in the trees. We talked about the city of Cairo and wondered whether we would know it when we reached it. I said we probably wouldn’t because I’d heard that there weren’t even a dozen houses there. If those houses weren’t lit up, how would we know we were passing the town? Jim said we would know because the two big rivers joined together there. I said that we might mistakenly think we were passing the foot of an island that runs down the middle of the river. That bothered both of us. So the question was, what should we do? I said that we should paddle ashore at first light and tell everyone that pap was following us in a trading barge. We could say that he was new to the business and wanted to know how far it was to Cairo. Jim liked the idea, so we had ourselves a smoke while we waited.

All we could do at this point was to keep a sharp eye out for the town so as not to miss it. Jim said he wouldn’t miss it because he’d be a free man the minute he saw it, but would be back in slave country again without an ounce of freedom if he missed it. Every now and then he’d jump up and say:

“Is that it?”

But it wasn’t. It would only be jack o’lanterns or lighting bugs. So he sat down and went back to watching. Jim said it made him anxious and excited to be so close to freedom. I can tell you, it made me anxious and excited as well to hear him talk about it. I began to start thinking that he WAS free. And who was to blame for setting him free? ME. My conscience was nagging me. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t stop thinking about it. It bothered me so much that I couldn’t relax; I couldn’t sit still. What I was doing hadn’t dawned on me before, but now it did, and it burned my conscience. I tried to convince myself that I wasn’t to blame for setting Jim free because I didn’t steal him from his rightful owner. But that didn’t help. My conscience kept saying, “But you knew he was running toward freedom. You could have paddled him back to town and told someone.” This was true—I couldn’t deny it no matter how hard I tried, and that’s what was bothering me. My conscience said to me, “What did poor Miss Watson ever do to you that would make you watch her n----- run away right in front of your eyes and never say a word? What did that poor old woman do to you that could make you treat her so badly? Why, she even tried to teach you how to read. She tried to teach you manners. And she tried to be good to you in every way she knew how. THAT’S what she did.”

I started feeling so sad and so miserable that I almost wished I were dead. I fidgeted and paced up and down the raft, berating myself. Jim fidgeted and paced up and down right along with me. Neither of us could keep still. Every time he jumped around and said, “There’s Cairo!” it went through me like a gunshot. I thought that if it WAS Cairo, I would die of sadness.

Jim constantly talked out loud while I talked to myself. He would say that the first thing he’d do when he got to a free state would be to start saving up money by not spending a single cent. When he had saved enough money, he would buy his wife, who was owned by a farm close to where Miss Watson lived. Then they would both work to buy their two children. And if their master wouldn’t sell them, they’d get an abolitionist to steal them.

It terrified me to hear such talk. He wouldn’t have dared to say things like that before. You could just see what a difference the idea of almost being free made in him. It’s like the old saying, “Give a n----- an inch and he’ll take a yard.” That’s what happens when you don’t think, I thought to myself. Here was this n-----, whom I’d helped to run away, saying flat out that he would steal his children—children that belonged to a man I didn’t even know, a man that hadn’t harmed me in any way.

I was sorry to hear Jim talk like this. It made me lower my opinion of him. My conscience got to bothering me more than ever until I finally told it, “Enough already. Stop bothering me. It isn’t too late yet. I’ll paddle ashore at the first light and tell someone.” Right away, I felt much better. I felt as light as a feather, as if all my troubles were gone. I began singing to myself as I looked for any sign of light on the shore. Pretty soon, I spotted one. Jim sang out:

“We’re safe, Huck, we’re safe! Jump up and dance! There’s the good old city of Cairo at last, I just know it!”

I said:

“I’ll take the canoe and go and see, Jim. It might not be Cairo, you know.”

He jumped up and got the canoe ready. He put his old coat in the bottom of it for me to sit on. He gave me the paddle, and as I shoved off, he said:

“Pretty soon, I’ll be shouting for joy, and I’ll say it’s all because of Huck. I’m a free man, and I couldn’t have been free if it hadn’t been for Huck—it was all Huck. Jim won’t ever forget you, Huck. You’re the best friend Jim’s ever had, and you’re the ONLY friend old Jim’s got now.”

I was paddling off, anxious to tell on him, but when he said this, it seemed to take the zip out of me. I went along slowly after that. I was no longer sure whether or not I was glad that I’d decided go ashore. When I was fifty yards away from the raft, Jim said:

“There you go, that honest old Huck—the only white gentleman that ever kept his promise to old Jim.” Well, I just felt sick. But I told myself that I HAD to do turn him in—there was no getting out of it. Right then a skiff came along with two men in it with guns. They stopped, and I stopped. One of them said: “What’s that over there?” “A piece of a raft,” I said. “Does it belong to you?” “Yes, sir.” “Any men on it?” “Only one, sir.” “Well, five n------ ran off tonight just up the river, above the head of the bend. Is your man white or black?”

