

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

Literary Analysis

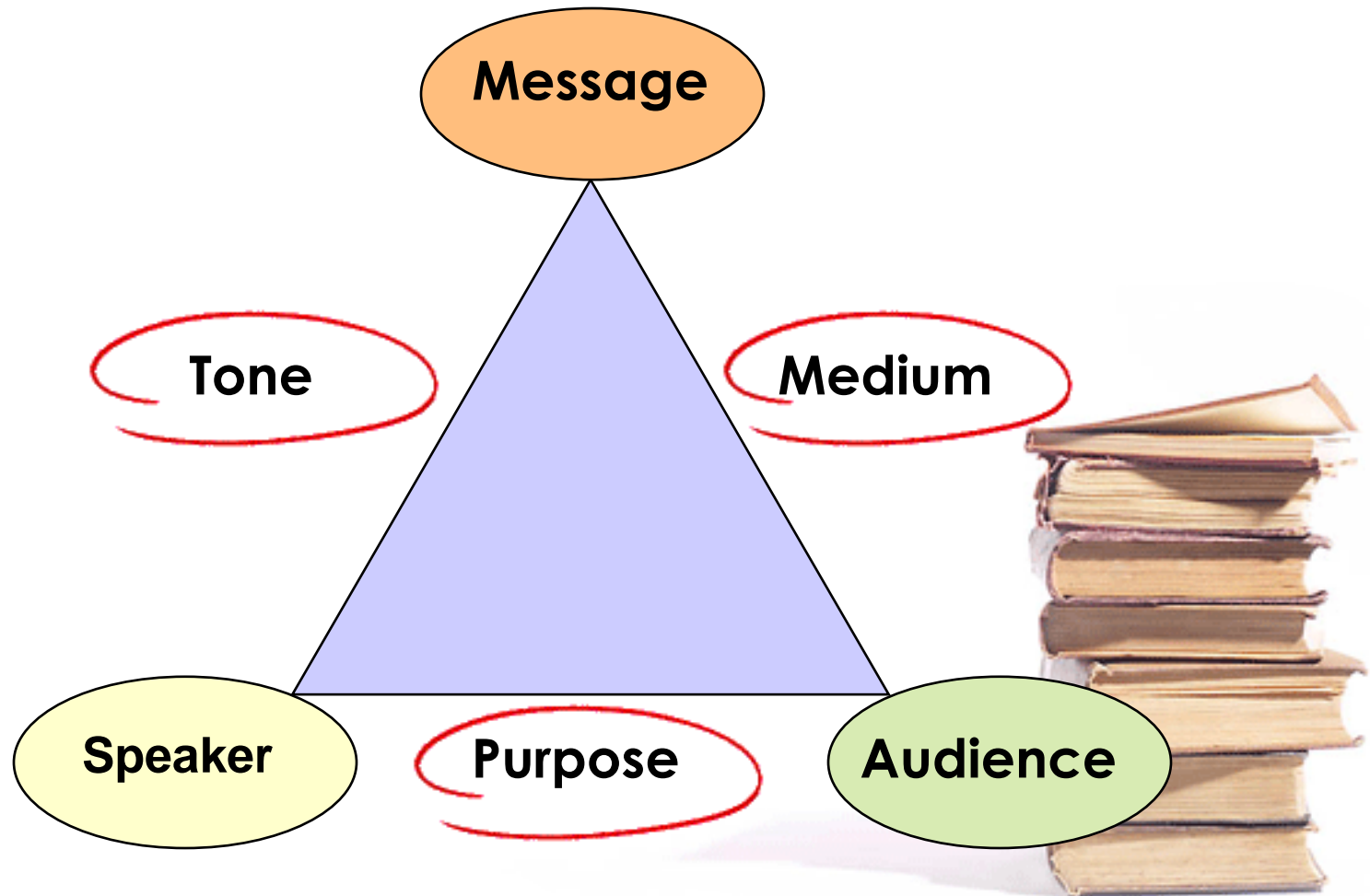


Irony, history, and racism all painfully intertwine in our past and present, and they all come together in *Huck Finn*.



