

# Teacher Quick Reference Guide

06/07 Children's Theatre Company Season

## The Play

### *Huck Finn*

Based on the novel by Mark Twain • Adapted for the stage by Greg Banks  
Most enjoyed by ages 8+



## Synopsis

A lot of folks think they know Huckleberry Finn—his guardian Ms. Watson, his pa, even his pal Tom Sawyer—but as Huck says, “anything you think you know probably ain’t true.” But when Huck gets a chance to escape his cruel father and set off down the Mississippi River, he takes it, and stumbles upon a runaway slave named Jim in the process. At once a humorous and intimate coming-of-age tale and complex study of race relations, the adventures of these unlikely friends have etched themselves into the pantheon of classic American literature. This re-envisioning pays homage to the narrative voice of the source material by letting Huck tell his story directly to the audience as it happens in real time, with choral support from the cast. The resulting play heightens the immediacy of Huck’s journey, allowing the audience to tangibly experience all the joy, fear, excitement and discovery that Huck himself feels.

## The Big Ideas

- Identity: Defining oneself against the opinions of others
- Race relations in the United States
- American history: 1800’s

## Examples of Activities and Standards Connections

Suggested Activity: Read *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain

*Standard: Reading and Literature (Grades 9-12) Literature:* The student will engage in the reading process and read, understand, respond to, analyze, interpret, evaluate and appreciate a wide variety of fiction, poetic and nonfiction texts.

The following activities can be used whether or not students have read the book:

### **Activity: Analyze the use of satire in Huck Finn.**

*Standard: Reading and Literature (Grades 9-12) Literature* (same as above): The student will: Analyze, interpret and evaluate the use of figurative language and imagery in fiction and nonfiction selections, including symbolism, tone, irony and satire.

Satire is defined as the use of wit, especially irony, sarcasm, and ridicule, to attack the vices and follies of humankind. In the play, Huck comes upon the Grangerfords, a family in the midst of a generations-old feud with the Sheperdsons. In this passage, Buck Grangerford explains the feud to Huck:

**Huck:** What did he do to you?

**Buck:** Him? He never done nothing to me.

**Huck:** Well, then, what did you want to kill him for?

**Buck:** Why nothing. It’s only on account of the feud.

**Huck:** What’s a feud?

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**Buck:** It's this way. A man has a quarrel with another man, and kills him; then that other man's brother kills him; then the other brothers, on both sides, goes for one another. Then the cousins chip in, and by and by everyone's killed off, and there ain't no more of a feud. But it's kind of slow and takes a long time.

**Huck:** Well who done the shooting?

**Buck:** Laws! How do I know? It was so long ago.

What do you think the playwright, and therefore Mark Twain in his original story, is satirizing in this passage? What events were taking place in U.S. history at the time of Twain's writing this story, which he could have been satirizing? Could this satire also apply to any current situations in the world? Can you think of any other parts of the play in which satire is being used? What is being satirized?

**Activity: Analyze the main characters in Huck Finn.**

*Standard: Reading and Literature (Grades 9-12) Literature (same as above):* Analyze and evaluate the relationship between and among elements of literature: character, setting, plot, tone, symbolism, rising action, climax, falling action, point of view, theme and conflict/resolution.

**The following are possibilities for discussion questions relating to Huck Finn:**

Brainstorm and list the various qualities that make someone a "good" person. List the qualities that make someone a "bad" person. At the climax of *Huck Finn*, Huck has to decide between what he believes is the "good" thing to do (turn in Jim to Widow Watson) and what he believes is "bad" (help Jim escape). After he writes to the Widow, he says,

*"I feel good and clean and washed of sin for the first time in my life... And then I got to thinking about our trip down the river, and I see Jim before me all the time...Somehow I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against him...All right, then, I'll go to hell. I will take up wickedness again, being brung up in it, and for starters I am going to steal Jim out of slavery again."*

**Now make a list of the main characters from Huck Finn.** Underneath each, write their qualities based on words from the lists you created. How do you know which characters are "good" and which are "bad"? What do you think Mark Twain was trying to say about notions of good and bad in creating these characters?

Analyze the character of Jim in terms of traditional notions of strength and weakness. What qualities make him strong? Which make him weak? In what way was Mark Twain trying to address stereotypical notions of African Americans during this time in U.S. history through this character?

**Activity: Write a newspaper article as a reporter who has witnessed a slave auction. Utilize extensive research to locate details about this period of U.S. history.**

*Standard (Grades 9-12) Historical Skills: Historical Resources.* The student will begin to use historical resources. Historical Inquiry. The student will apply research skills by investigating a topic in U.S. history.

In *Huck Finn*, Jim decides to run away when he overhears that his owner is going to sell him "down the river to New Orleans." Using a variety of resources including libraries, the Internet, historical sites, and archives that employ primary and secondary sources, research details of the slave trade in the United States. Based on your findings, write a newspaper article as a reporter witnessing a slave auction. How might the point of view of a reporter from the North differ from that of a Southern reporter? How would that affect the article?

