

# THE STORY

**H**uckleberry Finn is just like any other thirteen-year-old boy: looking for adventures and rebelling against attempts to “civilize” him. He made his first appearance in Mark Twain’s literary world in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, where he partnered with the title character to undertake an adventurous life of crime culminating in the discovery of a small fortune found in an Indian Cave. The orphaned Huck is placed under the care of the Widow Douglas, but his father, Pap, returns to claim custody of Huck and his found fortune. After being kidnapped by his father, Huck fakes his own death and runs away to an abandoned island. There Huck discovers Jim, a slave and a fellow runaway. Huck and Jim decide to float a raft down the Mississippi in order to get Jim into the heart of the free states up the Ohio River. The two drift happily together down the river; but as Jim anticipates his freedom, Huck begins to worry that he has done the wrong thing in helping a runaway slave. The travelers miss their opportunity to travel north, drifting past the Ohio-Mississippi River junction in a dense fog. Things go from bad to worse when two crooks claiming to be royalty beg for a ride on the raft. The King and the Duke mastermind all sorts of scams to cheat people out of money, ultimately selling Jim back into slavery. On his own, Huck must finally choose between the friendship he feels for Jim and the society that makes Jim a slave.

*Fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities.  
Truth isn't.*

—Mark Twain

*Ideally, a book would have no order to it,  
and the reader would have to discover his own.*

—Mark Twain

## MARK TWAIN

*Biographies are but the clothes and buttons of the man. The  
biography of the man himself cannot be written.*

—Mark Twain

**M**any have undertaken the job of setting down the life of one of America’s most beloved literary geniuses, but with one sentence Twain undoes their work. This is a perfect example of the quick wit and talent with words that made him famous. Still, the life and times of the man illuminate his famous writings.

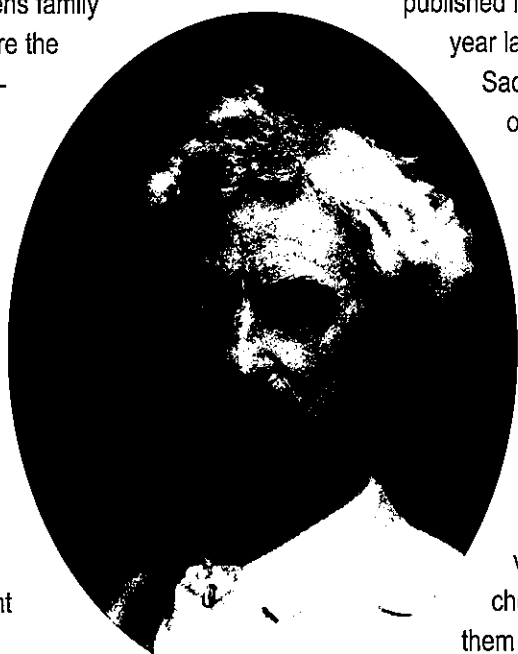
Twain was born Samuel Langhorne Clemens on November 30, 1835, in the town of Florida, Missouri. When he was only four, the Clemens family moved to Hannibal, Missouri, where the Mississippi River made a fine playground. Samuel’s childhood was cut short when the death of his father forced him to drop out of the fifth grade and work as a delivery and errand boy for the *Hannibal Gazette*. The next year he got a job as a printer’s apprentice at the *Hannibal Courier*, leading him to a career as a journalist. In 1853 Twain traveled east to Pennsylvania and New York, where he found success writing for several different newspapers.

Three years later he returned home to Hannibal. Twain recalled, “When I was a boy there was but one permanent ambition among my comrades in our village on the west bank of the Mississippi ... to be a steamboatman....” He began an apprenticeship under a riverboat pilot and spent the next five years on the Mississippi, until the Civil War halted all river traffic. After serving just two weeks in the Confederate Army,

he went west to the Nevada Territory to try his hand at prospecting. Failing miserably, he returned to journalism and began to write under a pen name. “Mark Twain” is the term for the shallowest depth of water in which a riverboat can safely travel, the line between safety and danger: exactly the place where Twain worked as a writer.

