Chapters 1-5: Status Quo and Conformity: Civilizing Huck

QUESTIONS

1. How and why does Twain establish Huck’s voice as storyteller? What do we learn about Huck from what he reveals of other characters’ assessments of him?

2. Make two columns, listing Huck’s clear likes and dislikes as he reveals them in these chapters. What things does he have trouble understanding?

3. What are Huck’s feelings about his adoption by the Widow Douglas and her sister, Miss Watson? As a motherless boy, does he need their influence?

4. Huck’s upbringing is at issue in the book. What has he been taught that forms his core self? What do other characters want to teach him and how do they wish to change him?

5. These chapters establish components of Huck’s self that others hope to influence: his emotions, his intelligence, his fiscal responsibility, his spirituality, his social self, and his physical health and habits. To what and whom does Huck conform and when/how does he reject conformity in these chapters?

6. The titles of the chapters are in third person, while the text itself is in the first person voice of Huck Finn. What does this literary device suggest about the argument that Huck and Twain are one and the same?

QUOTATIONS

1. “Then she told me about the bad place, and I said I wished I was there…I couldn’t see no advantage in going where she was going, so I made up my mind I wouldn’t try for it” (12-13).

2. “Why, blame it all, we’ve got to do it. Don’t I tell you it’s in the books? Do you want to go to doing different from what’s in the books, and get things all muddled up?” (18).

3. “I went and told the widow about it, and she said the thing a body could get by praying for it was ‘spiritual gifts.’ This was too many for me, but she told me…I must help other people, and do everything for other people, and look out for them all the time, and never think about myself…I went out in the woods and turned it over in my mind a long time…” (20).

4. “Pap he hadn’t been seen for more than a year, and that was comfortable for me; I didn’t want to see him no more. He used to always whale me when he was sober and could get his hands on me; though I used to take to the woods most of the time when he was around” (21).

5. “I liked the old ways best, but I was getting so I liked the new ones, too, a little bit” (24).

6. “The judge…said he reckoned a body could reform the old man with a shotgun, maybe, but he didn’t know no other way” (31).