

Discussion Questions

Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

HN CS Lit 11

Adapted from https://public.archive.wsu.edu/campbelld/public_html/amlit/huckques.htm

Be prepared for graded discussions of the novel, as per teacher direction, in the first few days/weeks of the course. To aid in this discussion, consider summarizing the main points of each chapter on a sheet of paper (not required).

Required: Answer each of the following questions in at least 3-4 sentences.

1. Review **romanticism** and **realism** as literary genres. In what ways does *Huckleberry Finn* attack romanticism and promote realism? In addition to Tom Sawyer, what characters, scenes, or incidents contribute to this theme?
2. If we assume, as Twain says, that the novel celebrates the triumph of a "sound heart" over a "deformed conscience," what are the steps in that process? Look closely at the relationship between Huck and Jim. What incidents mark steps in Huck's moral growth?
3. *Huckleberry Finn* is celebrated for its style, especially Twain's use of vernacular speech and dialect. Examine a short section of the book and explain what kinds of features (sentence structure, irony, word choice, repetition, and so forth) he uses to achieve the effects.
4. What kinds of humor occur in the novel? Does Twain use humor for serious effects? What debt does it owe to Southwestern humor? to understatement or irony? to set pieces of humorous dialogue like the "Sollermon" debate?
5. *Huckleberry Finn* is in some ways a novel in which violence is mingled with entertainment. In addition to its persistent mention of death and its motif of unburied bodies (especially those floating in water), the novel shows Huck witnessing a series of violent episodes; he also describes a number of entertaining spectacles. What connection exists in the novel between violence and entertainment?
6. The ending of *Huckleberry Finn*, one of its most frequently discussed features, has been criticized as abrupt, shallow, and unsatisfying. James Cox, on the other hand, defends the ending by saying that *we* are Tom who "safely" frees the slave who is already free. Would you agree or disagree with this characterization? Why?
7. Discuss *Huckleberry Finn* as a social satire. What classes does he satirize? What characteristics of each class does he criticize?