***The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn***

***Chapter 24:***

***Synopsis:***

As the duke and the dauphin tie up the raft to work over another town, Jim complains about having to wait, frightened, in the boat, tied up as a runaway slave in order to avoid suspicion, while the others are gone. In response, the duke disguises Jim in a calico stage robe and blue face paint and posts a sign on him that reads, “Sick Arab—but harmless when not out of his head.” The dauphin, dressed up in his newly bought clothes, decides he wants to make a big entrance into the next town, so he and Huck board a steamboat docked several miles above the town.

The dauphin encounters a talkative young man who tells him about a recently deceased local man, Peter Wilks. Wilks had recently sent for his two brothers from Sheffield, England—Harvey, whom Peter had not seen since they were boys, and William, who is deaf and mute. Wilks left much of his property to these brothers when he died, but it seems uncertain whether they will ever arrive. The dauphin wheedles the young traveler, who is en route to South America, to provide him with details concerning the Wilks family.

Arriving in Wilks’s hometown, the duke and the dauphin ask for Wilks and feign anguish when told of his death. The dauphin even makes strange hand gestures to the duke, feigning sign language. The scene is enough to make Huck “ashamed of the human race.”

***Critical Study:***

The next day, the duke paints [Jim](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/a/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/character-analysis/jim)'s face solid blue so they can navigate the river during the day. To complete the disguise, the duke posts a sign on the raft reading "Sick Arab — but harmless when not out of his head."

The two con men decide to scout the surrounding towns, and while the king and [Huck](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/a/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/character-analysis/huckleberry-finn)are heading to the steamboat, they pick up a young boy in their canoe. The king questions the talkative boy thoroughly about the town and discovers a local man, Peter Wilks, has just died and left all his fortune to his English brothers.

After learning the details of the Wilks family and its friends, the king sends Huck to fetch the duke, and the con men pose as Peter Wilks' English brothers, Harvey and William. They enter the town and begin to cry and moan when they hear of their "brothers" death. The cruel approach of the scam surprises even Huck, and he comments that "it was enough to make a body ashamed of the human race."

The events of Chapter 24 reveal that the duke and the king have taken complete control of the raft and its travelers. The fact that the duke unties Jim and uses a disguise to give him freedom during the day is overshadowed by the latest ploy to inherit a dead man's fortune.

Similar to their earlier methods that played off of faith and conviction, the duke and the king plot to earn the confidence of an entire town. The task becomes ludicrous when readers realize that the duke and king must convince everyone of their English heritage and that William (the duke) is "deef and dumb." The humor of the con men's upcoming scam is apparent, as is the realization that this plot is more callous than their previous pranks. [Twain](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/a/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/mark-twain-biography)'s burlesque on the ignorance of humankind is evident, for to succeed, the con men need a community of fools.

Huck's somber observation that "it was enough to make a body ashamed of the human race" alerts readers that he has again been forced to evaluate his society. Whereas earlier events took place with little judgment, the Wilks scam, coupled with the death of Buck Grangerford, forces Huck to condemn the entire race. The statement underscores Huck's constant struggle.

***Summary:***

* The cons dress up Jim as an Arab (or "A-rab") so he won't be discovered as a runaway slave.
* Still, in case the outfit isn't enough (they used some of the props from their [King Lear](https://www.shmoop.com/king-lear/) supplies), they put a sign on him that says "Sick Arab—but harmless when not out of his head."
* Well, that ought to take care of it.
* The two con men are ready to try the *The Royal Nonesuch* gig again, but they're afraid news of the scam might have spread along the river by now.
* Yeah, considering all the lynching-talk, we'd be worried about that, too.
* The king decides he'll just drop into the next village and "trust in Providence" to lead him the right way.
* He and Huck dress themselves up nicely in some new clothes and decide to arrive in town by steamboat, for appearance's sake.
* Pretty soon, they run into a young man from the country who takes them toward the boat and spills all the town gossip on the way.
* Turns out, a wealthy man named Peter Wilks has just died. While he was sick, he had sent for his brothers William (who is deaf and mute) and Harvey (a preacher in England).
* But they haven't shown up yet, which means they missed the chance to say good-bye to their brother before he died.
* Still in town, however, are Peter's three nieces: Mary Jane (nineteen), Susan (fifteen), and Joanna (fourteen, has a harelip).
* The king is super interested (mostly because dead people equals money, in the inheritance sense) and pumps this guy for all the information he's got.
* When they get to the steamboat, the king hangs back.
* He sends Huck to fetch the duke, and a new plot commences.
* Can you tell where this is going? Yeah.
* The duke and king decide to play the part of the dead man's brothers. They travel to town and make a big stink about the fact that Peter died before they arrived. (The king is playing the part of the preacher, with a British accent and all, and the duke plays William, the deaf mute.)
* Watching the two men blubber on and lament their dear, beloved dead "brother," Huck comments that, "it was enough to make a body ashamed of the human race" (24.49).
* Well said, Huck.

***Critical Analysis:***

[Jim](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/symbols/#Jim) is tired of being in ropes and pretending he is a runaway slave. The duke comes up with a plan to allow [Jim](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Jim) more freedom. He paints Jim blue, dresses him as King Lear, and places a sign on the raft that says, "Sick Arab—but harmless when not out of his head."

