

**BEN'S GUIDE TO:
HUCKLEBERRY
FINN BY MARK
TWAIN**



**Third
Thursday**
Book Club

MARK TWAIN'S *THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN*¹

Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is often regarded as the Great American Novel – the single greatest expression of the American personality in literature. Huck himself is a uniquely American figure: brash yet insecure; entrepreneurial yet lazy; kind yet immoral. He's a bundle of contradictions, a great enough character to hold an extraordinary variety of shades. But there is one virtue that characterizes both Huck and America above all else: a commitment to truth. Huck may be dishonest, but he's no liar.

And because Huck is no liar, he is able to see a truth that those around him refuse to see: that Jim is not just a slave, not just a piece of property, not just a clown or a character in a farce. Huck sees that Jim is a human being, and that Jim deserves to be free. Because of that, we know that Huck deserves our love. And so does America.

MARK TWAIN: A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Mark Twain was born Samuel Clemens in Florida, Missouri, on November 30, 1835. He had five older siblings; his father was a stern man who sought wealth in a variety of endeavors, none of them successful. But Twain's mother was apparently a far livelier person, and Twain was close with her. When Twain was four years old, his family moved to Hannibal, Missouri, a city located on the banks of the Mississippi River – the site of so much of Twain's writing. In 1847, Twain's father died. Throughout his childhood, Twain's family would face abject poverty.

Young Clemens stayed in school until the age of 12. Then he became an apprentice at the *Hannibal Courier*, moving to the *Hannibal Western Union* at the age of 15, working for his older brother Orion. In 1857, Twain began working as a pilot on a steamboat on the Mississippi, but the Civil War meant the end of such trade. He joined the Confederate Army for a brief period in 1861 but deserted. Instead, he went West, prospecting for gold in Cali-

ifornia. That venture fell through, and so he instead began reporting for the *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*. It was there that Clemens began using the pseudonym Mark Twain, a steamboat term for marking the depth of the river.

In 1865, one of Twain's short stories became a literary sensation. In 1869, he released *The Innocents Abroad*, a travelogue about his travels around the Mediterranean Sea. Then, in 1870, he married Olivia Langdon, a New York scion of a wealthy family. Twain and Livy lived in Buffalo, New York, and had four children.

In 1876, Twain published *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. He quickly began writing *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, but he didn't publish it until 1884; by that point, he had written *The Prince and the Pauper* (1881) and *Life on the Mississippi* (1883). In 1885, Twain paid a broke Ulysses S. Grant to write his memoirs, perhaps the greatest presidential memoir of all time; the book sold more than 300,000 copies, but that didn't stop Twain – a snakebitten businessman – from bankrupting the publishing house anyway.

Next, Twain published *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) and *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894). By the time of his death, he was one of the most treasured Americans in public life. But his life was marred by personal tragedy: one of his sons died as a toddler, the couple lost a daughter at age 24 to spinal meningitis, and they lost a second daughter at 29 years old. His sole remaining child's relationship with him was distant. In 1904, Livy died. On April 21, 1910, Twain followed.

A RICHLY COMIC TRAVELOGUE OF THE AMERICAN SOUTH

Twain was a master of the travelogue – he wrote two bestselling travelogues during his lifetime. *Huck Finn* is the third, and the greatest; it is infused with his humor, his scathing commentary. And it takes on the place of Twain's boyhood: the American South. Twain says in his 1876 preface to *Tom Sawyer*, "Most of the adventures recorded in this book really occurred; one or two were experiences of my own, the rest those of boys who were schoolmates of mine. Huck Finn is drawn from life The odd superstitions touched upon were all prevalent among children and slaves in the West at the period of this story." Twain adds, "part of my plan has been to try to pleasantly remind adults of what they once were them-

WANT TO KEEP READING?

Become a Daily Wire member today to receive the rest of Ben's notes for The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Head over to dailywire.com/subscribe and use code BOOKCLUB at checkout to ensure you receive the complete study guide. To be able to join Ben for a live discussion on the third Thursday of the month, be sure to join as an All Access member.