I didn’t answer promptly. I tried, but the words wouldn’t come. I tried for a second or two to brace myself and just say it. But I wasn’t man enough—I didn’t have the courage of a rabbit. I saw I was losing my strength, so I just gave up trying, and said: “He’s white.” “I reckon we’ll go and see for ourselves.” “I wish you would,” I said, “because it’s my pap. Maybe you could help me tow the raft ashore to that light over there. He’s sick—and so is my mom and Mary Ann.”

“The devil with you! We’re in a hurry, boy. But I suppose we’ve got to. Come, start paddling, and let’s get moving.” “I started paddling, and they began rowing with their oars. When we had made a couple of strokes, I said: “Pap will be grateful to you, I promise. Everybody goes away when I ask them to help me get the raft ashore. I can’t do it by myself.” “Well, that’s awfully mean. Strange, too. Say, boy, what’s the matter with your father?” “It’s the… ah… the uh… well… it’s not much.” They stopped rowing. They were just a short way from the raft by now. One said: “Boy, that’s a lie. What IS the matter with your pap? Do the right thing and answer me honestly now.”

“I will, sir, honest I will—but don’t leave us, please. It’s the… the… Gentlemen, if you’ll just pull ahead a bit to the raft and let me toss you a rope, you won’t have to come near the raft. Please just do it.”

“Back, John, row back!” one of them said. They started rowing backward. “Keep away, boy, keep to port. Darn it, the wind is blowing that raft right toward us. Your pap’s got [smallpox](javascript:void(0);), and you know it! Why didn’t you just say so? Do you want to spread it to everyone?

“Well,” I said, pretending to cry, “Everyone else I’ve told just went away and left us.”

“Well, you’ve got a point. Poor soul. We feel pretty sorry for you, but we… well, darn it, we don’t want to get smallpox, you see. Look here, I tell you what we’ll do. Don’t try to land the raft on the shore by yourself; you’ll just smash it to pieces. Just float along down the river about twenty miles, and you’ll come to a town. Ask for help, and tell them your folks have got the chills and a fever. Don’t be foolish again and let people guess what’s wrong with your family. Now, we’re trying to help you, so just be a good boy and take our advice. Put twenty miles between yourselves and us. It wouldn’t do any good to land the raft over where that light is. It’s only a lumber yard. I’ll bet your father’s poor, and I’m sure your family is having a tough time. Here, I’m putting a twenty dollar gold piece on this board. Grab it when it floats by. I feel pretty bad leaving you, but my God, we just can’t mess around with smallpox, you see?

“Hang on, Parker,” said the other man. “Here’s a twenty dollar gold piece to add to yours on the board. Goodbye, kid. You do as Mr. Parker instructed, and you’ll be alright.” “That’s true, my boy. So long, goodbye. If you see any runaway n------, you can make some money by getting help and catching them.”

“Goodbye, sir,” I said. “I won’t let any runaway n------ get by me if I can help it!” They went off, and I got back on board the raft, feeling awful because I knew for certain that what I’d just done was wrong. I saw that it was no use for me to try and do the right thing. A person who doesn’t get on the right foot when he’s a kid is never going to change. Whenever he gets in a pinch and has no one to keep him honest and focused, he loses. Then I thought a minute and said to myself, now, hold on; suppose you had done what was right and given Jim up? Would you feel better than you do now? No, I said, I’d feel bad—I’d feel just about as bad as I do right now. Well then, I said to myself, what’s the use in trying to learn to do the right thing? It’s so troubling to do right, and no harm comes from doing wrong. And the results are just the same anyway. I was stuck. I couldn’t answer my own question. So I decideed not to worry about it anymore. From then on, I’d just whatever seemed easiest at the time.

I went into the wigwam, but Jim wasn’t there. I looked all around, but he wasn’t anywhere. I said: “Jim!” “Here I am, Huck. Are they out of sight yet? Don’t talk too loudly.” He was in the river under the oar at the stern, with just his nose sticking out. I told him they were out of sight, so he came on board. He said: “I was listening to you three talking, so I slipped into the river. I was going to start swimming toward the shore if they came on board. Then I was going to swim to the raft again when they had gone. But, man, you sure fooled them, Huck! That WAS the smartest decision! I tell you, child, I expect your rouse saved old Jim. Old Jim is never going to forget you for that, kid.”

