

## Lesson Plan – *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

### Concept: Superstition found in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Developed by: Lori Rollison, Marceline High School, Marceline, Missouri

**Suggested Grade Level:** 9-12 (can be adapted for use in middle school)

**Time Frame:** 10 fifty-minute class periods (lessons can be combined to fit block schedule)

#### Objectives:

1. Students will identify and explain five examples of superstitions found in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.
2. Students will create five new superstitions based on an area of interest.
3. Students will write a story that appropriately includes a superstition created by the student.

**State Standards:** Missouri Show-Me Standards: CA1, CA2, CA4, CA6, CA7, SS6

**Assessment/Evaluation:** Students will create a list of five new superstitions that they create based on their own life and family values. With this list of superstitions, students will write a short story in which they incorporate their newfound superstitions. This story needs to follow standard writing format, and needs to be told from the viewpoint of Huck Finn. The text should be written in a dialect similar to what appears in the original Mark Twain text. In addition, students will include illustrations that depict the superstitions as they occur within the story.

#### Language/Vocabulary:

**Found Poem:** a poem consisting of words found in a non-poetic context and usually broken into lines that convey a verse rhythm

(<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/found%20poem>).

**Superstition:** 1 a: a belief or practice resulting from ignorance, fear of the unknown, trust in magic or chance, or a false conception of causation b: an irrational abject attitude of mind toward the supernatural, nature, or God resulting from superstition 2: a notion maintained despite evidence to the contrary

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/superstition>

**Integrated Curriculum:** Integration into a history class is possible with this lesson in terms of discussing the history of superstitions in general, or more specifically as they appear in Mark Twain's text. In addition, the lesson can be adapted into a science class by attempting to determine the "science" behind the superstition, and whether the superstition follows modern science.

**Background Information:** Background information on superstitions can be found at the following websites:

[www.oldsuperstitions.com](http://www.oldsuperstitions.com)

[www.snopes.com](http://www.snopes.com)

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superstition>

#### Materials:

Electronic text of *Adventure of Huckleberry Finn*

Sample copy of "Found Poem"

List of superstitions found in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Internet Access

#### Technology Support:

<https://www.twainquotes.com/Superstition.html> -Mark Twain Quotations, Newspaper Collections, and Related Resources

[http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-](http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=Twa2Huc.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=all)

[new2?id=Twa2Huc.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=all](http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=Twa2Huc.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=all)

–Twain, Mark, 1835-1910, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (E-text)

**Related Twain Quotes/Other Readings:** *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Life on the Mississippi*, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*

“When the human race has once acquired a superstition nothing short of death is ever likely to remove it.”  
- *Autobiography of Mark Twain*

“Let me make the superstitions of a nation and I care not who makes its laws or its songs either.”  
- *Following the Equator*, Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar

“When even the brightest mind in our world has been trained up from childhood in a superstition of any kind, it will never be possible for that mind, in its maturity, to examine sincerely, dispassionately, and conscientiously any evidence or any circumstance which shall seem to cast a doubt upon the validity of that superstition. I doubt if I could do it myself.”  
- "Is Shakespeare Dead?"

### Lesson Plan Format –

**A. Introduction:** Read aloud Chapter 10 from Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which demonstrates Jim's and Huck's superstitious beliefs: “After breakfast...it all come of looking at the moon that way, like a fool.”

### B. Lesson:

Hold a class discussion in which the students discuss background knowledge on various superstitions, as well as whether they personally feel that there is truth behind the superstitions. Sample discussion starters might include the following:

- What does the word “superstition” mean?
- Do you know any superstitions?
- Why do you feel that more people in the past believed and followed their beliefs of superstitions than people do today, or do you feel that superstitions are still prevalent in our society?
- Where do you think superstitions began?
- What modern day representations have you seen of superstitions still existing today (ex. Horseshoe over the door, tossing salt over the shoulder)?

Discuss examples of superstitious beliefs in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Be sure to refer back to the passage read that deals with the snake bite. Provide 2-3 examples from the book to help with student understanding (Note: students will be searching for examples in the text in a later assignment). Some of the superstitions from *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* that can be included in the discussion are:

- Chapter 1
  - It's bad luck to kill a spider.
  - To keep witches away, tie up a lock of your own hair with thread. Then turn around three times and cross your breast each time.
- Chapter 8
  - Young birds flying a yard or two at a time, and lightning is a sign of rain.
  - If you catch a bird, it means death.
  - Bees won't sting idiots.
- Chapter 10
  - If you talk about a dead man you will have bad luck and/or he might come and “ha'nt” you.
  - Wherever you leave a dead snake, its mate will find it.
  - To cure a snake bite, chop off the snake's head and throw it away; then skin the body and roast a piece of it to eat.

After the class discussion of superstitions, divide the students into groups of 3-4 and have each group of students locate five examples of superstitious beliefs found in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; this should be completed through an assigned section in the book (ex. Ch. 1-5, Ch. 6-10, etc.-this can be divided based on the class size) so that there is not excessive repetition. Once this activity is complete, students should discuss their findings with the rest of the class. Students need to be prepared to explain what the superstition is, where it was found, and in what context it is presented in *Huck Finn*.

Using the superstitions found by the class, students will individually create a “found poem” using the superstitions from *Huck Finn*. Found poem (a poem created using words or brief phrases that catch your eye during reading) example:

Kill a spider.

Going to rain.  
 Catch a bird.  
 Death.  
 Shake the tablecloth.  
 Tell the bees.  
 Going to be rich.  
 Dead man.  
 Ha'nt you.  
 Turn around three times.  
 Keep witches away.

