Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
Questions for Discussion

Chapters 1-3

1. Setting: The combination of place, historical time, and social situation that provides the general background from the characters and plot of a literary work is the story's setting. Setting frequently plays a crucial role in determining the atmosphere of a work. Explain the significance of the woods to Huck's life.

2. Characterization: Characterization is the use of literary techniques to create a character. Writers use two major literary techniques to create characters- direct and indirect characterization (direct description, portraying characters' behavior, and presenting the thoughts and emotions of characters). The main purpose of the first three chapters of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is to begin to characterize Huck Finn. How does Twain establish Huck Finn as a mischievous rascal? Give at least one direct and indirect example. In what ways is Huck different from the other boys in the gang?

3. Narrator and Point of View: A narrator is one who tells a story. Point of view is the vantage point from which a story is told. What can the reader expect in a story told from first-person point of view? Huck's way of describing the events in his life contributes to the humor in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. He is rather innocent in his dealings with people and reports things directly as he sees them. He is also often unaware when he has said something insightful. Give examples from the novel of Huck's style as a narrator. How does Twain incorporate humor through point of view in these chapters?

4. Syntax: The arrangement- the ordering, grouping, and placement- of words within a sentence is known as syntax. How does Twain use sentence structure in the following passage from Ch. 2 to emphasize the point of view and characterization of Huck Finn?

   "Everybody was willing. So Tom got out a sheet of paper that he had wrote the oath on, and read it. It swore every boy to stick to the band, and never tell any of the secrets: and if anybody done anything to any boy in the band, whichever boy was ordered to kill that person and his family must do it, and he mustn’t eat and he mustn’t sleep till he had killed them and hacked a cross in their breasts, which was the sign on the band. And nobody that didn’t belong to the band could use the mark, and if he did he must be sued: and if he done it again he must be killed. And if anybody that belonged to the band told the secrets, he must have his throat cut, and then have his carcass burnt up and the ashes scattered all around, and his name blotted off the list with blood and never mentioned again by the gang, but have a curse put on it and be forgot forever" (19).
1. Motivation: Motivation is a force that moves a character to think, feel, or behave in a certain way. Speculate why Huck gives all of his money to Judge Thatcher. After years of neglecting and abusing Huck, Pap returns to fight in court for custody of Huck. What is his main motive? Do you think he has any other motives? What is Huck’s motivation in planning his escape?

2. Motif: A motif is any element that recurs in one or more works of literature or art. Superstition is an important motif in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Throughout the novel, readers will see characters turning to superstitious beliefs. What is Huck’s reaction to the footprints, and what could the reader infer about the future plot of the story using his reaction as evidence? What are some other superstitions that Huck and Jim believe? (You may need to revisit Ch. 1-3, as well.)

3. Foreshadowing: The technique of introducing into a narrative material that prepares the reader or audience for future events, actions, or revelations is called foreshadowing. It often involves the creation of a mood or atmosphere that suggests an eventual outcome; the introduction of objects, facts, events, or characters that hint at a developing situation or conflict; or the exposition of significant character traits allowing the reader or audience to anticipate that character’s actions or fate. What example of foreshadowing does Twain use in Chapter 4? How does the foreshadowing in Chapter 4 come into play at the beginning of Chapter 6?

4. Theme: Theme is the central idea of a literary work. It is not simply the subject of a literary work, but rather a statement (the statement can be moral, or even a lesson) that the text seems to be making about that subject. How does Twain begin to question the morality of slavery in Chapter 6?

5. Suspense: Suspense is a feeling of expectation, anxiousness, or curiosity created by questions raised in the mind of a reader. How is suspense created in Ch. 7?

6. Imagery: A term used to refer to (1) the actual language that a writer uses to convey a visual picture using an appeal to the senses and (2) the use of figures of speech, often to express abstract ideas in a vivid and innovative way. Describe the examples of imagery used at the end of Ch. 7.
1. Situational Irony: In irony of situation, an event occurs that violates the expectations or the characters, the reader, or the audience. Mark Twain’s writing often depicts irony in human behavior. What is ironic about the fact that, although nobody went to Pap’s cabin to rescue Huck, a crowd of people gathered on the steamboat to search for his remains? In another instance, what is ironic about the fact that there is a three hundred dollar reward being offered for the capture of Jim, but only a two hundred dollar reward being offered for the capture of Pap, a man believed to have murdered his son? What does this fact reveal about society’s view of Jim, and the weight given to Jim’s “crime”?  

2. Figurative Language: Language that employs one or more figures of speech to supplement and even modify the literal, denotative meanings of words with additional connotations and richness is known as figural language. Identify the figurative language devices used in the paragraph from Ch. 9 below.