Then we talked about the money. It was a pretty good haul—twenty dollars each. Jim said we could take deck passage on a steamboat now, and the money would last us as far as we wanted to go in the free states. He said twenty miles more wasn’t far for the raft to go, but he wished we were already there. Toward daybreak we tied up on shore. Jim was pretty intent on really making sure the raft was hidden well. Then he worked all day tying all of our stuff up in bundles and getting us ready to abandon the raft.

Around ten o’clock that night, we came within sight of the lights of a town way down on a bend on the left bank of the river. I set out in the canoe to learn more about the lights. Pretty soon I found a man out in the river on a skiff who was setting a [trotline](javascript:void(0);). I pulled up and said: “Mister, is that town over there Cairo?” “Cairo? No. You must be crazy.” “What town is it, mister?” “If you want to know, go and find out for yourself. If you bug me for even another half minute, you’ll get something you’re not going to like.”

I paddled back to the raft. Jim was awfully disappointed, but I told him not to worry. I figured Cairo would be the next town. We passed another town before daylight. I was going to go out again, but I didn’t because the bank was too steep. The banks aren’t steep around Cairo, Jim said. I’d forgotten about that. We spent another day hidding on a towhead that was close to the left bank of the river. I began to get suspicious about something, and so did Jim. I said: “Maybe we went past Cairo in the fog that night.” He said: “Let’s not talk about it, Huck. Poor n------ can catch a break. I always suspected that rattlesnake skin hadn’t finished giving me my bad luck.”

“I wish I’d never seen that snakeskin, Jim. I realy wish I’d never lain my eyes on it.” “It isn’t your faul, Huck. You didn’t know. Don’t blame yourself.” When it was daylight, I saw that the clear waters of the Ohio River were running along the shore, while in the middle of the river was the muddy waters of the Mississippi! We had to give up on Cairo.

We talked about what to do next. We couldn’t go ashore, and we couldn’t take the raft upstream, of course. All we could do was to wait for dark and then take our chances paddling upstream in the canoe. We slept all day in the cottonwood thicket, so we’d be well rested and refreshed for the long night of paddling ahead. But when we went back to the raft around dark, the canoe was gone!

We didn’t say a word for a long while. There wasn’t anything TO say. We both knew well enough that this was the result of the rattlesnake skin, so what was the use to talk about it? It would only look like we were each blaminig the other, and that was bound to bring only more bad luck—and keep on bringing it until we learned to shut up.

After a while, we started talking about what we should do. We decided that we didn’t really have a choice but to continue floating down the river on the raft until we had a chance to buy a new canoe to paddle back upstream. We weren’t going to “borrow” the canoe when no one was looking, as pap would do. People to start coming after us if we did.

So we set out after dark on the raft. Anyone who doesn’t believe that it’s foolish to handle a snakeskin after hearing about all the bad luck that snakeskin brought us will certainly believe it after they read about what else happened to us. The best place to buy a canoe is off one of those rafts that are tied to the shore. But we didn’t see any rafts on the shore, so we continued floating down the river for three hours or so. Well, the night got pretty gray and thick, which is the next worse thing after fog. You can’t tell the shape of the river and you can’t see very far ahead. It got to be pretty late and the night was still. All of the sudden we saw a steamboat coming up the river. We lit the lantern and figured the men on board would see it. Boats chugging upstream generally didn’t come close to us because they hunt for easy water under the reefs by the sandbars. But on nights like this, they chug up the middle against the current of the river. We could hear the steamboat pounding along, but we didn’t have a good look at it until it was close. It was headed right for us. They often do try to see how close they can get without touching you. Sometimes the paddlewheel will bite off one of the oars. At that point, the pilot sticks his head out and laughs, thinking he’s pretty clever. Well, it was coming toward us, and we thought it was going to try and shave right by us—but it didn’t seem to be turning at all. It was a big steamboat and it seemed to be in a hurry, too. The boat looked like a black cloud with glowing streams around it. All of a sudden, it bulged out, big and scary, with a long row of furnace doors, were wide open and shining like red-hot teeth. It’s monstrous bows and guards hung right over us. There was a shout, a jingling of bells to stop the engines, multiple swears, and the whistling of steam. As Jim jumped over one side and I over the other, the steamboat smashed straight through the middle of the raft. I dove in and headed straight for the bottom. I knew the thirty-foot paddlewheel was going to pass right over me and I wanted plenty of room. I could normally stay under the water for about a minute, but this time I’ll bet I stayed under for about a minute and a half. Then I headed back up toward the surface in a hurry, because I was about to burst. I shot out of the water up to my armpits, blew water out of my nose, and puffed a bit. Of course, the current was extremely strong and the steamboat started up its engines again after having paused for only ten seconds or so—those crewmen never care much for raftsmens. That boat was churning along up the river and out of sight in the thick blackness of night, though I could still hear it. I called out for Jim a dozen times without getting an answer. So, I grabbed a plank that was floating into me while I was treading water, and headed for the shore, shoving the plank ahead of me as I went. I could see that the current was flowing toward the left bank, which meant that I was in a spot where two currents ran into each other. So I changed direction and headed with the current. I was in one of those long, slanting two-mile long crossings, so it took a while for me to get over to the shore. I landed safely and climbed up the bank. I could only see a little ways in front of me, but I went poking along over rough ground for a quarter of a mile or more. Then, almost before I knew it, I came across a big old-fashioned double log house. I was going to run past it without anyone noticing, but a bunch of dogs jumped out and started howling and barking at me. I knew better than to move another inch.

