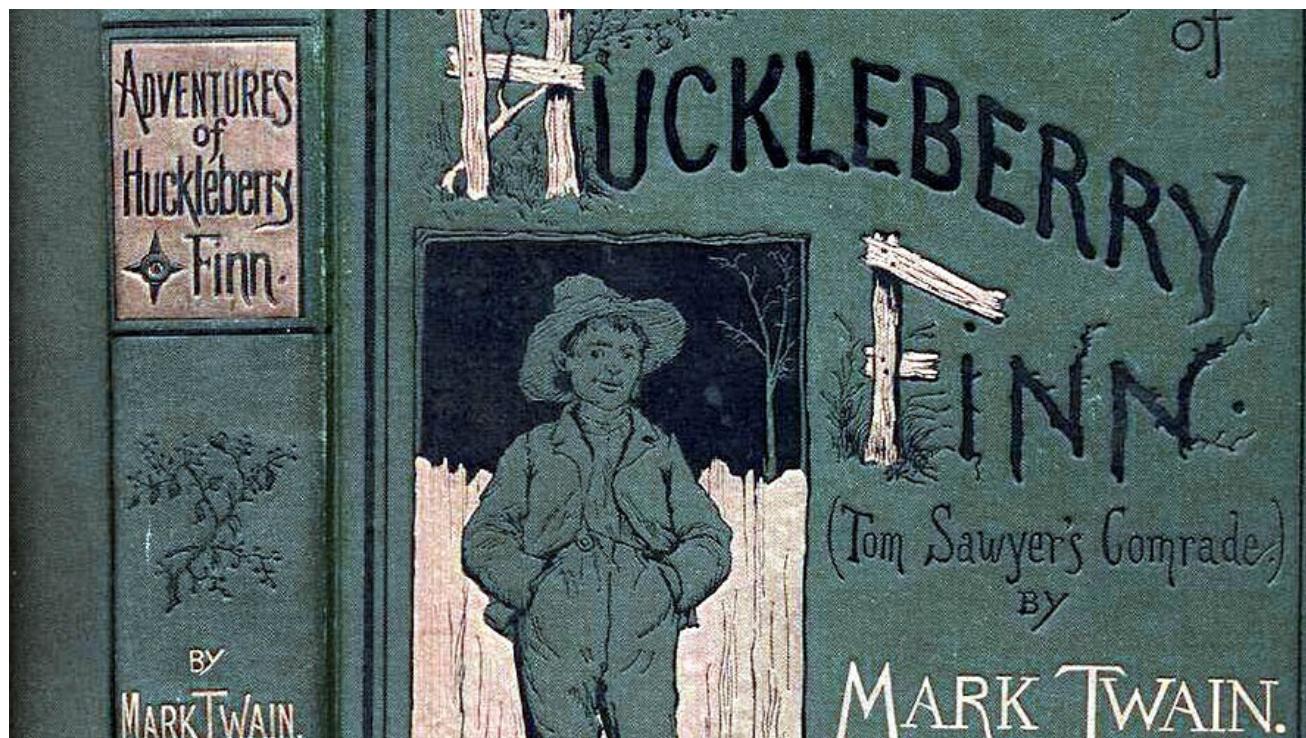


Rethinking Huck

By Steven Mintz, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, adapted by Newsela staff on 03.02.17

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The cover of the first edition of "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," published in 1885 in the United States. Photo: Wikimedia Commons. BOTTOM: Mark Twain in 1907. Photo from Library of Congress.

"The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" is a book by Mark Twain. It takes place over 150 years ago. The book is the story of Huck Finn. He is a teenage boy who goes on many adventures. He rides a raft down the Mississippi River. He also helps a man escape from slavery. The man is named Jim.

"Huckleberry Finn" is a complicated book. It is an adventure story and a coming-of-age story. It is also a book about life in America. The book shows how history continues to shape the present.

An American journey

"The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" came out in 1884. The story is told through Huck's eyes. Huck does not speak in fancy language. Instead, he talks like a regular person. At this time, this was rare for books.

Today, the book is considered one of the great American stories. It was not always considered so great, though. When the book first came out, many people did not like it. Some thought it was inappropriate. In later years, others were upset that it included racist language. In the book, Huck uses disrespectful words to talk about African-Americans.

But the book is more complicated than it seems. In fact, the story has many layers to it.

Twain begins the book with a warning. He tells his readers not to expect a simple story. The book has no lessons about right and wrong, he says. Instead, it offers a complicated picture of American life. It leaves readers to make up their own minds.

A historical view

The book shows how people are not always good or bad. Huck is a complicated character. Sometimes he does the right thing, and sometimes he does not. Often he is racist and disrespectful toward African-Americans. But at other times, he is kind to them. In the end, Huck helps Jim escape to freedom. The book shows how people's ideas and actions do not always agree.

A literary view

The book is about Huck's inner struggles. Some readers think the book is the story of him becoming a good person. By the end, Huck seems to respect Jim as an equal. But the ending is actually more complicated than that. At the end of their journey, Huck goes back to his old ways. He plays jokes on Jim. He is not always nice. So the book is not a simple story of becoming a better person. Instead, it is a story of the complicated struggle between right and wrong.