

"When Tom sees Injun Joe's hand in the cave it is really scary. But I'm glad Tom and Becky got out and Tom got rich." Chris, 10



TOM SAWYER

MARK TWAIN

Tom Sawyer is a respectable boy in a little Mississippi River town. Huck Finn is a freedom-loving, neglected outcast. What better playmate could Tom want?

One night, innocent games of pirates and Robin Hood turn serious when the boys witness a murder in the graveyard. The murderer will kill them if they tell the truth. What should they do?

The boys decide to search for the murderer's treasure. What risks will they take? Who else will they endanger? Will they have the courage and quick thinking to escape from dark caverns, cross the mighty Mississippi, and outwit the criminals? Will they find what they are looking for?



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Mark Twain



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THE CHARACTERS

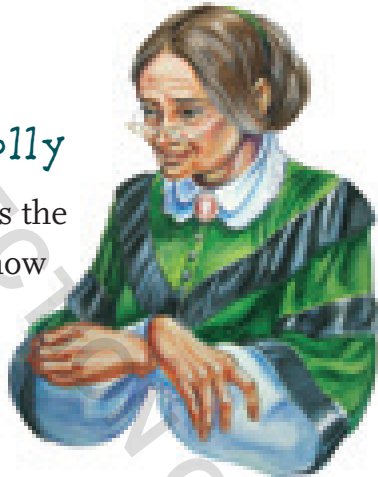


Tom Sawyer

Tom, an orphan, has had to learn to be independent. Will he learn more from doing what he is told, or from taking risks?

Aunt Polly

Well-meaning Aunt Polly wants the best for her young charges, but how can she feel proud of young Tom when he keeps lying to her?



Sid Sawyer

Sid is Tom's younger half-brother. If he can get Tom into trouble when he deserves it, will that keep him from going to heaven too soon?

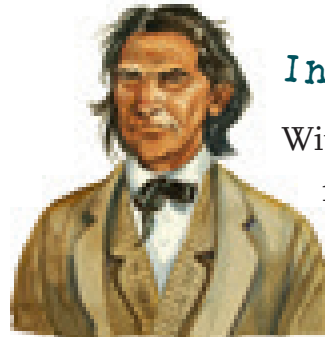


Huckleberry Finn

Huck is homeless and unschooled. He has both freedom and friendship, but is that enough?

Becky Thatcher

Becky is new in town, and is intrigued by Tom. She knows he is a rascal and a hero, but can he be a proper sweetheart?

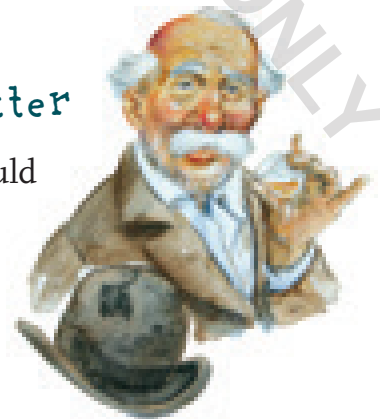


Injun Joe

Without tribe or loyalty, Injun Joe thirsts for revenge. People are afraid of him, but is that the same as respect?

Muff Potter

Muff wouldn't hurt a flea, but could drink turn him into a murderer? If only he could remember!





TOM SAWYER

‘Tom!’

No answer.

‘Tom! What’s wrong with that boy? You –
Tom!’ Aunt Polly caught Tom Sawyer escaping.

‘Hand me that switch,’ she ordered.

‘My, look behind you!’ Tom cried out. Then he fled, disappearing over the fence.

‘He’s played me tricks before,’ Aunt Polly complained, ‘but he’s my dead sister’s boy, poor thing. He knows if he can make me laugh, I can’t hit him. Well, I’ll make him work tomorrow.’

At supper, Aunt Polly checked to see if Tom had cut class to go swimming. She’d sewn his loose button on that morning, and stitched his collar closed. Pulling off his shirt to swim would have broken the thread. But his collar remained stitched.

‘Warm today, warn’t it, Tom?’ she said.

‘Yes’m.’ A scare shot through Tom. ‘Ben pumped on our heads – mine’s damp yet. See?’

Aunt Polly took this as gospel truth until Sid, Tom's younger half-brother, observed, 'I thought you used white thread. Now, it's black.'

Tom's ploy was exposed. Sid would catch it later. Now, Tom was out the door.



Saturday he surveyed the fence, and all gladness left him: thirty yards long and mighty high. Life seemed hollow. Sighing, he passed his brush along the first plank, compared the streak with the un-whitewashed continent, and sat down, discouraged. He thought of fun he'd planned. Soon his schoolmates would come and make fun of him working.

Just then inspiration struck. He took up his brush. Ben hove into sight, eating an apple and making whooping and ding-dong sounds to impersonate a steamboat. Tom whitewashed, surveyed the effect with an artist's eye. Ben stared. 'Got to work, Tom?'

No answer. Tom went on working until he

wheeled suddenly. 'Why, it's you, Ben! I warn't noticing.'

'I'm going a-swimming. 'Course, you'd druther work – wouldn't you?'

Tom contemplated. 'What do you call work?'

'Ain't that work?'

Tom resumed whitewashing, and answered carelessly, 'Well, maybe it is, maybe it ain't. Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?'

Ben stopped nibbling. Tom swept his brush back and forth – stepped back – added a touch. Ben said, 'Tom, let me whitewash a little.'

Tom considered. 'No, it wouldn't do, Ben. Aunt's awful particular.'

'Lemme just try. Only just a little – I'd let you, Tom.'

'Ben, honest; if anything was to happen ...'

'I'll give you my apple.'

Tom gave up the brush, reluctance in his face but alacrity in his heart. While Ben worked, other boys happened along; they came to jeer, but remained to whitewash. Ben wore out;

a great steam paddle-wheeler was in water two fathoms deep, just enough to be safe.

Twain's most famous creations, *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*, have become two of the world's great literary archetypes of boyhood. The books are often required reading in schools, in spite of claims that they are subversive and encourage bad behaviour.

Tom Sawyer, published in 1876, is set along the Mississippi River sometime in the 1850s, after the Mexican War and before the Civil War, and thus before President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation freed America's slaves. Missouri was a Southern, slave-holding state, and it bordered the Western frontier, where native tribal life was being over-run by white settlers.

The Plains tribes of American Indians traditionally lived by following the bison herds they hunted, and by raiding other tribes for horses and valuable captives. The United States government compelled native people to sign treaties surrendering territory and rights in exchange for reservation protection and provisions.

The 1849 California Gold Rush brought thousands

more prospectors, farmers, cattle ranchers and soldiers, who spread disease among the native groups and reduced the bison herds disastrously.

Missouri was the starting point for the Santa Fe Trail to Texas, and during Sam Clemens' childhood brutal raids along the trail butchered both native and white communities within only a few days' ride of his home in Hannibal. Later, in the mining towns of Nevada, Clemens heard how the Oglala Sioux attacked travellers. In describing Injun Joe, the 'half-breed' who plans to escape to Texas, Mark Twain might have been influenced by stories about Apache warrior chief Mangas Coloradas, who was bullwhipped by miners, and Comanche Quanah Parker, whose mother was a white woman.

For all his desire to rise above bigotry, Mark Twain admitted he never could overcome his lifelong horror born of such events. In 1876 he began writing *Huck Finn* and *Tom Sawyer Among the Indians*, in which the boys witness the aftermath of a bloody Oglala raid. He never finished the book.

Well into the twentieth century, the typical frontier town had only a one-room schoolhouse equipped with slate chalkboards, wooden desks and