Compiled By Amy Hardee

Rhetorical Analysis



Medium: The Structure

Episodic Narrative

- Takes its form from nature (the Mississippi River)
- Told in a series of episodes from the point of view of a major character

- Therefore, the episodes are held together by the...
 - Central plot
 - Developing theme of Huck growing up
 - Interplay of contrasting images: freedom vs. bondage, river vs. shore
 - Role-playing



Medium: Structure

Picaresque

- “A novel of the road” or in this case, “a novel of the river”
- Adventure, which a central character encounters many people who represent a range of social types
- Mischievous hero, who lives near or at the edge of the law



Medium: Structure



Bildungsroman

- A novel depicting stages of growth or the process of reaching maturity.



Medium: Characterization

Protagonist, Huck Finn

- Initiation: 14 year old boy venturing out into adult society. Huck is continually at war with society and its values.
- An Outcast: Father is a drunk; no formal education; misfit.



Medium: Characterization

Protagonist, Huck Finn

Four KEY episodes specifically give Huck firsthand experiences with the dark, ugly, violent side of human behavior

1. Horror of floating house; Jim and Huck find a dead man and house frequented by thieves and prostitutes. (Dead man is Huck's father)
2. Horror of Walter Scott; Jim and Huck overhear a band of thieves plotting to tie up one of their men and drown him.



Medium: Characterization

Four KEY episodes continued....



3. Violence of the feud; Buck is gunned down like an animal.
4. Cold-blooded killing of Boggs; Huck sees a town drunk shot in broad daylight.



Medium: Characterization

Protagonist, Huck Finn



- Death: Huck fakes his own death to escape Pap and Miss Watson; 20 deaths, real or imagined.
- Trying on identities
- Good-hearted nature; He has sympathy and compassion for the lowly, weak, and outcast members of society.



Perhaps because his innocent former life and the child in himself are dying.



Medium: Characterization

Huck's Moral Development:

Begins as a young boy who has never known anything but a slave society, in which black people are to be considered inhuman pieces of property. He never considers that society may be wrong.

- Irony – He believes by protecting Jim from slavery is wrong and that he is a sinner – where really his conscience is doing the right thing.



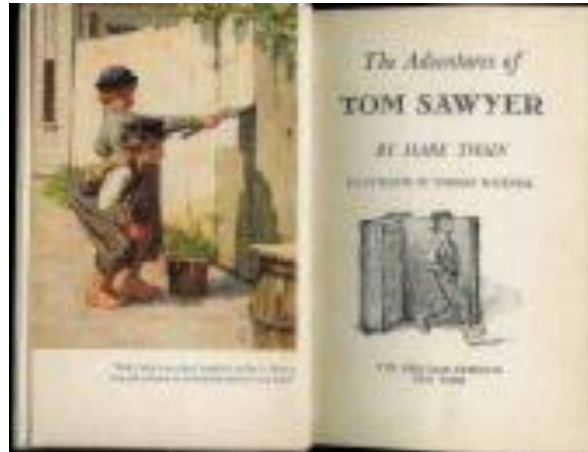
Medium: Characterization

Huck's Moral Development

- Early Chapters - Huck's and society's view of Jim is superstitious, gullible, and slow-witted, but as Huck and Jim's relationship grows, these views become complicated.
- In Becoming an Adult – Huck dramatically shifts his view of one black man, coming to embrace him as a friend and father figure for whom he is ready to go to hell.



Medium: Characterization



- Huck's Lies and Pretenses:
 - Huck's identities he plays reflects the truths of his experiences and his longings.
 - He conjures up a family for himself which involves some element of violence or tragedy – which is the reality of his young existence.



Medium: Characterization

Widow Douglas

- Highly refined; proper posture, book learning, table manners
- Religion; cold, intolerable faith, full of hell, damnation, and sin
- Prisoner; imprisons Jim as a slave and Huck as a student.



Audience: The Past

- It is a book that puts on the table the very questions the culture so often tries to bury, a book that opens out into the complex history that shaped it -- the history of the ante-bellum era in which the story is set, and the history of the post-war period in which the book was written -- and it requires us to address that history as well.



Purpose: Evils within Civilization

Huck and Jim
value...
Teamwork,
freedom



Society
values...
Rules,
regulations,
institutions –
EVERYTHING
rests on
slavery!



Social hierarchies of free and slave, black and white, are suspended in a democratic utopia.

Purpose: Flaws within Civilization

Walter Scott

- Boat named for a cultivated writer whose romantic and chivalric code of honor were said to influence the southern plantation life of slavery.
- Society created by values of Sir Walter Scott's work is the last refuge of scoundrels and is doomed to wreck.