***Synopsis:***

Jim and Huck worry that they will miss Cairo, the town at the mouth of the Ohio River, which runs into the free states. Meanwhile, Huck’s conscience troubles him deeply about helping Jim escape from his “rightful owner,” Miss Watson, especially after all she has done for Huck. Jim talks on and on about going to the free states, especially about his plan to earn money to buy the freedom of his wife and children. If their masters refuse to give up Jim’s family, Jim plans to have some abolitionists kidnap them. When Huck and Jim think they see Cairo, Huck goes out on the canoe to check, having secretly resolved to give Jim up. But Huck’s heart softens when he hears Jim call out that Huck is his only friend, the only one to keep a promise to him.

Huck comes upon some men in a boat who want to search his raft for escaped slaves. Huck pretends to be grateful, saying no one else would help them. He leads the men to believe that his family is on board the raft and is suffering from smallpox. The men, fearing infection, back away and tell Huck to go further downstream and lie about his family’s condition to get help. Out of pity, they leave Huck forty dollars in gold. Huck feels bad because he thinks he has done wrong in not giving Jim up. However, he realizes he would feel just as bad if he had given Jim up. Huck resolves to disregard morality in the future and do what’s “handiest.”

Floating along, Huck and Jim pass several towns and worry that they have passed Cairo in the fog. They stop for the night and resolve to take the canoe upriver but in the morning discover that it has been stolen. They attribute the canoe’s disappearance to continued bad luck from the snakeskin on Jackson’s Island. Later, a steamboat collides with the raft, breaking it apart. Jim and Huck dive off in time but are separated. Huck makes it ashore, but a pack of dogs corners him.

***Significance:***

We see in these chapters that Huck, though open-minded, still largely subscribes to the Southern white conception of the world. When Jim assesses their “adventure,” Huck does admit that he has acted foolishly and jeopardized Jim’s safety, but he qualifies his assessment by adding that Jim is smart—for a black person. Huck also genuinely struggles with the question of whether or not to turn over Jim to the white men who ask if he is harboring any runaway slaves. In some sense, Huck still believes that turning Jim in would be the “right” thing to do, and he struggles with the idea that Miss Watson is a slave owner yet still seems to be a “good” person. Over the course of these chapters, as he spends more time with Jim, Huck is forced to question the facts that white society has taught him and that he has taken for granted.

The arguments Huck and Jim have over Huck’s stories provide remarkable mini-allegories about slavery and race. When Huck tells the tale of King Solomon, who threatened to chop a baby in half, Jim argues that Solomon had so many children that he became unable to value human life properly. Huck’s comments lead us to compare Jim’s assessment of Solomon with whites’ treatments of blacks at the time—as infinitely replaceable bodies, indistinguishable from one another. Later, Huck tells Jim that people in France don’t speak English. Huck tries to convince the skeptical Jim by pointing out that cats and cows don’t “talk” the same, and that, by analogy, neither should French people and American people. Jim points out that both are men and that the analogy is inappropriate. Although Jim is misinformed in a sense, he is correct in his assessment of Huck’s analogy. Jim’s argument provides yet another subtle reminder that, in American society at the time, not all men are treated as men. Although Jim’s discussion with Huck shows that both have clever minds, we see that Jim is less imprisoned by conventional wisdom than Huck, who has grown up at least partly in mainstream white society.

We see the moral and societal importance of Huck and Jim’s journey in Huck’s profound moral crisis about whether he should return Jim to Miss Watson. In the viewpoint of Southern white society, Huck has effectively stolen $800—the price the slave trader has offered for Jim—from Miss Watson. However, Jim’s comment that Huck is the only white man ever to keep his word to him shows that Huck has been treating Jim not as a slave but as a man. This newfound knowledge, along with Huck’s guilt, keep Huck from turning Jim in. Huck realizes that he would have felt worse for doing the “right” thing and turning Jim in than he does for not turning Jim in. When Huck reaches this realization, he makes a decision to reject conventional morality in favor of what his conscience dictates. This decision represents a big step in Huck’s development, as he realizes that his conscience may be a better guide than the dictates of the white society in which he has been raised.

