

Leisure reading responses for *Death Be Not Proud* and/or *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

1. Read the poem "Holy sonnets: Death, be not proud" by John Donne. Why do you think Gunther alluded to this poem in his title?
Responding to the following question (to yourself, mentally) will help you see the variety of connections between the memoir's title and the poem's title.

What does this poem mean to you? Who is addressed? What does the speaker mean by telling death "thou art not" . . . mighty and dreadful? Do you agree? Why don't "those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow" really die? What does the speaker mean: "not yet cast thou kill me"? "From Rest and Sleep, which but they picture, be Much pleasure."? "And soonest our best men with thee do go."? "Thou'rt slave to fate, chance, kings . . ."? "And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell"? "And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well and better than thy stroke."? "Why swell'st thou then"? "One short sleep past, we wake eternally"? "And Death shall be no more: Death, thou shalt die!"?

2. Read the background and interpretation information about *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. A various points in the novel, Tom stole, lied, played hooky, smoked, picked fights, sneaked out of his room at night, ran away from home for several days, and kicked and cuffed his half brother. In addition, he disliked bathing, wearing shoes, dressing up, and going to church. He made a fool of his aunt, the Sunday school superintendent, and the entire village. He sometimes seemed indifferent to the feelings of others. He loathed the Model Boy and he admired the maverick Huck Finn. With these unsavory aspects of Tom's character clearly in mind, argue if the novel is or is not suitable for inclusion in a list of recommended novels.



Holy Sonnets: Death, be not proud

BY JOHN DONNE

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.



THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER

BIOGRAM The Person

On November 30, 1835, as Halley's Comet flashed across the sky, Samuel Langhorne Clemens was born in a cramped, two-room cottage in Florida, Missouri. His parents, John and Jane Clemens, had migrated to Missouri from Tennessee. Clemens' father, luckless John Clemens, spent his brief life making fresh starts. Unfortunately, he was never destined to prosper. Even the golden hopes that had brought the family to Florida tarnished in 1839. So the family moved to Hannibal, a promising settlement on the Mississippi.

Hannibal was a splendid place to grow up. It was surrounded by wooded hills that hid mysterious caves. There was also the river, a romantic highway to adventure that lured boys to build rafts and plan to float to the Gulf of Mexico. The memory of the fourteen years Clemens lived in the drowsy little town stayed with him for the rest of his life.

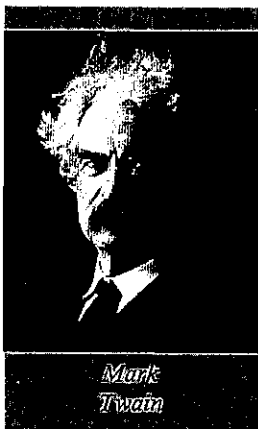
With the death of his father in 1847, Clemens was forced to quit school. He took on a series of odd jobs to help support the family. In 1848, he was apprenticed to the owner of the *Hannibal Gazette*, which sparked his lifelong fascination with words.

Eventually, Clemens left Hannibal and traveled about as a tramp printer. His restless nature never permitted him to stay in one place for long. In 1857, he boarded a steamship for New Orleans. This trip down the Mississippi reawakened his boyhood determination to be a river pilot. He learned the trade from Horace Bixby and served as a pilot until river commerce came to a halt at the outbreak of the Civil War.

The end of his riverboating career didn't stop Clemens' wandering. On July 25, 1861, Clemens caught the stagecoach at St. Joseph, Missouri, for Nevada. He later recorded his Nevada experiences in *Roughing It*. From Nevada, he moved on to California where he tried writing and mining.

While in California, Clemens wrote "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," an old backwoods tale that he borrowed from Angel's Camp. The story was published in *The Saturday Express* in 1865, and the already popular Western journalist began to receive Eastern recognition as a writer. Clemens continued to gain popularity as his lively travel stories were syndicated in papers around the nation.

Sometime during his early writing career, Clemens began signing his articles and stories with his pseudonym Mark Twain, a river term meaning "two fathoms." (When a leadsman called "mark twain," a riverboat pilot knew his boat was in two fathoms of water and safe.)



On December 15, 1866, as a correspondent for the *Alta California*, Twain sailed for Europe and the Middle East. This trip provided him with the material for *Innocents Abroad*, a satire on American travelers. The book became an immediate success.

In 1871, Twain married Olivia Langdon. They built a spectacular home on Nook Farm, near Hartford. Twain lived his happiest and most productive years here.

Because of a steady stream of visitors and a growing family, Nook Farm was too busy for the working author. Most of Twain's best work was done at Quarry Farm in a big house overlooking Elmira, New York, and the Chemung River. It was here, in a comfortable study shaped like a pilot house, that Twain wrote his world-famous stories of two river rascals, Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn.

