

Reading and Activity Suggestions for *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*  
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Chapter 1-6

- Look at characterization of Tom and other characters through the eyes of another character. For example, how does Aunt Polly view Tom? Write a description of a character from the viewpoint of another character. How does Becky see Tom? Does Tom act differently around Becky than around his Aunt Polly? Consider how we present ourselves to different people. The manner in which one acts in school is probably quite different from how one behaves at home. What are the motivations and reasons for performing differently in various environments? This activity will help students use a range of descriptions to construct an overall picture of a character.

Chapter 6

- Have the students identify the different methods of removing warts that Tom and Huckleberry talk about. Discuss the charms that they say and the items (i.e. dead cats) they use. Ask students to devise their own charm to remove warts. Students could develop a method that would fit in the time of Tom Sawyer and a method that would incorporate items and words from current time. Boys played with dead cats and frogs, during Tom's time. Are there cultural ideas or artifacts from the current time that could be used in the charm?

Chapter 9

- Have students act out the graveyard scene. Why were the boys there? Why were the men there? Talk about the sequencing of the action. Acting out the scene can help students see how the boys stayed out of view but were able to hear and see the action. Realizing Tom and Huckleberry would have been fairly close to the men, ask students to think about how they would have felt. Ask the students to consider the motivation of all the characters in the scene. Instead of automatically making value judgments, encourage the students to think about why Injun Joe would have made the decisions he made. What are the social factors that influence how people react in tough situations?

Chapter 10

- Why does Tom decide not to tell anyone about Injun Joe framing Muff Potter? What are the consequences for that decision? How does Tom feel? Students take a position (tell or don't tell) and justify their reasoning. Groups from both positions can make their case to a "jury." Groups speculate about what will happen to all parties involved (Tom, Huck, Injun Joe, Muff Potter).
- What are Tom's emotions, at the end of Chapter 10? Students relate Tom's feelings of guilt and burden to a time when they felt a heavy burden. What is Tom and Huck's way of dealing with the overwhelming feelings of fear and guilt?
- For two boys who believe very strongly in superstition, the oath holds a lot of weight for them. Would an oath be as meaningful to kids of today? Would the oath say the same thing? How would the oath be different? Are there certain things today's kids would or wouldn't say?

## Chapter 11-12

- Discuss Tom's changes in behavior. Compare and contrast Tom's behavior from earlier chapters to his behavior after the graveyard scene. In particular, consider why Tom and Huck are so fascinated with Injun Joe, in Chapter 11. What character or personality traits does Injun Joe possess or not possess that mesmerize Tom and Huck?
- Consider how Becky has an affect on Tom and his behavior. In Chapter 12, Becky has stopped coming to school and Tom is so concerned about her that he "no longer took interest in war, nor even piracy. The charm of life was gone." What is so powerful about Becky (beyond infatuation) that causes Tom to change his outlook on life? Moreover, when Becky rebuffs Tom, how does Tom react?

## Chapter 13

- Students create their own island. What would you need and want? What would the island look like, and what would you do? Students would write descriptions of their islands and develop three-dimensional models. Have each student present his or her islands and ask each student to convince the other students that his or her island is the best. What are the best parts about living on *your* island? Using the boys' descriptions about living on the island as information, consider what the positives and negatives would be about living on an island.
- Map the real St. Petersburg (Hannibal), from that time period. Using descriptions from the book, where would the island be in reality? Find information from archived and current maps to supplement the descriptions in the book. Use this time to integrate math and measurement into the book study. Include all of the elements of a map (e.g. compass rose, scale, symbols).

## Chapter 14

- What did the boys really want when they left for the island? Did they really want to be away from everyone, or did they just want to be missed?
- Each student decides what Tom's note to the boys said, and the student writes the note on tree bark. Use a sharp stylus to etch the note in the bark. Students must make sure to use Tom's language.

## Chapter 15

- Considering Tom's feelings upon hearing his Aunt Polly talk about him and the description of him kissing her before he returned to the island, decide how Tom feels about his Aunt Polly. He may be a troublemaker and cause his Aunt Polly much grief, but Tom does care for his Aunt. What actions let the reader know he loves his Aunt Polly? Ask students to consider how they act toward people versus how they feel about important people in their lives. Do we always communicate our true feelings in our actions? What discourages or prompts us to show those feelings?
- Using dialogue from the chapter, use pictures to illustrate how Aunt Polly is feeling. Think about feeling words (i.e. anguish, pain) that people feel when someone dies. Use those words to create picture descriptions of the emotions.
- Using Aunt Polly's language, write the prayer that she says. What do you think she might say about Tom or her feelings?

- Why would Tom decide to go back to the island? Consider his motivation for leaving and his reasons for returning.

#### Chapter 16

- Encourage students to research what would be needed to survive for a week on an island. What supplies would you need? How would you get fresh water? How long would a person be able to survive on an island without food and fresh water? Considering the habitat and animals of Missouri, what potential threats and benefits would a person encounter?
- Joe discovers that activities like swimming are "...no good. I don't seem to care for it, somehow, when there ain't anybody to say I shan't go in." What have the boys discovered about "freedom?" Why are things more exciting when they are forbidden? Ask the students to think about activities in their lives that are forbidden and consider just how exciting those activities would be if they were allowed.