**Culminating Activity:** Students should choose one of the following activities as their final project:

1. Choose one instance of superstition in *Huck Finn* and illustrate the superstition as it would appear in modern beliefs; then illustrate it as it appears in the text.
2. Create a board game on the story *Huck Finn* using the superstitions from the book as detours or chance cards throughout the game.
3. Find six additional examples of classic literature in which superstition plays a role (ex. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*). The six examples must come from at least two different sources. Write a 2-page paper in which you detail the use of the superstition in the literature, explaining from where it was found, the context in which it was used, and how you interpret the superstition.

**C. Closure:** Students will present their chosen culminating activity to the class. In this presentation, students will explain their activity, as well as its use of superstition.

**Scheduled Use of Time:**

Time	Teacher Activity/Questions to be asked	Student Activity
5 min.	Read aloud Chapter 10 from Mark Twain's <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> , which demonstrates Jim's and Huck's superstitious beliefs: "After breakfast...it all come of looking at the moon that way, like a fool."	Listen
15 min.	Facilitate a class discussion in which the students discuss background knowledge on various superstitions, as well as whether they personally feel that there is truth behind the superstitions. Discussion Questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What does the word "superstition" mean?</li> <li>➤ Do you know any superstitions?</li> <li>➤ Why do you feel that more people in the past believed and followed their beliefs of superstitions than people do today, or do you feel that superstitions are still prevalent in our society?</li> <li>➤ Where do you think superstitions began?</li> <li>➤ What modern day representations have you seen of superstitions still existing today (ex. Horseshoe over the door, tossing salt over the shoulder)?</li> </ul>	Listen and respond
30 min.	Discuss examples of superstitious beliefs in <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> . Be sure to refer back to the passage read that deals with the snake bite. Provide 2-3 examples for the students (Note: students will be searching for examples in the text in a later assignment). Some of these that can be included in the discussion are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Chapter 1               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It's bad luck to kill a spider</li> <li>• To keep witches away, tie up a lock of your own hair with thread. Then turn around three times and cross your breast each time.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Listen and respond

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Chapter 8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young birds flying a yard or two at a time, and lighting is a sign of rain</li> <li>• If you catch a bird, it means death</li> <li>• Bees won't sting idiots</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Chapter 10 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you talk about a dead man you will have bad luck and/or he might come and "ha'nt" you.</li> <li>• Wherever you leave a dead snake, its mate will find it.</li> <li>• To cure a snake bite, chop off the snake's head and throw it away; then skin the body and roast a piece of it to eat.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
30 min.	Divide the students into groups of 3-4 and have each group of students locate five examples of superstitious beliefs found in Mark Twain's <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> ; this should be completed through an assigned section in the book (ex. Ch. 1-5, Ch. 6-10, etc-divide based on the class size) so that there is not excessive repetition. Once this activity is complete, students should discuss their findings with the rest of the class. Students need to be prepared to explain what the superstition is, where it was found, and in what context it is presented in <i>Huck Finn</i> .	Locate five examples of superstitious beliefs found in Mark Twain's <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> . Discuss findings with classmates, explaining what the superstition is, where it was found, and in what context it is presented.
20 min.	Define "Found Poem" for students, and assign students to create a poem based on the superstitions discovered in <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> . Provide example of poem for students.	Students will individually create a "found poem" using the superstitions from <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> .
Four 50-minute class periods	Assign culminating activity to students	<p>Students should choose one of the following activities as their final project.</p> <p>*Choose one instance of superstition in <i>Huck Finn</i> and illustrate the superstition as it would appear in modern beliefs; then illustrate it as it appears in the text.</p> <p>*Create a board game on the story <i>Huck Finn</i> using the superstitions from the book as detours or chance cards throughout the game.</p> <p>*Find six additional examples of classic literature in which superstition plays a role (ex. <i>The Adventures of Tom Sawyer</i>). The six examples must come from at least two different sources. What is the superstition, and what is the context in which the superstition appears (what is occurring in the story at the time)? Write a 2-page paper in which you detail the use of the superstition in the literature, explaining from where it was found, how it was used, and how you interpret the superstitions.</p>
Two 50-minute class periods	Arrange for students to present the chosen culminating activity to the class. Provide feedback to the students regarding their work (may be verbal or written).	Students will present their chosen culminating activity to the class. In this presentation, students will explain their activity, as well as its use of superstition

Two 50-minute class periods	Assign final assessment to students. Provide feedback to the students regarding their work (may be verbal or written)	Students will create a list of five new superstitions that they create based on their own life and family values. With this list of superstitions, students will write a short story in which they incorporate their newfound superstitions. This story needs to follow standard writing format, and needs to be told from the viewpoint of Huck Finn. The text should be written in a dialect similar to what appears in the original Mark Twain text. In addition, students will include illustrations that depict the superstitions as they occur within the story.
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**Strategies/accommodations to support students with exceptionalities:** Accommodations can be made by decreasing the number of superstitions required in the research and written portions of the project as needed. In addition, gifted students can be challenged by adding a research portion to the activity, which would include researching the superstitions found in various countries around the world and the origin of these superstitions.

**Possible Follow-up Activities:** Choose another work of literature and have students relate the superstitions found in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to those found in the new work. Research the history of superstitions in other countries of the world, as well as those related to specific holidays, items, animals, or events.

**Possible Guest Speakers/Other Resources:** Field trip to Hannibal to enhance student understanding of the life/works of Mark Twain; Bulletin Boards: Photographs of various superstitious objects around the world.