Twain’s first big break as a writer came when his short story “Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog” was published in papers across the country. A year later he was hired by the *Sacramento Union* to visit and report on the Sandwich Islands (today known as Hawaii). His columns were so well received that when he returned he took his first lecture tour, establishing himself as a successful stage attraction. He was hired by the *Alta California* to write articles about his travels throughout Europe and the Holy Land. He collected these writings, full of vivid description and tongue-in-cheek observations, and reworked them into his first full-length book, *The Innocents Abroad*. On this trip he met

Charles Langdon, who would become Twain’s life-long friend. When Twain met Charles’s sister, Olivia Langdon, the two fell instantly in love. After two years of courting they were married in 1870. They settled in Hartford, Connecticut, where they would live for the next 20 years. While there Twain wrote some of his most famous works, including *Roughing It* (1872), *The*



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# EXPLORING...

*"THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN IS THE  
SOURCE OF ALL AMERICAN LITERATURE."  
- ERNEST HEMINGWAY*

*AN AMAZING TALE OF A BOY'S COMING OF  
AGE AND A MAN'S LONGING FOR FREEDOM.*

*FUNNY, POIGNANT AND REMARKABLY RELEVANT  
125 YEARS AFTER ITS FIRST APPEARANCE.*

*Mark Twain's  
Huckleberry Finn*

BY RITA GRAUER  
AND JOHN URQUHART

WELLPOINT  
THE LIFE OF MARK TWAIN

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*Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *The Prince and the Pauper* (1880), and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889). He also wrote the first 400 pages of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* almost immediately after completing *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, but he wrote to a friend, “I like it only tolerably well and may possibly pigeonhole or burn the [manuscript] when it is done.” He put it aside, working on it only sporadically and then completely halting all progress for two years. It seemed that Huck and Jim would be stuck on the river forever before Twain’s writer’s block broke, causing a torrential flood of creativity. His hiatus from the plot allowed his creative juices to flow once more. He completed the book in two months. After seven years in process, Twain was confident the book would become an American classic when he said, “Modesty compels me to say it’s a rattling good one.”

Though Twain was finding success in his writing, tragedy struck at home. Three of his four children died while still young, and a series of bad investments left the family nearly bankrupt. In an attempt to recover from financial ruin, Twain and his wife moved to a less expensive home in Berlin, Germany. Over the next nine years, he witnessed the exploitation of weaker governments by European powers and joined the Anti-Imperialist League. He continued his lecture tours, which got him out of debt; but the political turn his writing had taken threatened his standing as an adored American author. The couple moved back to the States in 1900, but after a year his wife became ill. Twain took her to Italy, where she died a year later. On April 21, 1910, Twain died at the age of 74. Halley’s Comet, which appears once every 74 years, appeared in both the year of Twain’s birth and the year of his death.



This painting, part of a mural in the Missouri State Capital building, depicts Huck and Jim floating down the Mississippi River on their raft. The artist is Thomas Hart Benton (1889-1975) a famous midwestern muralist whose work may be seen in several building at Indiana University in Bloomington and elsewhere around the state.

## SLAVERY

**H**uckleberry Finn was one of the first novels to deal with the contradiction between slavery and the American value of freedom. In 1776 the Declaration of Independence stated that “all men are created equal,” and the United States was founded on such fair-minded principles. Yet slavery flourished in the South, where the economy was largely based on cash crops such as sugar, tobacco and cotton that required a large, cheap labor force.

Early in the 1800s, the Abolitionist movement—the desire to end slavery—began to grow. In the North, a large base of cheap white labor prevented slavery from taking a strong hold; but in the South, the success of the economy was directly linked to slavery. This conflict eventually led to the American Civil War.

