

AP English Language and Composition – Summer Assignment

Introduction

Mark Twain once said, "Censorship is telling a man he can't have a steak just because a baby can't chew it." Yet, since the day it was first published in 1883, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has been criticized, censored, and even banned. Nearly one hundred and fifty years later, the controversy continues to build and has seemingly reached a plateau – with a new version of the book being released that replaces the “N-word” with “slave.” Many scholars consider this new version to be a clear form of censorship, while others appreciate its thoughtfulness and sensitivity. Of course, those *against* this revamped version wonder what’s next to be censored, while those *in favor of* the new edition think that it will make the novel more accessible.

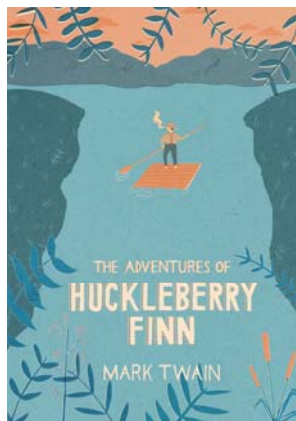
Assignment (to be completed, naturally, *after* reading the novel)

Read the following sources carefully. Then, in an essay that synthesizes* AT LEAST THREE of the attached sources and AT LEAST TWO sources you procure on your own, defend or challenge the notion that this new, edited version of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is appropriate and/or warranted.

In other words, choose a side (“Yes, this form of censorship is OK for this book,” or “No, this form of censorship is not OK for the book”), create a strong thesis, and defend your claim using a combination of the sources provided, the sources you found, your own ideas and beliefs, and the novel itself.

The final paper should be 6 – 8 pages in length, implement correct MLA format, and contain AT LEAST SIX sources (the novel, three of the sources provided, and two sources that you find on your own). DO NOT FORGET IN-TEXT CITATIONS AND A WORKS CITED PAGE. Essays that do not have these will be considered plagiarized and will receive a score of “0.”

NOTE: In your essay, you may discuss what impact a change such as this could have in other realms (freedom of speech issues, gender-neutral pronouns, other pieces of literature, etc.), but stick to the prompt and keep the focus of your essay on Twain’s novel.



*When you synthesize sources, you refer to them to develop your position and cite them accurately. Your argument should be central; the sources should support your argument. Avoid merely summarizing the sources.

Source A

Murphy, Kim. "Teacher thinks Obama is proof that 'Huckleberry Finn' needs to leave the classroom" *L.A. Times*, 19 Jan. 2009.

An African American is about to be inaugurated as president. That leaves John Foley to wonder whether students should still read books that depict black men as ignorant, inarticulate and uneducated.

RIDGEFIELD, WASH. — John Foley figures he has pretty much maxed out on explaining to African American mothers why it's OK to call a black man the N-word -- as long as it's in a novel that is considered a classic.

For years, English teachers have been explaining away the obvious racism in Mark Twain's "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn." And for years, the book that perhaps best explains Americans' genetic predilection for hitting the road, only to later find themselves, has stayed near the top of many high school reading lists.

However, with an African American about to be inaugurated as president, Foley wonders whether 'Huck Finn' ought to be sent back down the river. Why not replace it with a more modern, less discomfiting novel documenting the epic journey of discovery?

"The time has arrived to update the literature we use in high school classrooms," Foley wrote in a guest column this month for the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. "Barack Obama is president-elect of the United States, and novels that use the 'N-word' repeatedly need to go."

Foley, 48, teaches at a largely white suburban high school near Portland, Ore. Year after year, he said, he patiently explains to his students that Jim, a black man, is actually the hero of the novel, and that Huck comes to see the error of his ways and commits to helping Jim escape slavery. But many of them find the book dull and plodding, and they sometimes never get past the demeaning word Huck uses to refer to his friend.

"This is particularly true, of course, of African American students," Foley wrote. "With few exceptions, all the black students in my classes over the years have appeared very uncomfortable when I've discussed these matters at the beginning of the unit. And I never want to rationalize 'Huck Finn' to an angry African American mom again as long as I breathe."

He also thinks "To Kill a Mockingbird," Harper Lee's classic about racial inequity in the Deep South, and John Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men" should be removed from the curriculum for similar reasons.

