

Twain & Finn: Breaking the Language Barrier

Mark Twain's use of language and dialect in the book "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" helped him to bring about the overall feel that he conveyed throughout the book, allowing him to show Huck Finn's attitudes and beliefs concerning the nature of education, slavery, and family values.

When the story begins, Huck is seen as a young boy who is not very educated nor wishes to be. He does not seem to care very much for the attention that is given to him by the Widow Douglas, who had taken him in for her son, and her sister, Miss Watson. Huck's moral values were not only the product of his ignorance, but there is relation seen between Huck's attitude and the attitude of his father when Huck is confronted by him. Huck's father is disgusted at the way that Huck seems to be becoming more and more civilized. He states "...they say you can read and write. You think you're better'n your father, now, don't you, because he can't?" Perhaps this statement shows disgust in Huck through not following the moral values of his father, or perhaps this is just merely jealousy on his father's part. Huck's father warns Huck about going to school any more, yet Huck goes anyway, showing great willpower in the character of Huck in that he was gaining an education that he never really wanted in the first place, but soon came to realize that it was something actually useful, and in the fact that he was disobeying his father's orders.

Huck's feelings about slavery are shown when he helps Jim, Miss Watson's slave, to escape. Huck's constant statement that "Jim talks like he is white inside" shows that Huck was unique amongst the society in which he lived in the fact that he saw beneath the color of a person's skin and saw the person that was truly there. Jim seems to be the only person that Huck can trust other than Tom Sawyer, Huck's best friend. Huck Finn felt that slavery was a cruel injustice because he had gotten to know Jim and found out that there was more to him than just being a slave. Huck had found that Jim was a human being just like himself. Through these ideas, Mark Twain subtly conveyed his own feelings about slavery that existed in the south by using Huck as an example.

Mark Twain not only challenged the topics of education and slavery, but he also criticized the very society in which he lived. Social criticism appears in Twain's picture of the feuding Grangerfords and Shepherdsons, two families upon which Huck stumbles while on his travels. The two families show the foolheartedness of the pre-civil war society that existed in Twain's lifetime. Twain tried to convey the point that society had no need for civil feuds such as the one illustrated, or even the American civil war.

Through Mark Twain's use of language, he succeeded in showing the thoughts and beliefs of Huck Finn and the world that surrounded him. He accomplished this by showing these beliefs through Huck's realistic attitude, creating the framework to tackle the then-present and controversial issues of slavery and nationalistic values that accompanied peoples' thoughts on the subject.