#### Chapter 17

- Research the funeral traditions of Tom's time and around the world. Compare and contrast the traditions of Tom's time with current traditions and traditions from other countries. How would Tom's funeral have been different in another country or another time?

#### Chapter 18-19

- How have Aunt Polly's feelings changed from sadness to anger with Tom? What are her reasons for being angry with Tom? Is she justified? Consider how you would feel in Aunt Polly's position. Aunt Polly wants Tom to have *thought* about coming to tell her the truth, even if he didn't *do* it. Why does *thinking* about doing the right thing make *not* doing the right thing a little more tolerable? In the end, Aunt Polly only wants to know that Tom does care for her. Explain how Tom's actions and thoughts do and do not show he cares?
- When Tom and the boys go back to school they have many grand stories to tell their classmates. Study the term "hyperbole," and consider how Tom and the boys exaggerate their stories. Take one of the events from the island and tell it with exaggeration, from one of the boy's perspectives.

#### Chapter 20

- Outline the evolution of Tom and Becky's relationship. There are many ups and downs in Tom and Becky's relationship. Talk about each fluctuation and discuss the reasons for each high and low. What are the motivations and intentions of each person, during each high and low? What attracts Tom to Becky and vice versa? What traits do they admire in each other?

#### Chapter 21

- Study the "Examinations" from Tom's world. What did students do to prepare for and present the examinations? How are Tom's examinations similar and different from the examinations that today's students take? Have students research and recite the excerpts from the book. Have students write their own "examination" paper and recite it.

#### Chapter 23-24

- As the trial of Muff Potter begins, how are Tom and Huck feeling? How have the visits with Muff Potter (the final one, in particular) given new insight into the man that Muff Potter is?
- Why does Tom decide to testify? What adult traits does Tom show? Write and act out Tom's testimony. What would he say about the night in the graveyard? How would he say it, with Injun Joe watching?
- Tom's concern about Injun Joe increases in Chapter 24. Remembering Tom's way of looking at the world, write a nightmare that Tom might have had about Injun Joe coming back to seek revenge.

#### Chapter 25

- Tom and Huck discuss many of the superstitions and rules for ghosts and treasure hunting. Discuss the reasons that people believe in and use superstitions to guide their lives. Do Tom and Huck always have a "reason" (superstition) that can explain why something did or did not happen? What is the benefit in having an answer to everything that happens to you?

#### Chapter 26

- Speculate about the revenge that Injun Joe wants to carry out before he leaves town. Describe the who, what, where, and why of the revenge.
- Based on the descriptions from the chapter, sketch the haunted house. What makes this house a good place for Injun Joe to hide?
- Write the chapter as though Injun Joe *does* find the boys. How would the chapter and the book end?

#### Chapter 29

- Research the Cave. Study the formation, environment, and uses of caves. What are stalactites and stalagmites? What animals and insects live in caves?

#### Final Thoughts

- How does Tom view the adult world? How does Huck view the adult world? How do they fit into the social construction of their worlds? They do many things that get them in trouble, and they run away from the many rules of the adult world. However, Tom and Huck also personify many "adult" character traits, like honesty and courage. In fact, they show those traits better than some of the adults. What things do Tom and Huck dislike about the adult world and why?

#### Additional Ideas

- Have students create a new book cover for Tom Sawyer. Pick a favorite scene or the scene that best represents what the book is about and create a picture of that scene. Use the words from the scene to make a visual representation. Make sure the students can justify why they picked the particular scene to symbolize the overall theme of the story. Have students consider why the whitewashing scene is often on the cover of the book.

What is significant about the whitewashing scene? How does that scene represent the character of Tom or the theme of the book?

- To help the students understand the literary concepts of setting, character, characterization, plot, mood, and climax, define the concepts and then show the students how the concepts relate to their lives.
  - Setting: Ask the students to write about the house, neighborhood, city, county, and state in which they live. Moving from the small stage of their house to the larger stage of their state helps them to understand the affects that setting has on people.
  - Character: Have the students discuss the characters in their lives. Discuss how some characters play a major role (Mom) and some play a minor role (Great-Aunt Sue who lives in Japan).
  - Characterization: Ask the students to describe themselves. Begin with physical descriptions and move to more abstract personality qualities.
  - Plot: Explain how the different pieces of Tom Sawyer fit together into a complete story. Have the students create a timeline for their own lives and compare it to a timeline of Tom Sawyer.
  - Mood: Brainstorm a list of different moods (e.g. happy, sad) and have the students match the varied moods to related times in their lives. For example, the mood of my life story was happy when my new baby sister was born.
  - Climax: Talk about the climax as the exciting part of the story-after which everything changes. Use a short book or movie to illustrate climax.
- Ask students to think about the overall personality and characterization of one of the main characters. After each student picks one of the main characters, the student will “modernize” the character and pick a movie star that best embodies that character.
- Ask students to retell a favorite scene in modern language. In particular, have students look at the language that the characters use, and have the student rewrite conversations using current lingo.
- Rewrite a chapter from the perspective of another character. For example, rewrite the cave scene from Becky’s perspective. Decide what thoughts are going through Becky’s mind.
- Try to find all of the superstitions that are referenced in the book. Research the superstitions and try to find their origins. Consider the motivation for believing in superstitions.