Foley had wanted to talk to the staff at Ridgefield High School about his proposal, but after his op-ed was published, it was as though a stink bomb had landed in a crowded room.

"Obama would be horrified if he knew this censorship was done in his name," wrote Trudy J. Sundberg, a retired teacher of American literature from Oak Harbor, Wash. Her response to Foley's column was just one in a barrage of letters and e-mails that the newspaper received.

Source B

Kakutani, Michiko. "Light Out, Huck, They Still Want to Sivilize You." *N.Y. Times* 6 Jan. 2011.

"All modern American literature," Ernest Hemingway once wrote, "comes from one book by Mark Twain called 'Huckleberry Finn.' "

Being an iconic classic, however, hasn't protected "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" from being banned, bowdlerized and bleeped. It hasn't protected the novel from being cleaned up, updated and "improved."

A new effort to sanitize "Huckleberry Finn" comes from Alan Gribben, a professor of English at Auburn University, at Montgomery, Ala., who has produced a new edition of Twain's novel that replaces the word "nigger" with "slave." Nigger, which appears in the book more than 200 times, was a common racial epithet in the antebellum South, used by Twain as part of his characters' vernacular speech and as a reflection of mid-19th-century social attitudes along the Mississippi River.

Mr. Gribben has said he worried that the N-word had resulted in the novel falling off reading lists, and that he thought his edition would be welcomed by schoolteachers and university instructors who wanted to spare "the reader from a racial slur that never seems to lose its vitriol." Never mind that today nigger is used by many rappers, who have reclaimed the word from its ugly past. Never mind that attaching the epithet slave to the character Jim — who has run away in a bid for freedom — effectively labels him as property, as the very thing he is trying to escape.

Controversies over "Huckleberry Finn" occur with predictable regularity. In 2009, just before Barack Obama's inauguration, a high school teacher named John Foley wrote a guest column in *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer* in which he asserted that "Huckleberry Finn," "To Kill a Mockingbird" and "Of Mice and Men," don't belong on the curriculum anymore. "The time has arrived to update the literature we use in high school classrooms," he wrote. "Barack Obama is president-elect of the United States, and novels that use the 'N-word' repeatedly need to go."

Source C

Rawls, Phillip. "Huck Finn: Controversy Over Removing the 'N word' from Mark Twain Novel." *The Christian Science Monitor* 5 Jan. 2011.

Huck Finn ('Adventures of Huckleberry Finn') is the fourth most banned book in the US. A controversial new edition would replace 219 references to the 'N-word' with 'slave.' Historical accuracy vs. censorship?

Mark Twain wrote that "the difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter." A new edition of "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" and "Tom Sawyer" will try to find out if that holds true by replacing the N-word with "slave" in an effort not to offend readers.

Twain scholar Alan Gribben, who is working with NewSouth Books in Alabama to publish a combined volume of the books, said the N-word appears 219 times in "Huck Finn" and four times in "Tom Sawyer." He said the word puts the books in danger of joining the list of literary classics that Twain once humorously defined as those "which people praise and don't read." "It's such a shame that one word should be a barrier between a marvelous reading experience and a lot of readers," Gribben said.

Yet Twain was particular about his words. His letter in 1888 about the right word and the almost right one was "the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning."

The book isn't scheduled to be published until February, at a mere 7,500 copies, but Gribben has already received a flood of hateful e-mail accusing him of desecrating the novels. He said the e-mails prove the word makes people uncomfortable.

"Not one of them mentions the word. They dance around it," he said.

Another Twain scholar, professor Stephen Railton at the University of Virginia, said Gribben was well respected, but called the new version "a terrible idea."

The language depicts America's past, Railton said, and the revised book was not being true to the period in which Twain was writing. Railton has an unaltered version of "Huck Finn" coming out later this year that includes context for schools to explore racism and slavery in the book.

"If we can't do that in the classroom, we can't do that anywhere," he said.

He said Gribben was not the first to alter "Huck Finn." John Wallace, a teacher at the Mark Twain Intermediate School in northern Virginia, published a version of "Huck Finn" about 20 years ago that used "slave" rather than the N-word.

"His book had no traction," Railton said.