Prior to the end of slavery as brought about by the Emancipation Proclamation, slaves were subjected to the harshest of circumstances. They were considered property, not people. As a result, they were not allowed to make decisions about their own lives, such as where to live or what to do. Some worked in white households cooking or cleaning, but most worked long hard hours in plantation fields. Life in the fields was much more difficult than in households. Masters inflicted severe punishment on slaves to ensure their obedience. White slaveholders in the North and the Upper South generally owned only a handful of slaves and worked alongside them in the fields. Slaves in these circumstances were treated better, because often times their owners could not afford to replace them.

In the Deep South, however, where cash crops grew on large plantations, slaves were more often mistreated. Being sold to a plantation in the Deep South was a fate worse than death. For Jim in his attempted escape,

traveling down river would have been incredibly frightening and dangerous. The further south he travels the more stringent slave codes are and the more likely he is to be captured and punished harshly.

One of the ways slaves found refuge from such a difficult life was to maintain family structures. The support offered from the nuclear family offered an opportunity for slaves to have some control over their own destiny. The stability of these families faced many challenges: state laws did not recognize marriage among slaves; masters rather than parents had legal authority over slave children; and the possibility of forced separation was a fact every family feared. Despite these challenges, the family remained the slave's most basic refuge.

Though families helped slaves to avoid total control by their owners, many slaves pursued more active paths of resistance such as revolt. Often these attempts ended in more bloodshed and harsher treatment rather than any productive gain. Other forms of resistance were somewhat more passive, for example: silent-sabotage or “foot dragging” where slaves did little things to slow production. The most common form of resistance, however, was flight. About 100 slaves per year escaped successfully to the North during the pre-Civil War decades. This, however, was only a small percentage of those who attempted escape.

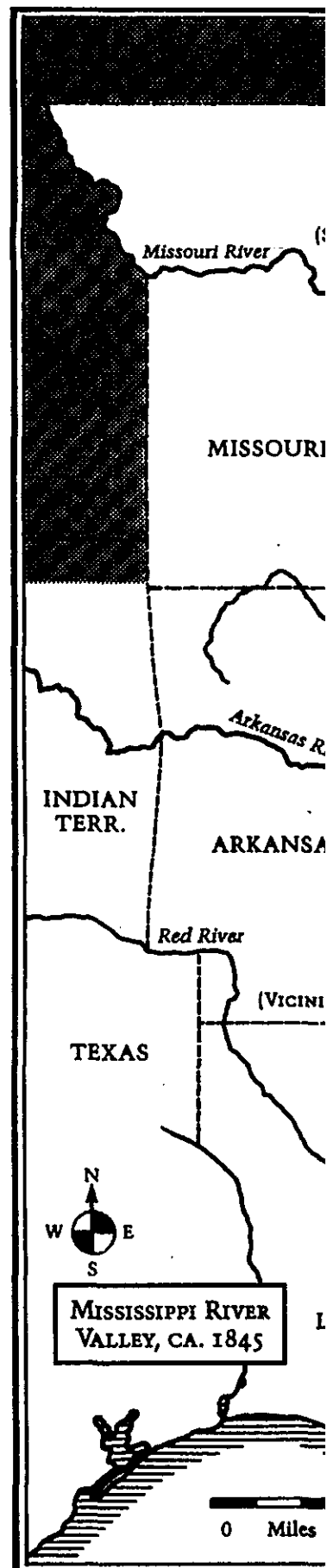
The life of a slave was a difficult one. Many people refused to acknowledge that slaves were people, referring to them as inferior and giving them animalistic characteristics. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain sought to challenge these prejudices by showing the development of a real friendship between Huck and Jim.

## THE MISSISSIPPI

Although Mark Twain is remembered as a great American author, he loved nothing more than his time as a riverboat pilot on the Mississippi River. This love is ever apparent in his writings, particularly in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. “The reason is plain,” Twain explains in *Life on the Mississippi*, “a pilot, in those days, was the only unfettered and entirely independent human being that ever lived in the earth.” Twain's association of freedom with the Mississippi River can be seen in the journey Huck and Jim take in search of freedom. The Mississippi River winds through the story of *Huckleberry Finn* as much as the two fugitives on the raft wind through different adventures. The life and history surrounding the Mississippi River becomes an important character in the novel.

