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Huckleberry Finn Socratic Seminar

Question 1: Does Mark Twain believe that Huckleberry Finn is an ethical character?

No, I believe that Mark Twain does not believe that Huckleberry Finn is an ethical character. Being ethical means to follow the social norms and have common beliefs and ideas with society and the locals, along with following rules. But Huck does not tend to follow the rules much. For instance, on chapter 33, page 217, paragraph 4, Huck Finn says, “…I’m a-trying to steal out of slavery, and his name is Jim – old Miss Watson’s Jim.” This shows that Huck Finn is unethical because he is trying to help a slave escape. At the time, if you helped a slave escape, it would be considered wrong to do so. Furthermore, Huck thinks that it is ethical to steal. According to the text, on chapter 12, page 64, “Pap always says it warn’t no harm to borrow things if you was meaning to pay them back some time…” This shows that Huck is unethical because Huck thinks that stealing is not punishable, as he thinks it is just borrowing something. His father said that stealing is not bad, only if you intend to give it back.

Question 2: Is Huckleberry Finn a Romantic Hero?

Yes, I do believe that Huckleberry Finn is a romantic hero. This is because to be a romantic hero, one has to reject the established norms, be rejected by society and be the center of their existence. First of all, Huckleberry Finn is rejected by society in many ways. For example, Huck Finn begins very immature and foolish in the beginning. Huck looks up to Tom Sawyer and joins a gang and finds causing havoc amusing. Despite the separation of Huck and Tom, Huck still looks up to Tom and refuses to be civilized by Miss Watson. If it weren’t for the separation, then Huck would not have become as mature and be as independent as he develops to be. A quality of Huck that is considered to be Romantic is his way of understanding. Huck learns new methods to understand his environment, for example, through superstitions and other thoughts of his. In chapter 4, page 16, paragraph 3, the text states, “One morning I happened to turn over the salt-cellar at breakfast. I reached for some of it as quick as I could to throw over my left shoulder and keep off the bad luck...” This shows that Huck is superstitious and acts like this throughout the novel, including touching snake skin. Adding to the question, and expanding my answer, Huck would’ve taken Jim’s words on faith, and not through his intellect, a common characteristic of a romantic hero.

Question 3: Is the conclusion of Huckleberry Finn satisfying? Why does Twain conclude the novel this way?

The conclusion of Huckleberry Finn is satisfying. It ends with Aunt Sally adopting Huck Finn and trying to civilize him. It is satisfying because it ends peacefully. The readers would have an idea that Huck Finn is doing well, and not doing anymore unethical things, because Huck Finn would be civilized by Aunt Sally. Furthermore, after all of the action that dealt with the armed farmers, it is satisfying to end it with peace. So basically, to have Huck Finn encounter malicious actions and have a sense of relief in the end is a really good feeling and good way to end the novel. Huck, this boy, learns a very valuable lesson. On chapter 53, page 281, it states, “…Aunt Sally she’s going to adopt me and sivilize me…”