Gribben, a 69-year-old English professor at Auburn University Montgomery, said he would have opposed the change for much of his career, but he began using "slave" during public readings and found audiences more accepting.

He decided to pursue the revised edition after middle school and high school teachers lamented they could no longer assign the books.

Some parents and students have called for the removal of "Huck Finn" from reading lists for more than a half century. In 1957, the New York City Board of Education removed the book from the approved textbook lists of elementary and junior high schools, but it could be taught in high school and bought for school libraries.

In 1998, parents in Tempe, Ariz., sued the local high school over the book's inclusion on a required reading list. The case went as far as a federal appeals court; the parents lost.

Published in the U.S. in 1885, "Huck Finn" is the fourth most banned book in schools, according to "Banned in the U.S.A." by Herbert N. Foersta, a retired college librarian who has written several books on First Amendment issues.

Gribben conceded the edited text loses some of the caustic sting but said: "I want to provide an option for teachers and other people not comfortable with 219 instances of that word."

In addition to replacing the N-word, Gribben changes the villain in "Tom Sawyer" from "Injun Joe" to "Indian Joe" and "half-breed" becomes "half-blood."

Gribben knows he won't change the minds of his critics, but he's eager to see how the book will be received by schools rather than university scholars.

"We'll just let the readers decide," he said.

Source D

Conan, Neal. Interview with Alan Gribben. *Talk of the Nation*. Natl. Public Radio. WGCU, Ft.

Myers, 5 Jan. 2011. Radio.

Next month, Mark Twain's classic novel "Huckleberry Finn" gets an update. The story will stay the same, but the N-word will be scrubbed from its pages 219 times. Alabama-based publisher NewSouth Books will replace Twain's noun with the word slave. As you might expect, "Tom Sawyer" also gets a facelift. Both novels will be in one volume.

Many scholars and teachers view Twain's language as an integral part of the story, all of it, including words we know sometimes people find offensive. That's why this story is about, in some respects. We warn you that we will use those words over the next few minutes. Callers may use them as well. So, with that warning, we should also add that, for decades, teachers and librarians have faced demands to take novels out of the syllabus and off the shelves.

So if you're a librarian or an English teacher, is this still Mark Twain? 800-989-8255. Email us: talk@npr.org. You can join the conversation at our website. That's at npr.org. Click on TALK OF THE NATION.

Alan Gribben teaches English at Auburn University, wrote the introduction to the new edition of "Huckleberry Finn" and "Tom Sawyer," and joins us now by phone from his office in Montgomery. Nice to have you with us today.

Professor ALAN GRIBBEN (Professor of English, Auburn University): Good to be here.

CONAN: And why do we need an edited version of a classic like "Huckleberry Finn" or "Tom Sawyer"?

Prof. GRIBBEN: Well, I don't think everyone needs it. But my 40 years of teaching the novels and my recent lecture tour, which took me to many libraries and communities last year, convinced me that, increasingly, public school teachers are finding it more and more uncomfortable to get these books into the classroom. And, in fact, if you consult the records of the American Library Association, you'll see that "Huckleberry Finn" is the fourth most-challenged book among the so-called classics of all time and that "Tom Sawyer" falls behind. I think it's 14th.

This has resulted in a situation where many school districts and many administrators and a growing number of teachers simply feel that they'll have to use other readings. That is a great shame, because these two are probably the most vibrant novels of the 19th century.

And so, my book speaks to that particular need. It is not intended for the expert. It is not intended for the advanced reader, not intended for the senior scholar. In fact, I emphatically point people in the direction of authoritative text. And indeed, I, myself, edited an edition of "Tom Sawyer" two years ago that used the original first edition. But it seems to me that this small change enables us to set aside a word that has inflamed all discussions of the book now for 30 or 40 years. And we then can look at the novels and see the biting satire and the - and a very realistic

treatment of slave conditions and so forth.

CONAN: You said they were among the most vibrant books of the 19th century. I'm sure a lot of teachers and readers would say vibrant in part because of their vibrant language.

Prof. GRIBBEN: Absolutely. And that's why I only tampered with the one word. But that word has proved to be quite a hurdle for many younger readers, their parents and their teachers.