***Summary:***

* The two continue on their way to Cairo (where Jim will finally be free) but eventually they think to ask the very important question: how will they know they've gotten there once they've arrived? You know, since there aren't exactly highway signs all over.
* Huck decides to paddle ashore, tell some lies (which he likes doing anyway), and find out how far they are from Cairo.
* Except the action is interrupted by Huck having… MORAL CRISIS #2!
* This moral crisis has to do with the fact that he is stealing Miss Watson's slave. After all, he reasons, Miss Watson taught him books and religion and manners and all, and he's repaying her by stealing her property.
* In the midst of this crisis, Jim rambles on about what he's going to do once he gets to a [free state](http://www.learner.org/biographyofamerica/prog10/maps/). He says he'll save up his money until he has enough to go back south and buy his wife and his two children from the farms around Miss Watson's.
* If that doesn't work, he says, he'll just steal them.
* This bothers Huck even more, all this talk of "stealing" the "property" of his neighbors. When he spots lights at the shore and paddles out in the canoe, he's pretty much decided to turn Jim in again.
* But then, as Huck's paddling away, Jim calls out to him about how he (Huck) has been such a good friend and how he'll always be grateful.
* This is a [record-scratching](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sqgW-2orQQg) conscience moment, and when Huck is stopped by a raft several yards later, he can't bring himself to turn in his friend—even though the guys on the raft are actually looking for runaway slaves themselves.
* And they want to inspect the raft that Huck has left behind.
* Very cleverly, Huck pretends it's his Pap back there with the [smallpox](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0002332)—serious bad news.
* This does the trick: the men take off but leave Huck with two twenty-dollar gold pieces to help out.
* Trouble isn't over. Huck and Jim can't seem to figure out where Cairo is, and they wonder if they passed it in the fog.
* And then…they realize they've passed Cairo in the fog.
* Now, their new plan is to sell the raft as soon as possible and take a steamboat up north to the free states.
* They stash their stuff and go to sleep in the cottonwood thicket, but when they come back, the canoe is gone.
* Clearly, this is the fault of the rattlesnake skin.
* In that case, so is what comes next: a huge steamboat comes straight toward them and smashes through their raft.
* So, in short: no raft, no canoe, near-death by steamship smashing, and Jim and Huck are now separated and trying not to drown.
* Huck makes it to shore, only to be attacked by a pack of vicious dogs.

***Analysis:***

[Jim](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/a/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/character-analysis/jim) and [Huck](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/a/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/character-analysis/huckleberry-finn) believe that three more nights will bring them to Cairo, Illinois, and, from that point, they can take a steamboat up the Ohio River to the free states. On the second night, however, a dense fog rolls in, and the strong current separates Huck and Jim. After calling in vain for Jim, Huck decides to take "one little cat-nap" and wakes up several hours later under a clear sky.

He eventually finds Jim, who is in tears over seeing Huck again. Instead of celebrating their reunion, Huck decides to act as if Jim has been dreaming and Huck has been on the raft the entire night. Jim's concern turns to confusion, but he finally realizes Huck is lying. He admonishes Huck for the prank and says that only "trash" would treat a friend like that. After a few minutes, Huck feels so ashamed that he apologizes to Jim.

Jim and Huck decide that Huck must go ashore to check their progress. Jim's excitement is obvious, and Huck struggles with his shame of helping a slave escape. When Jim says he will steal his children out of slavery if necessary, Huck decides he must go ashore and turn Jim in to the authorities. Instead of rushing ashore at dawn to free his conscience, however, Huck covers for Jim when he runs into townspeople.

Shortly after, Huck and Jim see the clear water of the Ohio River and realize they have passed Cairo in the fog. They decide to buy another canoe to head upriver, but a steamboat wrecks the raft and the two are once again separated.

Before 1991, critics largely believed that [Twain](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/a/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/mark-twain-biography) stopped writing after Chapter 16 and set the manuscript aside. The assertion appears logical, for Cairo is, indeed, the original destination of Jim and Huck. If Huck and Jim make it to Cairo, they can head north up the Ohio River, and the story heads toward its conclusion. It is obvious that Twain was struggling with the novel's direction, but the 1991 discovery of the first half of the Huck Finn manuscript revealed that Twain had continued through Chapter 18 and then set aside the manuscript for two years.

