**ELA 20 AP The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn**

Mark Twain AKA Samuel Langhorne Clemens was born on November 30th 1835.

**Historical Context: The Slave Narrative**

This novel is grounded firmly at the center of American geography and consciousness, making it necessary for readers to understand something of the pre-Civil War slavery controversy, free and slave states, and the Mississippi River’s division of East from West and North from South, a primary conduit for people and goods. Please answer the following questions using the miraculous thing called the World Wide Web.

1. What is the effect enslavement on Africans and their descendants?
2. How did slaves sustain a sense of selfhood and cultural identity in slave master relationships?
3. How did slavery affect white people, even non-slave-owning?
4. How have slave laws changed over time, especially just before the Civil War?
5. What are the aspects of slavery emphasized by abolitionists and freed slaves in their narratives?
6. How was a free or slave state was determined?

**General Questions: (10)**

1. Why does Mark Twain have two names?
2. Where did the idea for his books come from/what do they parallel?
3. In life, what does Huck really want?
4. I am telling you that the Mississippi River is a major and dynamic character in this story. Why?

**Main themes of HF may be:**

Coming of Age: Huck’s Search for Identity

Social Responsibility: Conformity and Civilization

Friendship and Betrayal

Freedom and Enslavement

In Catcher in the Rye we talked about universal themes. Are these themes considered universal? Part one of HF deals with the characters, and part two is mostly “real world. “Pick two themes and explain how these themes are in the present with a minimum of 3 examples.

**Anticipating Issues of Censorship:**

Since its publication, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn has been under fire as objectionable, not always for the same reasons. Some objections have stemmed from the overt violence and cruelty present in the text; some have originated in the companionship of a black slave and a white teenager; some have been offended that Southerners have been depicted as ignorant or backwater; but most frequently in the modern period, objections to racist words found in the text have led schools to suppress reading of the novel.

Although Twain is writing in the 19th century, the use of the “n-word” was not common. The “n-word” was used when an individual wanted to exert power over, degrade, offend, and control another person or slave. Speculate as to why Twain would use this highly offensive word in his text. What would he be trying to convey about a character, or person, who used this inflammatory and offensive word choice? Think about contemporary films in which taboo words are used in great profusion. What is the purpose of using these words?

**Understanding Twain’s Use of Dialect**

Twain develops both the character of Huck Finn and other characters in the novel by using both dialect (local, regional language) and point of view. This use of regional dialect and local color contributes to the novel’s being a Realistic work, rather than a Romantic one, representing a shift in 19th century fiction and a remarkable device in character development. Since the novel is told solely by Huck Finn, Twain reproduces not only Huck’s unlettered, unsophisticated, and regional speech patterns, but he also, through Huck, varies the speech of others whom Huck recalls for the reader, each with his or her own contributing factors affecting speech: intellect and educational level, sophistication and socio-economic level, race, and gender. These factors are easily analyzed by readers who examine grammar, vocabulary, speech patterns, but all of the speakers of the novel are siphoned through the voice and point of view of Huck Finn, who narrates the novel. Huck’s rendition of the speech patterns of other characters not only develops them as characters, but also sets his own speech apart from them and distinguishes him as a reliable narrator and imitator of others.

Answer the questions:

How does Huck’s dialect differ from Standard English?

What does Huck’s speech suggest about his intelligence and education?

Do these patterns reveal him to be a reliable narrator for the novel?

What would be the effect on the reader if all the characters in the novel spoke Standard English?

In telling the story, Huck proves himself a talented actor who mimics others’ speech patterns. Examine the speech of the characters below, noting the differences in this character’s speech and social station and Huck’s own dialect and social standing.

Where did these dialects come from? Do people judge one another based on language habits? Do you have a dialect? Do you change your speech patterns at times? When is it important for you to use Standard English and when is it appropriate for you to use dialect? Is one dialect better than another? Why or why not? (Questions to think about/go over as a class but NOT to answer)

**\*To be done in class, as a general discussion.**