Despite his productive writing schedule, financial troubles hounded Twain. By the time he was 60, heavy living expenses and poor business investments had put Twain \$100,000 in debt. However, he managed to pay off all his creditors with the profits from a world lecture tour.

Family tragedy also burdened Twain. His daughter Jean died in a bathtub during an epileptic seizure. Another daughter, Suzy, died of spinal meningitis shortly after Jean's death. Olivia's death in 1904, after a two-year battle with asthma, left Twain a lonely survivor.

Twain moved to Stormfield, a rented villa near Redding, Connecticut, where his strength rapidly declined. While in Bermuda, he suffered a heart attack but summoned enough strength to return to Redding. He died quietly on April 21, 1910.

Twain's best-known works are *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885). Other novels include *The Prince and the Pauper* (1882), *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), and *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894). His nonfiction works include *The Innocents Abroad* (1869), *Roughing It* (1872), and *Life on the Mississippi* (1883).

The Philosopher

Humorist, realist, cynic, satirist, commentator are all appropriate labels for Mark Twain, but none do justice to his individuality. Twain was able to capture the world in all its glory and folly. His characters were often motivated by spite, self-importance, and greed. Yet wonderful characters such as Huck and Jim in *Huckleberry Finn* show he was attuned to the caring, decent side of human nature.

Twain's attitude toward society was a wary one. He detested the hypocrisy of the world and the insistence on the importance of conventional manners while inner corruption was ignored. For Twain, the dictates of conscience took precedence over the dictates of society, as reflected in the way Tom ignores church and community expectations.

Twain's view of society's imperfection led him to glorify the individual who escapes contamination by society. He saw the peak of human nobility most commonly occurring during the brief period of youth. The ideal representative of this philosophy is Huck Finn.

The Technician

Twain was, first and foremost, a storyteller and a spinner of yarns who elevated tall tales and folklore into greatness. His novels tend to be episodic, but they are shaped by superb craftsmanship.

Twain's wit and enthusiasm also helped transform his material into vital experience. His childhood memories, Mississippi experiences, and traveling days all gave him a fund of valuable material for his stories. Filtering those experiences through his lively imagination, he was able to fascinate and amuse a huge audience.

Twain aspired to become an "intellectual" but found that his work as a humorist brought him greater acclaim. His early frustration of not being taken seriously led to his development of a savage comic style. Ultimately, he emerged as one of America's greatest satirists.

BOOK CHAT

In the 1870s, when Twain was first gaining recognition, American literary style was shifting from romanticism to realism. The realistic approach emphasized life as it really was, rejecting the sentimental, emotional style of the romantic period.

Realists attempted to create believable characters with complete personalities. They wrote about people from many walks of life and captured the slang and dialect these people used.

Realism also examined current social problems. While romanticism was an escape from

the miseries of industrialization and urbanization, realism squarely faced these developments.

Although a new literary style does not emerge overnight, Twain has been called the first great American realist. There is always a period of transition from the old to the new. Twain's writings, especially *Tom Sawyer*, display some aspects of this transition. To his basic realistic style, Twain added an element of romantic nostalgia. He also used the exaggerated humor of the American frontier. Satire, sometimes gentle, sometimes harsh, was another one of his tools.

Tom Sawyer may be considered at several different levels. First, it is a humorous and often exciting children's story. Like many children's stories, its hero and main characters are children and their adventures are those with which children can easily identify.

At a second level, *Tom Sawyer* is a nostalgic look at childhood in the preindustrial, pre-Civil War days of a sleepy town on the Mississippi River. In this respect, the novel is romantic.

At a third level—a level that appeals to the social historian—the novel is a realistic record of the folklore, superstitions, myths, beliefs, customs, and manners of nineteenth-century village America.

At a fourth level, the novel is a gentle satire on the pride, pretense, and petty vanities of the adult world, as well as a satire on the customs and institutions of American society. Clearly this satire is directed toward adult readers.

Finally, the novel offers insight into the process of growing up. Indeed, the basic theme of the novel may be Tom's development toward maturity. At the beginning of the novel, Tom seems irresponsible, unconcerned about the feelings of others, and unwilling to accept any of society's constraints. By the end, he has matured in all these areas. As Twain wrote at the conclusion of the novel, the story of a boy must now end or it would become the story of a man.

SYNOPSIS

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer relates the events of five or six months in the life of an adolescent boy. Tom, who is an orphan, lives in St. Petersburg, Missouri, on the banks of the Mississippi River. He lives with his Aunt Polly, his half brother Sid, and his cousin Mary.

Although he has a number of incredible adventures in a short span of time, Tom is, for the most part, a typical adolescent. He dislikes going to school, bathing, dressing up, and going to Sunday school and church. He plays hooky, gets in fights, experiments with smoking, plays pranks, tells fibs, and even runs away from home for several days. His aunt, who loves him dearly, does her best to provide proper upbringing and discipline for Tom, but he is resourceful in avoiding punishment for his misdeeds.