Although Huck is distraught at the thought of losing Jim, he does play the horrible prank, which contrasts sharply with Jim's parental demeanor. [Tom](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/a/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/character-analysis/tom-sawyer), no doubt, would have been proud of Huck's creativity and imagination, but Huck realizes that he has done more than embarrass Jim; he has taken advantage of his trust and friendship. The elaborate joke wounds Jim, and Huck is not prepared for Jim's confession that his "heart wuz mos' broke bekase you wuz los', en I didn' k'yer no' mo' what become er me en de raf'." Jim's somber comment serves, in a sense, to break the heart of Huck, and readers realize, just as Huck does, that Jim would give his life for the young boy who has always been on the opposite side of societal laws.

Huck's comment that it took him 15 minutes to apologize is overshadowed only by the fact that he actually does. In Jim and Huck's squalid world, an apology from a white person to a slave is not only unnecessary, it is scandalous. Huck, however, does not regret his decision to apologize and learns another lesson about Jim's loyalty. He does not play another prank on Jim, but he continues to feel guilt over helping a slave. The irony of the situation is painful, as Huck condemns himself for protecting Jim instead of recognizing the heroics involved.

By passing Cairo, Twain is able to navigate the familiar setting of the Mississippi River and the South. The passage down-river also allows Huck to continue his battle between his instincts and what society dictates he should do. Despite his shame from the prank, Huck still struggles with his conscience. His decision to turn Jim in details the twisted logic of slavery that condemns a man for wanting to rescue his children from captivity. The biting satire is obvious, as is the realization that Huck cannot defy society's moral code of racism without a struggle. He is, after all, resisting all the social and cultural reasoning that made slavery possible.

When the two men searching for runaway slaves surprise Huck, however, he develops an elaborate story that saves Jim. Once again Huck's actions mirror his natural conscience. Huck is constantly pulled between what he is supposed to think and feel (that is, what he has been taught either by lessons or social example) and what he actually feels and thinks (that is, what he has developed through his personal and natural experiences). He finds himself aiding Jim, who grows more certain of Huck's loyalty and friendship.

Glossary

**Cairo**city in southern Illinois, at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers.

**buckle**to paddle hard.

**Muddy**the Mississippi River.

***Synopsis:***

[Jim](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/symbols/#Jim) is anxious to get to Cairo and looks forward to being free. [Huck](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Huck) recognizes that he is the reason that [Jim](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Jim) will be free, and he feels guilty about it. Huck questions what Jim's rightful owner, Miss Watson, ever did that he should hurt her by helping her slave escape. Jim talks about earning money to buy his family's freedom or having abolitionists kidnap them if the owners refuse to sell. This upsets Huck, and he decides that he is going to give Jim up when he goes ashore.

When Huck goes off to check if they have reached Cairo, Jim calls out that Huck is his only friend and one who keeps promises. These declarations make Huck uncertain about how to act. While approaching land Huck comes across men in a boat who are looking for escaped slaves. When asked about the raft, Huck makes up a story that his parents have smallpox. The story scares the men, and they give Huck money and leave.

When Huck returns to the raft Jim thanks him profusely, as he heard the whole exchange. They look for Cairo but do not see it. Later Huck goes ashore to check where they are and discovers they have completely passed Cairo. Their canoe gets lost. To make matters worse, a steamboat comes along and destroys the raft. In order to escape harm Huck and Jim jump. They are separated, and Huck ends up on shore surrounded by a pack of dogs.

[Huck](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Huck) faces a severe moral dilemma as his role in [Jim](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/symbols/#Jim)'s escape dawns on him. While he has come to recognize [Jim](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Jim)'s many fine qualities, Huck has been brought up in a society where slavery is what is right. Huck does not make the laws or the customs but is a product of them. To help Jim escape goes against everything Huck was taught as a child and will harm Miss Watson, who has always been good to him. There seems to be no right answer for Huck.

Just as Huck decides to turn Jim in, an opportunity presents itself for him to do just that. Instead Huck lies in order to save Jim. Naturally and without thinking Huck is drawn to helping Jim and ensuring his escape. His own sense of injustice seems to win over the conditioning he has had by society.

Ironically the town that is the key to reach—and thereby and obtain Jim's freedom—is Cairo. In the Bible the Jews are enslaved to the Egyptians. The capital of Egypt is Cairo. The goal of the Jews was to escape Cairo. The Jews experienced a number of miracles that enabled them to escape their bondage. One of the miracles was the parting of the sea, which allowed the Jews to finally leave Cairo and the Egyptians behind. For Jim, Cairo represents the opposite. Reaching Cairo and getting to the Ohio River will mean he is in the free states. [Twain](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/author/) seems to be winking at past enslavements of people. In this case it is Huck who plays the role of Moses, and he is trying to part the seas and lead Jim to freedom.