The duke goes ashore at the next town in search of a scheme. The king gets dressed up, and he and [Huck](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Huck) head toward a steamboat. On the way they pick up a man (later identified as Tim Collins) who tells them a local man, Peter Wilks, just died. Wilks, who is wealthy, left his estate to his brothers who have yet to arrive from England. The king asks many questions and is interested in each detail. He and Huck take Collins to the steamboat.

After returning to shore, the king has Huck get the duke, so he can tell him the story. They then make plans to arrive at the town by another steamboat. When they arrive, they claim to be Wilks's long-lost brothers, Harvey and William Wilks, with Huck in tow as their servant. The scheme works, the crowd gathers around to commiserate with the fake Wilks brothers, and Huck feels "ashamed of the human race."

[Huck](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Huck) feels disgust at the duke and the king's behavior. With all he has seen over the course of his escape, he says he has never seen anything like it and feels ashamed of humanity. Yet not only does Huck do nothing to rid himself of the duke and the king, he participates in their scams. Huck's lack of power in the society is underscored even further. Despite this Huck's conscience seems to be awakening, and his comments foreshadow future action.

Based on the reception that the duke and the king get at the end of the chapter, the people of the town will be duped. The people that Huck and [Jim](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/symbols/#Jim) come across, other than the duke and the king, continue to show negative character traits. They have been dumb, foolish, mean, violent, and gullible. On top of these traits, the people participate in maintaining the institution of slavery. If these characters are meant to represent the people actually found in the South, [Twain](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/author/) has written a stinging rebuke of his one-time home.

***Significance:***To avoid tying Jim up in ropes during the day (since he has been pretending to be a runaway slave), the Duke figures out a better solution. He paints Jim in blue and makes him wear a costume. Then, he writes a sign that reads, "Sick Arab - but harmless when not out of his head." Jim is happy that he can now move around.

The King and Huck cross the river and meet a young fool waiting for the ferry to Orleans. He proceeds to tell them all about how a [Peter Wilks](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/study-guide/character-list#peter-wilks) has died, leaving his whole estate to his daughters and brothers. The two brothers have not yet arrived from England, which greatly saddened the man before he died. The King takes a keen interest in the story and gathers every detail he can.

Once he has all the details, the King gets the Duke and tells him the entire story. The two men agree to pretend to be Peter Wilks's brothers from Sheffield, England. Together, with Huck acting as a servant, they get a steamboat to take them to the town and drop them off. Their ploy works perfectly and when they hear that Peter is dead, both men put up a huge cry and lament. Huck remarks that, "It was enough to make a body ashamed of the human race."

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

***Summary Part 1:***

As the duke and king devise another con, [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/jim) tells the duke that it is uncomfortable to be tied up every day. In response, the duke invents a new way for Jim to stay by himself during a day without risking capture. He dresses Jim up in a costume for King Lear, a character in Shakespeare’s play [King Lear](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/king-lear), and paints Jim blue. The duke then makes a sign saying that Jim is a sick Arab. When people approach him, Jim is to jump out and carry on and howl till they leave him be.

***Analysis Part 1:***

It is maybe surprising that a man as selfish as the duke would go out of his way to help Jim feel more comfortable, but he nevertheless does so, demonstrating a kind of moral freedom uncommon in the novel. The duke tends to other’s interests as long as doing so isn’t inconsistent with pursuing his own interests.

***Summary Part 2:***

The [king](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-duke-and-king), dressed in black clothes that make him look “swell and starchy,” rafts to a nearby town with [Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn). As they drift in, the two run across a young country boy. The king says he’ll give the boy a lift and invites him on the [raft](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/symbols/the-raft), which the boy accepts.

***Analysis Part 2:***

The king dresses in respectable black to trick people into thinking, based on his appearance, that he is himself respectable. He exploits society’s overvaluation of appearance.

***Summary Part 3:***

On the [raft](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/symbols/the-raft), the boy tells the [king](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-duke-and-king) that he resembles Mr. Wilks. The king lies and says that he is a reverend, and that he is sorry if Mr. Wilks is late for something. The boy then reveals that Mr. Wilks’s brother [Peter Wilks](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters) has died, and that, as he died, he wished to see his brothers from England, the living ones being Harvey and the deaf mute [William](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters). The king asks more questions about the Wilks family, and the boy obliges in answering.

***Analysis Part 3:***

By tricking the boy into trusting him with his clothes and false identity as a priest, the king exploits the boy for information to be used in a con. In contrast to the boy’s gullibility is Huck’s gentle skepticism of everyone he meets. Huck doesn’t care about appearances but about substance.

***Summary Part 4:***After dropping the boy off, the king tells [Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) to fetch the duke. Huck knows what the king is up to (conning the [Wilks](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters) family), but he retrieves the [duke](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-duke-and-king) anyway. The king tells the duke everything the boy told him, all the while imitating an English accent. After hailing a yawl, the duke, king, Huck and [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/jim) all travel to the town where the Wilks family lives. There the duke and king claim to be [Peter Wilks](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters)’s brothers [Harvey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters) and [William](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters). The townspeople sympathize and help them, while Huck thinks their con “enough to make a [person] ashamed of the human race.”

***Analysis Part 4:***

Though Huck earlier denounces the duke and king as rapscallions, he is now mature enough to know that none of their cons compare in depravity to their defrauding of the Wilks family, where, in a time of tragedy, the two are not only emotionally exploiting grieving people, but are also stealing the possessions of two men whose brother has just died, nothing less than everything that remains of Peter’s life.