Now some people have objected by saying that this might deprive teachers and educators of a wonderful opportunity to get into discussions of race relations. But I have to say, I find it - I could think of a dozen more constructive entries into such discussions than to write that word on a - on the wall and begin to discuss it with students. In fact, this novel, even with this small change, is hardly a colorblind novel.

On every page there are distinctions of class and race. So it occurred to me, after so many years of teaching and lecturing, there might be -it might be helpful to offer teachers this optional alternative.

CONAN: That's for "Huckleberry Finn." There's a character in "Tom Sawyer," Injun Joe. Is his name changed?

Prof. GRIBBEN: Well, there are nine references to the N-word in "Tom Sawyer," and those were altered to slave. And the debasement of the native peoples, I think, has probably proceeded far enough.

I also retired the archaic Injun term and - however, I left the racial denominator Indian because it helps explain why the villain in the story feels so alienated from the village as the frontier has receded away from the village and he's stranded there and treated, he feels, disrespectfully.

Source E

Matthews, David. "Dumbing and Numbing Down Jim." *NY Times* 6 Jan. 2011.

David Matthews is the author of "Ace of Spades," a memoir, and "Kicking Ass and Saving Souls: a True Story of a Life Over the Line," a forthcoming biography.

The word is the word. In many ways, it's America. It's confounding, infuriating, degrading, and, sometimes, necessary. Even lyrical (in the right context, one need only listen to early Richard Pryor, or Biggie Smalls, or Dolemite).

Removing that single word from the text relieves the reader of doing any heavy lifting.

The word "nigger" should sting. It's part of the bloodied soil of America, yet another legacy of slavery still with us a hundred-plus years after the fact.

Huck Finn is an historical document. What a tragedy if a modern reader, deprived of the context the word provides, were to conclude that 'Slave Jim' was the equal of 'Nigger Jim.' A slave, without the proper historical guideposts, could conjure the lowly born, the unlucky member of the wrong caste, or maybe victim of some feudal system. There is no equivalency between slave and "nigger," which is an American invention. It's a word that denies humanity, and along with it justice and mercy.

Dumbing and numbing down 'Nigger Jim' to 'Slave Jim' etiolates the crushing, dehumanizing institutional forces against the character, and minimizes Huck's enlightenment. The reason Huck is such an enduring character is that he represents the best and worst of his time. He was able to skewer the inherent absurdity of slavery, while ostensibly being a member of the ruling society.

Removing that single word from the text, while sparing those too sensitive to get past it, relieves the reader of doing any heavy lifting. Great books -- or any work of art -- require that the reader meet the author half-way. Huck Finn is a serious literary work. It is not a children's adventure book, nor a Rockwellian portrait. As intended, it is a scathing indictment against slavery, hypocrisy, gender roles (sure, why not), and class.

It is the successor to the *Odyssey*, and the precursor to "*Catcher in the Rye*." I understood little of Huck Finn when I was in high school, a little more in college, and still more is revealed to me, when I pull it from the shelf every few years. I'll run out of capacity before Huck Finn runs out of lessons.

These books -- and others like them -- should not be retrofitted to make modern readers comfortable. Modern readers are already too comfortable. Lazy, even. If the word "nigger" keeps one from reading Huck Finn, then one lacks the critical skills to appreciate all the book has to offer.

Source F

Duban, James. "We Want Readers." NY Times. 6 Jan. 2011.

James Duban is a professor of English at the University of North Texas. He is the author of books about Herman Melville, Henry James, and college achievement. His book on Melville explores, among other concerns, 19th century attitudes about race.

My wife and I used to shop at discount stores and used-book shops for kids' versions of classic novels to read to our children. Good stuff. Years later, they are avid readers.

In today's wasteland of 'gaming' and other electronic distractions, I applaud any effort to perpetuate the reading and enjoyment of great fiction.

School kids should be able, at their teacher's discretion, to read modified editions of classic works. We are, after all, talking about young people, and about many educators who would feel more comfortable teaching Mark Twain's adventure stories with the NewSouth text.

There will be time enough in high school or college to study the original books and learn how those explore, and ultimately subvert, bigotry. In today's wasteland of "gaming" and other electronic distractions, I applaud any effort to perpetuate the reading and enjoyment of great fiction.

Source G

Online Reader Comments on "Upcoming NewSouth 'Huck Finn' Eliminates the 'N' Word".