***Critical Analysis:***

As [Jim](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/study-guide/character-list#jim) and Huck float downriver, Jim restlessly searches the riverbank for the town of Cairo. Each time Jim mentions how soon he will be free, Huck feels increasingly guilty. Huck knows that helping Jim escape is breaking the law, but Jim is also his friend. Thus, Huck is trapped in a difficult moral dilemma. After a great deal of reasoning, Huck realizes he will feel possibly even worse if he turned Jim into the authorities, and decides it would be best to let him escape.

Huck makes this decision spontaneously, when heading to shore to determine what town they are near and with the intention of reporting Jim. On his way to shore, Huck meets two white men searching for runaway slaves. The men ask him who else is on his raft and rather than telling them about Jim, Huck tells them his Pa, mother, and sister are aboard. Huck pretends to be eager for their help and tells them no one else has been willing to pull the raft to shore. At this news, the men become suspicious and finally conclude that Huck's family must have smallpox. Each man then puts a twenty dollar coin on a log and floats it over to Huck to avoid any interaction with him, but only after making him promise not to land anywhere near their town. Huck's ingenious lie fools the men and saves Jim from capture.

Huck and Jim are thrilled to have received so much extra money, which is enough for several trips up the river. They continue watching for Cairo, but are unable to locate it. After several days, both Huck and Jim begin to suspect that they passed Cairo in the fog several nights prior. The next night, Huck and Jim start to plan to use the canoe to paddle upriver. However, the canoe disappears, forcing them to continue downriver in hopes of buying a new canoe. While drifting downstream, they encounter an oncoming steamboat. Instead of getting out of their way as the steamboats usually do, the boat ploughs directly over the raft. Both Huck and Jim are forced to dive overboard. Huck emerges and grabs a piece of wood with which he paddles to the shore. Jim is nowhere to be seen. Huck is soon surrounded by dogs and stands dripping wet and immobilized.

***Critical Study:***

Huck and Jim are off to a town named Cairo. When they get there, Jim will be free. And as Huck ponders this, he begins to realize that, at that point, Huck will be responsible for this "terrible crime." Worse, Jim tells him that if he can't buy his children from their new owner, he will get an abolitionist to get them back. To Huck, this is just a terrible sin. Jim has reached his morale nadir by daring to even think that. Huck decides to turn Jim in. But when the opportunity comes and some men want to search the raft, he tells them that his Pappy is sick and basically suggests that he has smallpox, thereby saving Jim. But after some further traveling and the sky become thick and gray, they realize they have probably missed Cairo. While they are still trying to figure what is happening, a steamboat crashes through the rafts and they dive off, going off in their unexpectedly separate ways.

It is fascinating the way Huck is always trying to figure out his relationship to Jim's escape to freedom. Twain is probably delighting in the strange contortions of his mind to understand where is truth conscience lies. To men and women in this century, the thought that someone would consider a man's effort to recapture his children from slave owners a scandal and, would be almost unthinkable, at least in most modern countries. And it is my idea that it was unthinkable to Twain to, in a moral sense, but he knew that there were millions of his time who did think that way. And, as a somewhat enlightened author, I think he enjoys playing with his reader's incredulity at Huck's working of conscience.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) and [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/jim) continue their journey to Cairo, and, as they approach it, Jim trembles and is feverish with the thought of being so close to his freedom. Huck begins to tremble and feel feverish too, because he acknowledges that he is helping Jim to liberate himself. Huck’s conscience is troubled by this; it tells Huck that he should have told someone that Jim was running away, that he is meanly wronging [Miss Watson](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-widow-douglas-and-miss-watson), who has done nothing to harm him, by helping Jim, her property. Huck feels so mean and miserable that he wishes he were dead.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Huck has no control over his conscience, conditioned by society. It makes itself known to him not with a reasoned argument but a bodily symptom of sickness, and, as such, Huck can’t reason with himself to figure out what course of action he should take. Instead, at least for now, he can only do what conscience compels him to do. In relation to conscience, then, Huck is not free, though he will grow into such a freedom.