In the 1700s, Native Americans and French explorers traveled the Mississippi in canoes and in rafts (much like the raft used by Huck and Jim). Every trade good imaginable could be found up and down the banks of the river: furs from the Great Lakes and the Missouri River; staple agricultural products like corn and wheat from the Midwest; cotton, sugar, and tobacco from the plantations of the Deep South. As trade around the river became increasingly important, travel methods evolved. First came flatboats that shipped grain, livestock, and lumber downstream to New Orleans. The major problem with this method was its inability to make a return trip upstream, forcing its passengers to find alternative methods home, generally on land. Keelboats with their v-shaped hulls cut through the water, allowing for travel against the current from south to north. This labor-intensive trip required planting long poles in the river bottom and walking along a cleated deck. Keelboat-men would reach the stern, pull up the poles, return to the bow, and start the entire process over again. Finally the advent of steam-powered ships allowed for easy travel up and down the river. The first steamboat trip was made in 1811 from the Ohio River to the Mississippi to New Orleans.

With new avenues of travel, the North and the South were now connected by the river and the ability to trade, but still divided by the issue of slavery. During the time of Huck Finn, the Mississippi River ran through the middle of America from Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico. The river is divided into halves at the Ohio



This map includes the approximate locations of the fictional towns Twain created for Huckleberry Finn, along with the real towns they are based on. Huck and Jim's journey begins in St. Petersburg (Hannibal, Missouri) and ends in Pikesville (Columbia, Arkansas).

## RACIAL SLURS

The word *nigger* is used throughout Mark Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In recent years, society has condemned this word as a racial slur; its use demonstrates an ignorance and hatred that should not be imitated.

The word was not originally used for verbal assault. It first appears in historical documents in 1587 as *negar*, an alternate spelling of *Negro*. *Nigger* was a common word in both England and America by the 17th century; it was considered nothing more than an alternate pronunciation of *Negro*. By 1825, however, both abolitionists and Blacks found the word offensive and began to object to its use. More than 150 years later, the use of the word has not been eliminated.

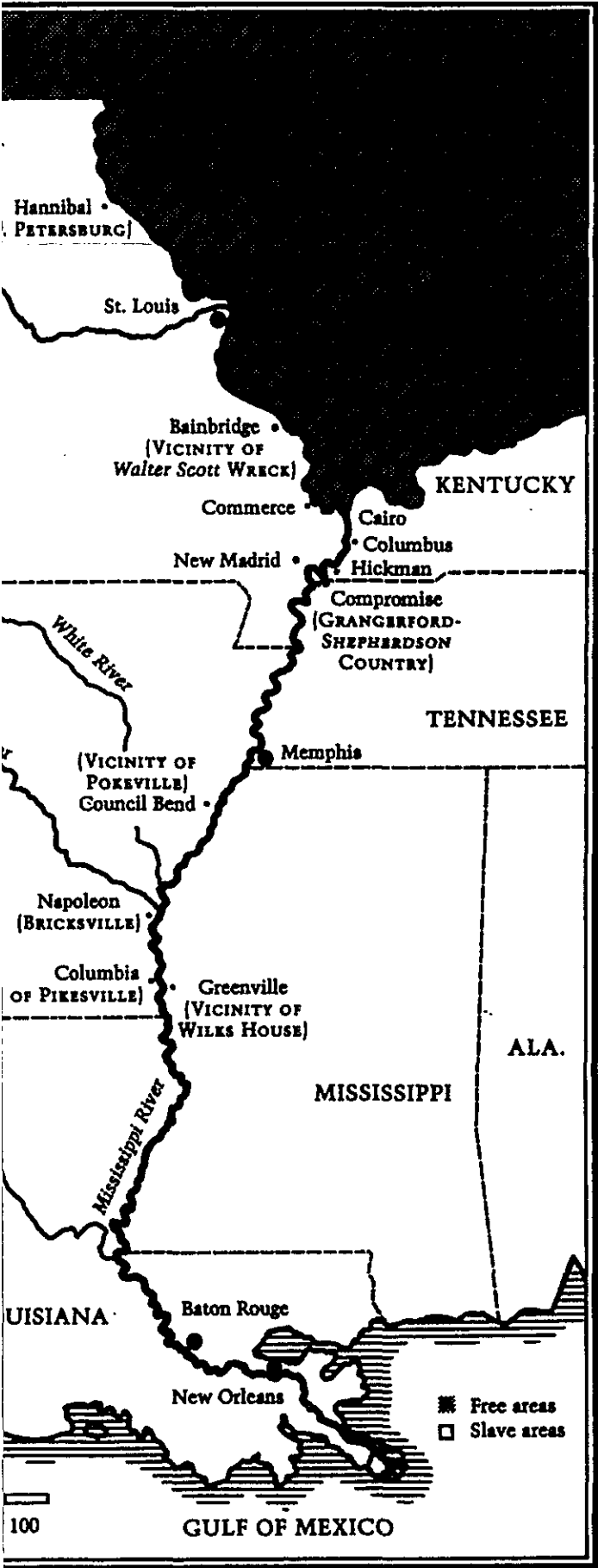
Ever since Twain wrote *Huckleberry Finn* in 1885, his use of the word has been controversial. The novel has been banned from many schools and libraries over the years because of this issue, among others. This seems, however, to be a simplistic response to a complex issue, ignoring both the historical accuracy of Twain's usage as well as the clear and strong anti-slavery message inherent in the story.

