



Teaching the Classics: Student Essay Sample

(interpretive essay by an 11 year old student of *Teaching the Classics*)

Society Overthrown

By Ian, age 11

Mark Twain had very specific ideas about a great many things. However he voiced one of his most valued opinions in his book, *Huckleberry Finn*. In this book, Twain explored the meaning of slavery and freedom. He queried, "What does it mean to be free and what does it mean to be a slave?" As Huck journeys down the Mississippi river with an escaped slave, the conflict in his soul becomes more apparent. Should he be helping Jim escape or was it right that Jim be a prisoner because of his color?

Huck has lived as a ragamuffin all his life. The backwoods are his home. Because of his secluded life, the moral ideals of society are never imprinted on his brain. Instead, God's ideals and the voice of his conscience goad him on. This is the basis for the mental battles he encounters along the way. In his heart Huck knows that slavery is wrong and that Jim is no lesser man than he. But the little that he knows of society tells him to return Jim to his master and be done with the whole business. The little voice in Huck's mind continually battles with society until Huck can stand it no more. He resolves that if helping Jim means going to hell then that is where he is headed.

Huck's decision reveals Twain's own ideas about the issue. Obviously Twain believes, very strongly, that no man should be enslaved and that all men should be equal. Twain uses the character Huck, his friend Jim and their journey as a mask for his theme.

In addition Twain believed that society imprisoned itself. For instance, even though she could do anything she wanted, Miss Watson was really more of a slave than Huck. Huck thought it very binding to have to wear stiff clothes and to live in a house. But his mind was free to wander the paths of the forest, blissfully unaware of political issues. Miss Watson, however, was fully chained in her intellect by her social ideals. Society, which Huck had never been a part of, was a slave master to all in its grip. Miss Watson, caught up in the claw, was burdened by the demanding overseer, society. But Huck was running, not yet caught, which is why he was still engrossed in the problems of a simple mind and soul. Society chained the mind and spirit.

Twain was an amazing author. The troubles and big ideas of his times had an effect on his stories. Because of that influence, most of Twain's themes are deep and important. While they are hard to discover, they are important to comprehend. Slavery is an abhorrence to God. The idea that black Americans are inferior won't hold water any more than a sieve. All men are equal, and that's the way God meant it to be. Without God's voice in our lives we don't have a chance against the enslaving voices of the social order.