Publishers Weekly, 6 Jan. 2011.

This is censorship. The problem with censorship is that it has no end...why not remove references to incest from "The Color Purple" or take out the murder from "Lord of the Flies"? Just because an offensive word is removed from a work of fiction, it doesn't mask the truth or the history behind its use. I find it sad that teachers and parents feel the need to shelter children from a dark and ugly truth in our contry's history. If teachers embrace this edition, what book will be next? I thought the purpose of great literature was its resonance--the aftershocks following the initial quake in which one is left to ponder one's own import and purpose. I think those in support of this abridgement do not place enough faith in our youth's aibility to discern for themselves what Twain intended in the writing of Huck Finn.

--Shannon Agnew (smarie22)

I read this book when I was 8 or 10 years old. I understood then that it was an important book and important for me to understand the concepts and language and reality of life during that time and the effects on the world I was living in. Please, stop dumbing down our educational experiences, we're getting dumber by the minute as it is. And to say that teachers can't teach it in its original form is just ridiculous. You have no business being a teacher if you can't tackle "Huckleberry Finn" and "Tom Sawyer" and other great works of American literature.

--Penny Lane (crooowww)

The N-Word is, and will be, a toxic word in any language. When I read Twain in school, it was nearly painful and enraging to read it. Every chapter filled me with rage where the word popped up. I think, though, that this was Twain's intention. Jim was the most human character in Huck Finn, in my opinion, and the irony that he was referred in one of the most degenerate manners emphasised that point. Also, the language of the time was very offensive compared to now, and this captures how dark a history we had. Changing the language to make it "more accessible" is more sugar-coating of our past than recognising how far we've come since then. This sugar-coating culture is too overprotective of our youth, and probably part of the reason they are so apathetic now.

--Christopher Thompson (BoxyBrown)

Source H

Whelan, Debra Lau. "Student Vaughn Hillyard Awarded for Defending Free Speech." *School*

Library Journal's Extra Helping 13 Jan. 2011.

It took former Arizona high school students Vaughn Hillyard and Sophia Curran 10 months to finally get a controversial story published in their Thunderbird High School student paper. But it was worth the wait. The two are winners of the Arizona Freedom of Information Sunshine Award for battling censorship when their principal and the Glendale Union High School District refused to publish a front-page story that criticized a decision by school officials. That issue of *The Challenge* went to press with a blank, eight-and-a-half inch square of white space. We spoke to Hillyard about the importance of the First Amendment and why he did it all.

Winning this award was probably the last thing on your mind when you were in a legal battle with your principal and district for the right to publish a story. What gave you the courage to pursue it when you could have easily walked away?

For Sophia and me, we never imagined anything like this taking place because we thought the school district would have the integrity to resolve the issue in a reasonable manner, but when they kept throwing up roadblocks through their intentionally ineffective appeal system. There was no doubt in our mind that we would push forward. We felt we were fighting more than censorship of the school newspaper. We believed we were fighting on behalf of the students, teachers, the school, and the community. We couldn't fathom the possibility of letting Principal Matt Belden and Superintendent Jennifer Johnson get away with silencing the voices of others.

Was this your first encounter with censorship?

Yes. It was hard to comprehend why Belden and Johnson would choose to censor the article. We pressed hard to give them the opportunity to comment in the story and explain their takes on the testing system, but instead of encouraging the journalistic efforts of the newspaper staff and simply answering its questions, they chose to censor the article. I think they thought the story would go away and censoring was the easiest route of avoiding questions, but ultimately they found themselves in a much bigger issue. [*The Arizona Republic*](#) ran the story for the entire community to read.

It must have been very upsetting.

Being censored left me scratching my head more than anything. Their reasons didn't add up. It made me question their motives. There is a reason someone tries to censor material, and it's important to try to understand and uncover those reasons.

Sounds like a great lesson on the First Amendment.

Before the incident, I honestly knew only the basics of our First Amendment rights. We learn about them in government classes, but I don't think you realize its importance until it directly affects your life. In our situation, it was freedom of the press, and I think it's important to magnify these sort of situations because it is important for the wider community to realize the role the Constitution plays in our everyday life and why the First Amendment includes freedom of the press.