*Loyalty to petrified opinion never broke a chain or freed a human soul.*  
—Mark Twain

# RIVER

River junction. Settled by people of Scandinavian, German, and Irish descent, the northern Mississippi was characterized by ice and snow for much of the year, leading to smaller settlements and a less agricultural economy. The southern landscape of the lower Mississippi, with plentiful water flowing through rich soil under a hot sun, led to natural success for plantations and the cash crops grown there. The increased prominence of trade along the River caused a rapid expansion of slavery in Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri, and western Kentucky. There was tremendous profit to be made from goods produced by the slave system. Racial divisions and inequality reigned over the cultural systems along the river.

Not only did the Mississippi represent an important disconnect between North and South, but it also divided East and West, old and new. President Thomas Jefferson purchased the territory west of the Mississippi from France in 1803, opening up a new frontier for exploration and settlement by the American people. The Mississippi served as the starting point for journeys west. Travelers would often travel up or down the river to St. Louis, where their trip west would begin on the Missouri River. This flurry of activity and excitement caused the Mississippi to represent new beginnings for many Americans. However, for those caught in the grasp of slavery, these new beginnings seemed just out of reach. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Jim and Huck are looking for a similar chance to start over.



*A person who won't read has no advantage over one who can't read.*  
—Mark Twain

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Huck and Jim's journey is a search for freedom. What does freedom mean to you? How would you define the word "free"?

Many characters in the play fail to recognize Jim's rights as a human. What rights is he denied? Who does this to Jim and how? What would it be like to be in his situation? How would you react?

Imagine you are on the raft with Huck and Jim. How would you react to the Duke and the King?

In what ways are Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn similar, and in what ways are they different?

Discuss the use of the word "nigger" by both African Americans and others in music, books, movies, and everyday life today. Take into account that many still view it as a derogatory term. Examine this question from the viewpoint of other generations.

Discuss the effects of racial slurs and name-calling.

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has raised a good deal of controversy over the years. Many people still challenge that the book shouldn't be taught or read. Why do you suppose some people feel this way? Do you agree? If not, why not? What kind of books would you ban and under what circumstances?

How does the relationship between Huck and Jim change as the play progresses? What do you think this shift is meant to tell to the audience?

How does Huck interact differently with each adult in the play: the Widow, Pap, Jim, the King, the Duke? Who do you think has the best relationship with Huck and why? Who has the worst and why?

What traits in Huck's character are admirable? Which are not? What about Jim is admirable?

Why is it important to the Widow Douglas that Huck be civilized? In what ways does Huck need improvement to become civilized? In what ways is he already civilized? How does his trip down the river work to civilize him?

