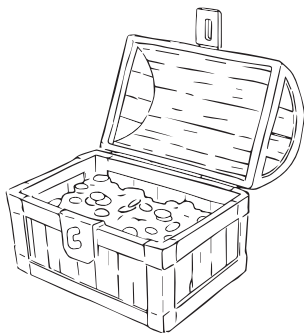


# WORLDVIEW GUIDE

## THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER

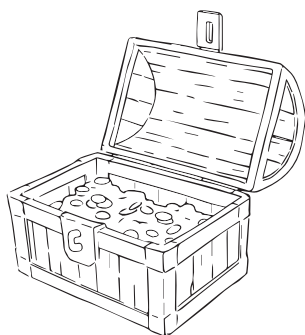


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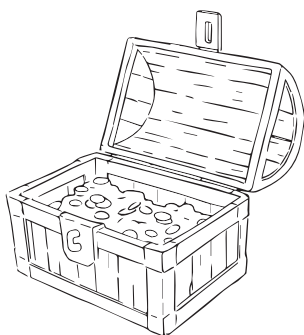




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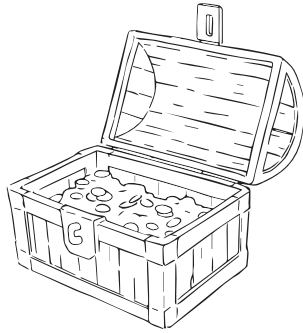




## INTRODUCTION

Ah, *childhood*. Boys. Long summer days, barefoot, fishing, swimming, laughter, pocket knives, dirty hands, dirty faces, sweaty brows, trouble, *joy*. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is an unmistakable celebration of youth and in particular *boyhood*. At the same time, it's an extended commentary on adulthood, grownups, society, and culture. And that commentary largely consists of a long, exaggerated eye-roll. Welcome to one of the great American stories. Welcome to the wit and the wonder of one of America's greatest writers.





## WORLDVIEW ANALYSIS

Mark Twain's classic work is a big grin and a wink and a nod at the glory of childhood, and *boys* in particular. But this celebration of boyhood isn't in a vacuum; there is a clear target to Twain's lampooning: a certain bureaucratic bumbling, a stuffy legalism, a fussy Pharisaism, the unmistakable cranky old man syndrome. From Aunt Polly's medicinal quackery and emotional superciliousness to the mind-numbing preacher to the show dog Sunday School teacher, the hypocrisies are thick and stifling. And Twain invites us to cheer when Tom thwarts their designs with his wit and folly, accidental or intended.

In one of the early and most legendary scenes, Tom outwits his Aunt Polly's designs to keep him occupied all day with the laborious assignment of white-washing a fence, and he succeeds in this by engendering the envy of all the neighborhood children and getting them to pay *him* for a chance to white-wash the fence. Twain writes:

And when the middle of the afternoon came, from being a poor poverty-stricken boy in the morning, Tom was literally rolling in wealth. He had besides the things before mentioned, twelve marbles, part of a jews-harp, a piece of blue bottle-glass to look through, a spool cannon, a key that wouldn't unlock anything, a fragment of chalk, a glass stopper of a decanter, a tin soldier, a couple of tadpoles, six fire-crackers, a kitten with only one eye, a brass door-knob, a dog-collar—but no dog—the handle of a knife, four pieces of orange peel, and a dilapidated old window sash.... Tom said to himself it was not such a hollow world, after all. He had discovered a great law of human action, without knowing it—namely, that in order to make a man or a boy covet a thing, it is only necessary to make the thing difficult to attain.... Work consists of whatever a body is obliged to do, and that Play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do. (13-14)<sup>1</sup>

Here, Twain captures with characteristic wit a deep pleasure in the curiosities and absurdities and obsessions of boyhood alongside the slothful tendencies of human nature.

In another scene, having “won” a number of Bible memory tickets as a result of trading the wealth he had acquired in the fence white-washing business, Tom is introduced to the new judge in town as the winner of a brand new Bible. With the whole church looking on and the Sunday School teacher trying to make a good impression on the new judge, the judge speaks to Tom:

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1. All quotes are taken from the Canon Classics edition (2016), .