Grangerfords

- The family has all the entertainments expected of society, but involved in a deadly feud.
- The most civilized are lacking brotherly love.



Purpose: Realism



- In its time, *Huckleberry Finn* was understood as realistic for its evident refusal to idealize. It shows life in the lower reaches of society, and it shows that life as grim.



Purpose: Slavery



- Slaveholding was evil. Injustice was the law of the land. History books teach that.
- History books don't require you to look the perpetrators of that evil in the eye and find yourself looking at a kind, gentle, good-hearted Aunt Sally. They don't make you understand that it was not the villains who made the system work, but the ordinary folks, the good folks, the folks, who did nothing more than fail to question the set of circumstances that surrounded them, who failed to judge that evil as evil and who deluded themselves into thinking they were doing good, earning safe passage for themselves into heaven.



Speaker: Mark Twain



A book of mine where a sound heart and a deformed conscience come into collision and conscience suffers defeat.
~Mark Twain

Clemens as a child accepted without question, as Huck did, the idea that slaves were property; neither wanted to be called a "low-down Abolitionist" if he could possibly help it. Between the time of that Hannibal childhood and adolescence, however, and the years in which Twain wrote *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain's consciousness changed. By 1885, when the book was published, Samuel Clemens held views that were very different from those he ascribed to Huck.



Speaker: Twain



Mark Twain House, Hartford, Connecticut



Speaker: Mark Twain

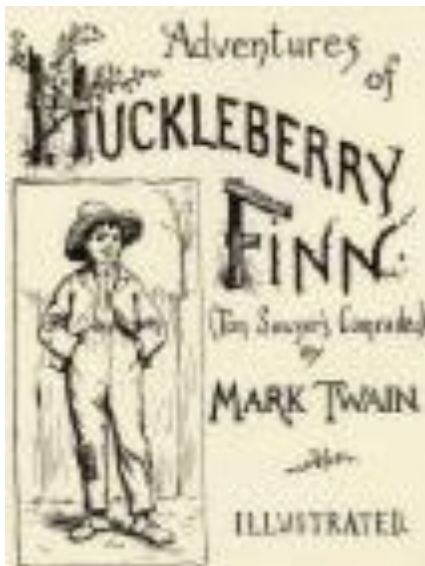
- By the time he wrote *Huckleberry Finn*, Samuel Clemens had come to believe not only that slavery was a horrendous wrong, but that white Americans owed black Americans some form of "reparations" for it.
- Twain wrote to the Dean of the Yale Law School in 1885, in which he explained why he wanted to pay the expenses of Warner McGuinn, one of the first black law students at Yale. "We have ground the manhood out of them," Twain wrote Dean Wayland on Christmas Eve, 1885, "and the shame is ours, not theirs, & we should pay for it."



Speaker: Twain and Huck

Unreliable Narrator

- The reader knows or is more aware than Huck about the cruelty of regarding slaves as property.
- Though an unreliable narrator, Huck has innocent insight and never lies to the reader.



- The flow of language is the sign of Huck's voice, felt in his words and intonation, while the author has constructed the sentences, in all their intricacy.
- When a rich, famous, worldly author entrusts his narrative to a provincial outcast of limited literacy, it already produces the structural potential for irony, but when everyone in the author's world knows more and sees differently from everyone in the novel's world, it multiplies ironic possibilities.



Tone: Informal, Humor

- Huck's voice, combined with Twain's satiric genius, changed the shape of fiction in America, and African-American voices had a great deal to do with making it what it was.
- Twain's tone in the story gives a humorous and informal mood but in much of the observations he makes on society, he is often critical.

- Satire is a style of writing using humor and hyperbole to ridicule some aspect of human behavior in order to draw attention to it or initiate change. The behaviors Twain satirizes include: greed, racism, bravado, Southern chivalry and aristocracy, gullibility, lack of altruism, "obituary" poets, romanticism, "religious" people (not religion), naiveté, and many more.



Message: Goodness and Equality



- The innate goodness of an individual as opposed to the pretense of goodness in society.
- We continue to live, as a nation, in the shadow of racism while being simultaneously committed, on paper, to principles of equality.



Rhetorical Analysis: Review