Jim mentions Abolitionists when he is talking about freeing his family. What is an Abolitionist? Research the history of the Underground Railroad. Who are some famous Abolitionists? What did they do? How did they travel? What dangers did passengers and conductors of the Underground Railroad face? What are some of the creative ways slaves escaped to the North?

In Chapter 25 of *Huckleberry Finn*, the King tries to fool the crowd with his linguistic analysis of the word "obsequies." Brainstorm a list of words that have multiple meanings or have changed meaning through the years. Research the roots of the words.

## WEBSITES

[www.marktwainhouse.org](http://www.marktwainhouse.org)

- Good biographical information
- List and description of all works
- Suggested reading list
- Map of famous mansion

[www.pbs.org/marktwain](http://www.pbs.org/marktwain)

- Really cool scrap book of Twain's life
- Teacher information for classroom
- Great pictures
- Information about a video on Twain's life

[www.nps.gov/civilwar](http://www.nps.gov/civilwar)

- Solid information about Civil War events

[www.hannibal.net/twain](http://www.hannibal.net/twain)

- Hometown biography site
- Fun user friendly

## WRITING PROMPTS

Write a review of your experience at the IRT seeing *Huckleberry Finn*. Talk about the play, the story, the actors, the staging, the audience, and the theatre space.

Visit the American Libraries Website

(<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/bannedbookweek/challengedbanned/challengedbanned.htm>) and learn more about banned and challenged books and authors. Choose a book you and your peers have read recently, or an author. Have a debate or write a speech for or against banning this book or author.

Imagine you are Huck Finn. Write a diary entry about one of your days and nights on the raft.

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a journey story like *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Odyssey*, *The Walkabout*, *Walk Two Moons*, *Crow and Weasel*, *The Bean Trees*, and many others. In groups, create a character and write your own journey story where your hero or heroine faces an ethical dilemma.

The King and the Duke devise scheme after scheme for conning good citizens out of their money. Write a scenario for the King and the Duke to use and act it out.

Write an escape story in the old-fashioned adventure mode that Tom Sawyer loves.

*Good friends, good books, and a sleepy conscience: this is the ideal life.*  
—Mark Twain

*Don't let schooling interfere with your education.*  
—Mark Twain

WORD SEARCH

Each of the following clues represents a word you can find in the Word Search.

