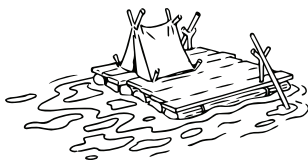


WORLDVIEW GUIDE

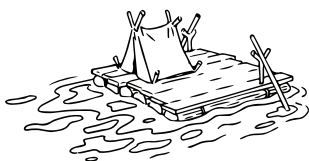
ADVENTURES *of* HUCKLEBERRY FINN



Douglas Wilson

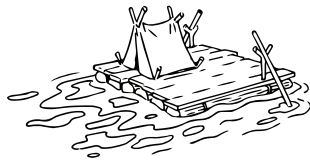
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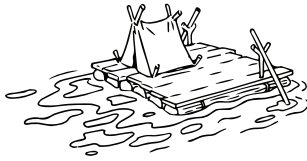
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INTRODUCTION

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is the best known book of Mark Twain, a preeminent American author. Fifty years after the publication of *Huck Finn*, the writer Earnest Hemingway declared that all distinctively American literature marks its descent from this story. It is the story of a boy named Huck escaping from “civilization” down the great Mississippi River with a runaway slave named Jim.



WORLDVIEW ANALYSIS

You probably saw the “Notice” Mark Twain put at the start of his book: “Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot” (p. iv). If by this warning Twain meant that you should refrain from the allegory of woodenly turning Huck into “all humans” and the River into the River of Life or “God” (as some have done), then we can agree with him: don’t do that. But if Twain was hinting that *Huck Finn* had no worldview or deeper meaning in it whatsoever, then he was trying to pull the wool over your eyes—because no great stories are shallow.

The great central climax of *Huck Finn* occurs after the duke and king double-cross Jim by selling him to the Phelps for \$40 (which would be somewhere around \$1,160 today). Huck is trying to figure out what to do, and he begins to reflect on the lessons he had been taught

on helping runaway slaves. A person who behaved the way he had been behaving “goes to everlasting fire.”

And so as a consequence Huck has a moral crisis, and he decides to write to Miss Watson, Jim’s original owner, to tell her where Jim is to be found. Once he made this decision, this is how it all played out.

I felt good and all washed clean of sin for the first time I had ever felt so in my life, and I knowed I could pray now. But I didn’t do it straight off, but laid the paper down and set there thinking—thinking how good it was all this happened so, and how near I come to being lost and going to hell. And went on thinking. And got to thinking over our trip down the river; and I see Jim before me, all the time; in the day, and in the night-time, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we a floating along, talking, and singing, and laughing. But somehow I couldn’t seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind. I’d see him standing my watch on top of his’n, stead of calling me, so I could go on sleeping; and see him how glad he was when I come back out of the fog; and when I come to him agin in the swamp, up there where the feud was; and such-like times; and would always call me honey, and pet me, and do everything he could think of for me, and how good he always was; and at last I struck the time I saved him by telling the men we had smallpox aboard, and he was so grateful, and said I was the best friend old Jim ever had in the world, and the *only* one he’s got now; and then I happened to look around, and see that paper. (Ch. XXXI, p. 232–3)