Tom's best friend among the respectable boys in the village is Joe Harper, who is not as adventurous, imaginative, or romantic as Tom. Joe is a follower; Tom is a natural leader.

The boy Tom most envies is the homeless Huckleberry Finn. Huck's drunken, good-for-nothing father has abandoned his son and disappeared from the village. Huck sleeps in doorsteps, barrels, and barns, and scrapes together enough food to survive. He represents Tom's ideal of complete freedom. Huck doesn't go to school or church and doesn't bathe or dress up. He is free to smoke, swear, and come and go as he pleases. Because of the precarious nature of his existence, Huck is more practical than Tom. Therefore, he can not understand some of Tom's flights of fancy or his concern with ritual, but he usually goes along with Tom's plans.

The novel contains four overlapping subplots. At the beginning of each, Tom embarks on some childish enterprise; each ends with Tom having moved a step closer to adult standards of socialized behavior. The first subplot, which continues to the end of the novel, is Tom's courtship of Becky Thatcher. The early stages of their relationship are stormy, plagued by misunderstanding, jealousy, and pride. But their relations warm considerably when Tom accepts the blame and punishment for something Becky has done. This subplot reaches a climax when the two get lost in a cave. Tom's cool-headed, courageous behavior enables them to survive and escape.

The second subplot involves Tom and Huck witnessing a murder. The boys go to the cemetery at midnight to try out some wart-removing magic. There they see Dr. Robinson stabbed to death by Injun Joe. Another man present, Muff Potter, is so drunk that Injun Joe is able to convince him that he is the murderer. Injun Joe further covers his tracks by telling the villagers the next day that Muff is the murderer.

At first Tom and Huck keep silent about what they have witnessed because they are terrified of Injun Joe. But in the end, Tom's conscience overcomes his fear and he testifies against Injun Joe, thereby saving Muff Potter from the gallows. Unfortunately, Injun Joe escapes and Tom lives in fear of his life.

Meanwhile, in between the murder and the trial, Twain interweaves a third subplot: Tom, Huck, and Joe Harper's adventures on Jackson's Island. Because Tom and Joe believe they have been unjustly punished at home, and Tom feels that Becky is treating him unfairly, the two boys run away from home to become pirates. Huck joins them just for the sake of adventure.

But civilization is not so easily left behind. After stealing meat to take to the island, Tom and Joe begin to feel guilty about their theft. So, in spite of their intention to become pirates, the two vow never to steal again.

Tom and Joe also feel sorry for their families, who by this time believe the boys are dead. Tom even sneaks back to the village to leave a message for Aunt Polly. Although he does not leave the message, the fact that he thinks about doing so makes a favorable impression on his aunt later. Finally, the three boys sneak back to the village and appear in church at their own memorial funeral service.

The fourth subplot is Tom and Huck's search for buried treasure. Beginning as a childish adventure, this search unites aspects of the first and second subplots and leads to the grand climax of the novel. In the course of their search, Tom and Huck come across Injun Joe disguised as a Spaniard. As they hide in the upstairs of an old house, they watch Injun Joe and a companion discover a cache of gold coins. Thereafter, Tom and Huck concentrate on gaining possession of this fortune.

The boys take turns watching what they believe to be Injun Joe's hideout. During one of Huck's turns at watch, he follows Injun Joe and his companion to the Widow Douglas' home. But instead of going to retrieve their treasure, the two men plot to harm the Widow. Huck, who overhears their plan, rushes to the nearby home of Welshman Smith for help. The Welshman and his sons get to the Widow's house in time to scare away the attackers. Injun Joe disappears; his companion is later found dead.

Meanwhile, Tom and Becky and other youth of the village go on a picnic excursion to McDougal's cave. The pleasant outing turns to disaster when Tom and Becky get lost in the five-mile labyrinth of underground chambers. While searching for a way out, Tom catches a glimpse of Injun Joe and discovers a clue to where Injun Joe has hidden the gold coin. Finally, after three days, Tom finds a hidden entrance to the cave, and he and Becky escape.

Becky's father has the main entrance to the cave sealed, not knowing that Injun Joe is inside. Injun Joe starves to death before anyone knows he has been imprisoned.

After Tom and Becky recuperate from their ordeal, Tom leads Huck back to the secret entrance to the cave, and the two boys find the gold coins that are worth about \$12,000. The two boys appear with their wealth at a party arranged by Widow Douglas to honor Huck for saving her life. The money is invested for them, Huck goes to live with the Widow, and all seems well.

But Huck can't tolerate the regimentation of his new life. He runs away after only three weeks. The novel ends with Tom persuading Huck to go back to the Widow's. In return, Tom will allow Huck to join a band of robbers he is founding.

Among these four subplots, Twain interweaves humorous scenes, such as the incident in which Tom induces his friends to pay him for the privilege of whitewashing a fence. While these episodes do little to advance the main story, they do entertain and develop characterizations.