Involuntary servitude

Name of the river traveled down

Author of *Huckleberry Finn*

Name of title character

Huckleberry's travel partner

Vehicle used to float down the river

Twain piloted these in his youth

Someone who works to end slavery

Mark Twain's real name

Huck's partner in crime

Where Twain worked on a newspaper

Mark Twain's northeast home

What Aunt Sally wants Huck to be

Two schemers on the raft

Direction the river flows

S Y I J R B W W A C X D Y J H W L B W H U Q Q H Y H X Q X V  
G A R H F L C W I R I S E F V E L K I N S S I A Y E D Z B L  
S E M R D I Z A U A G V G E A A Y E I T S M F R B K R E L Q  
O U Z U E A T U U L B C I J L Y B A B F P P F T M U M T D S  
H J R G E B P Z N A M Z Q L I V W H U Y F V L F J D U O A O  
S S E O N L E E M T Y H I B I T Y S Z P Z R C O N N J I B S  
U D S Q N Z L L F A V V C D K Z N Z E Q Z C T R J A O P G C  
H T Y R Y C J A K E E K U R F H E P Y A H N N D U J C A T Z  
C W C M H Q W D N C U X A Z K J F D I A Z J W C G S D F T S  
R F J R V W D H I G U M R Z D E C Z T Q A P Y O A Z P L D F  
P P Q E N N Y G R L H H E O U I M J J M K N M N V X M Q X R  
I W I J T V H C E Y H O D D D T D J W P L A I N A X P B A X  
Z X I L I G O T M P T L R T V F V M J R I O O E B T A K A O  
P U U T N U Q T B W F A I N T O A L P T P H F C M U W G G B  
O F V I F G M A U S P Q K N C I D Y D E U S U T G Y O L S S  
Z C K J O A B W K R G T G T N L Z Y B Z L V J I M C W U P G  
Z Y G I A H R Z E S X J Q H T R E O T A J C W C G U J M C I  
I P P I S S I S S I M U N A Q J E M V E P V U U K U A V M Q  
O M W R X C B D R Q J W W N E L R E E O A P M T Q B Q J K E  
E K M U D L F K A R U D W N K E R N G N T T B F O T V B R X  
B S B Z P V K V M L I E I I G Y E E Y R S F J L V A D T B X  
O Q D T D X T V H T R A A B T M Q J G H H G I F S O J K A W  
T O M S A W Y E R N Q T U A M J P G I M Q T K O E B R A T L  
N Z O H M T N V Z K P A N L Q P D Y G E I D V W T R P G O X  
M R H Z Q E C X F X V D K V A G M O Y O G E R G P E Z F F D  
A E B O E S U W E D Q H E M V I O E N I A X B D Q V I L M K  
V R Q Q I V R D I R S O O T H L F I B Y V L E O H I Y L W C  
H T U O S O U G V C I L Z P D H S Y L L E I M Y Y R J O O Z  
T B G N R C D E Z N Z V X K R T S N X H S B Z F X A T I M R  
X X U W K K O B L O Q P Q T T D N W P N D X A T D H X D X F

HUCK ON STAGE

The process of translating an epic novel like *Huckleberry Finn* to the stage is inevitably a process of picking and choosing, from a vast canvas of events and characters, those which will fit on a finite stage in a relatively brief amount of time. This adaptation by Rita Grauer and John Urquhart is particularly economical, utilizing only five actors and a musician and less than 90 minutes to tell the story of Huck and Jim's journey. Three of the actors play two or three characters each; in the IRT production, they will be on stage the entire time, changing characters and costumes in full view of the audience.



Costume designer Joel Ebarb has given each actor a base costume; elements will be added or subtracted to change characters. Mr. Ebarb has based his designs (such as those for Jim, above, and the Duke, below) on the novel's original pen-and-ink sketches by E. W. Kemble; the costumes will feature hand-painted details such as pockets and buttons, literally bringing the drawings to life on stage.

The scenic design by Robert M. Koharchik transforms the Upperstage into a theatre-in-the-round that places Huck and Jim's raft center stage. Original music written and performed live on stage by David N. Wierhake will contribute to the atmosphere. Directed by Priscilla Lindsay, the IRT production of *Huckleberry Finn* promises to be a lively and theatrical telling of a much-loved classic tale.



Clothes make the man.  
Naked people have little or no influence on society.  
—Mark Twain

You can't depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus.  
—Mark Twain



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Janet Allen, Artistic Director

Outreach to underserved students has been made possible in part through grants from General Motors, Allison Transmission Division & Metal Fabricating Division—Indianapolis Metal Center & The Indianapolis Foundation, an affiliate of the Central Indiana Community Foundation.

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NATIONAL  
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FOR THE ARTS

Study Guide written by Katelyn Coyne  
Edited & Designed by Richard J Roberts  
Contributors: Katie Norton, Millicent Wright

UPCOMING STUDENT MATINEES

*A Christmas Carol*

November 1-3, 6-10, 13-17, 20-22, 28-30  
December 1, 5-8, 12-15

*I Have Before Me a Remarkable Document  
Given to Me by a Young Lady from Rwanda*

November 22, 28, 29; December 6, 7, 13

*Gem of the Ocean*

January 23, 25, 30, 31; February 6, 7

*Twelfth Night*

Monday-Friday, January 24 - March 2

*Death of a Salesman*

March 6, 7, 8, 13, 20, 21

*Bad Dates*

March 21, 28, 29; April 3, 4, 18

*The Unexpected Guest*

April 17, 18, 19, 20, 24, 25, 26; May 1

Questions or comments?  
Call the IRT Education Department at  
317-916-4844 or 916-4841