***Summary Part 2:***

Restless and fidgety like [Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn), Jim talks about what he will do when he is free, how he will work and save money so that he can buy his wife and two children out of slavery, or, if the owners of his wife and children won’t sell, how he would enlist the help of abolitionists to “steal them.” Huck is mortified to hear Jim speak this way, about stealing his children, who belong, Huck thinks, to “a man that hadn’t ever done me no harm.” Huck is sorry to hear Jim lower himself in this way. He resolves to turn Jim in.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Jim’s course of action is very reasonable—he wants to liberate his family from unjust bondage—but Huck, in the throes of his Southern slave-owning conscience, can’t understand the logic of Jim wanting to free his family no matter which way, and does not see it as ridiculous that Jim’s family should belong more to their master than to Jim (or themselves). The slave-owner may never have harmed Huck, but he has harmed his slaves simply by owning them.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/jim) spots in the distance what he thinks is Cairo. [Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) volunteers to paddle over and see if it is, with the intent of turning Jim in. As he does, a skiff comes along, aboard which are two armed men. They tell [Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) that they’re hunting five runaway slaves, and ask Huck if there are any people aboard his [raft](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/symbols/the-raft), and, if so, whether they’re white or black. Huck desperately wants to tell them about [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/jim), but the words won’t come out of his mouth. At last, Huck lies: he says the man aboard his raft is white. The men say they’ll see for themselves. Huck tells them he wishes they would, because, he lies, the white man on the raft is his father, who’s sick, along with his mother and Mary Ann, also aboard the raft. As the men paddle to investigate, Huck lets on that the illness that afflicts his family is both contagious and dangerous: smallpox. As soon as Huck does so, the men refuse to get anywhere near the raft, apologize to Huck, give him money, and paddle away.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Even though his conscience tells Huck to turn Jim in, Huck has an even stronger ethical force at work in him, one that literally prevents him from producing language to turn Jim in. If conscience is conditioned by society, this stronger ethical force in Huck is deeply personal, and, as such, it is not riddled with hypocrisies as conscience is. Huck’s lie to the men, which ultimately saves Jim from discovery, is an action more expressive of Huck’s personality than any other he could have made. Note that the slave-hunters Huck talks to are not vicious: they do the best they can to help Huck’s made-up sick family without futilely endangering themselves. It’s clear that their hunt for Jim is conscience-motivated, not vice-motivated. It’s just that a society that accepts slavery as okay is, by necessity, turning even good men into hypocrites.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) feels bad and low when he returns to the [raft](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/symbols/the-raft), but reasons that he would feel just as bad had he done “right” and turned [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/jim) in. He figures it is easier to do wrong than right, and that the outcome of doing either is the same, and so decides to “always do whichever come handiest at the time.” Jim finds Huck hiding in the [river](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/symbols/the-mississippi-river), holding onto the raft. Jim praises Huck for his clever deception of the two men.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Given that Huck would feel bad regardless of what course of action he pursued, he realizes that conscience is not a firm means of determining what is right. He therefore endorses an ethic of handiness: whatever his heart tells him to do instinctually, Huck resolves to do. He is free, in this way, to be himself, and by following his heart and his compassion, Huck’s actions will show the depravity of the moral rules that dominate Southern society because of its embrace of racism.

***Summary Part 5:***

[Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) and Jim resume their journey, passing two towns, only to find out that neither are Cairo. Huck tells Jim that the two of them must have passed by Cairo when lost in the fog nights earlier. Jim doesn’t want to talk about it and blames the rattlesnake skin for their bad luck, a judgment with which Huck agrees.

***Analysis Part 5:***

Despite how excited Jim was to reach the free states, he gracefully accepts the bad news that he and Huck have passed Cairo. This may well be because of his superstitions: instead of blaming somebody for bad luck, he just moves on.

***Summary Part 6:***

[Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) and [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/jim) learn they have reached the muddy Missouri River, and figure that Cairo is upstream. They decide to canoe there after resting. But when they return to where they left the raft and canoe, they find that the canoe is missing. They are forced to raft downriver till they reach a place where they can buy a canoe. As they drift, a steamboat comes at them full-speed. Huck supposes that the captain is playing a kind of game of getting as close to the raft as he can without touching it. But the steamboat keeps coming; a bell rings and men yell and cuss at Huck and Jim to get out of the way. At last, the steamboat crashes into the raft, throwing the pair overboard. Huck swims ashore and finds himself before a house, and then barking dogs swarm him. Huck knows better than to move.

***Analysis Part 6:***

Huck and Jim live in a world that doesn’t seem to have a bottom on bad luck. The pair seem to be in a rough spot after missing Cairo, but that doesn’t even compare to the bad luck of losing their canoe, and what’s worst of all, the bad luck of their random collision with the steamboat. We might wonder, though: is it childish of Huck to think the steamboat captain is playing a game, or merely optimistic? Or maybe Huck has seen captains play such games before? Whatever the case, after this tense scene, Huck and Jim are once again on their own.