“We spread the blankets inside for a carpet, and eat our dinner in there. We put all the other things handy at the back of the cavern. Pretty soon it darkened up, and begun to thunder and lighten; so the birds was right about it. Directly it begun to rain, and it rained like all fury, too, and I never see the wind blow so. It was one of these regular summer storms. It would get so dark that it looked all blue-black outside, and lovely; and the rain would thrash along by so thick that the trees off a little ways looked dim and spider-webby; and here would come a blast of wind that would bend the trees down and turn up the pale underside of the leaves; and then a perfect ripper of a gust would follow along and set the branches to tossing their arms as if they was just wild; and next, when it was just about the bluest and blackest-fst! It was as bright as glory, and you’d have a little glimpse of tree-tops a-plunging about away off yonder in the storm, hundreds of yards further than you could see before; dark as sin again in a second, and now you’d hear the thunder let go with an awful crash, and then go rumbling, grumbling, tumbling, down the sky towards the under side of the world, like rolling empty barrels down-stairs—where it’s long stairs and they bounce a good deal, you know. “

3. Theme: In chapters 7-11, an important theme of the novel is raised—Huck’s growing sense of compassion for other human beings, especially for Jim. Refer to the prank with the dead snake Huck plays on Jim in chapter 10. What is Huck’s intent when he plays the prank? What is the unfortunate result of his prank? How does Huck feel when he realizes his mistake? What do his feelings reveal about his growing maturity and his feelings for Jim? What theme is Twain building in Ch. 11 when Huck chooses not to turn Jim in for the reward money (you might consider the significance of the chapter’s title, “They’re After Us!”)?

4. Satire: Satire is humorous writing or speech intended to point out errors, falsehoods, foibles, or failings. It is written for the purpose of reforming human behavior or human institutions. What satire about religion does Huck offer in Ch. 8?

5. Motif: Many of Jim’s actions are deeply rooted in seemingly odd superstitions. A careful reader, however, can see that many of Jim’s superstitions are grounded in practical knowledge and knowledge of the natural world. Describe some of Jim’s superstitions concerning birds and
stormy weather and about tampering with snakes. In what way is his advice, based on these beliefs, correct? When Huck asks Jim why only bad luck can be predicted in his “signs,” what is logical about Jim’s response? Explain the significance of the Mississippi Valley’s caves and caverns in the story thus far.

6. **Foil**: A character who, by his contrast with the main character (protagonist) or other character, serves to accentuate that character’s distinctive qualities or characteristics is known as a *foil*. In what ways does Jim assume a father-like role to Huck establishing him as a foil to Pap.
1. **Symbol:** A symbol is a thing that stands for or represents both itself and something else. What does the river represent to Huck and Jim? Of what might the fog be symbolic?

2. **Conflict:** A conflict is a struggle between two forces in a literary work. A struggle that takes place between a character and some outside force is called an external conflict. A struggle that takes place within a character is called an internal conflict. What internal conflicts does Huck face, especially in Ch. 16? How does Huck resolve this moral conflict, at least temporarily, in this chapter?

3. **Figurative Language:** A hyperbole (sometimes referred to as an overstatement) is a figure of speech that uses deliberate exaggeration to achieve an effect. Identify the hyperbole in the first paragraph of Ch. 13 and explain why it is used. Identify and interpret the figurative language example in the last line of Ch. 13.

4. **Characterization:** What do the events in these chapters suggest about Huck’s personal development? How does Twain continue to portray Huck Finn as a boy of quick wits? What does Huck do at the end of Ch. 15 that was surprising in the historical and social context of the book? Why is this a turning point for Huck and Jim’s friendship?
1. **Satire**: What instances of satire can you find in chapters 17 and 18? What could be the author's intention in satirizing feuding families or the poetic Emmeline?

2. **Foil**: Describe how Buck Grangerford could be a foil to Huck Finn.

3. **Frame Story**: A story that contains another story or stories is known as a *frame story*. Identify the example in Ch. 18.

4. **Situational Irony**: What is ironic about the Grangerfords' and Sheperdsons' attending church and the sermon that is delivered?

5. **Narrator and Point of View**: Explain how the first person point of view naturally omits a main character from the majority of these chapters. How does this affect the reader's interpretation of the novel?
1. Imagery: What images are used to create the description at the beginning of chapter 19? Explain the intent and effect of this imagery appealing to all five senses.

2. Characterization: What do you learn about the attitudes, beliefs, and personal qualities of the duke and the king from their words and actions? In what way is the characterization of the duke and the king satiric? Consider their claims about their lineage, their acting, and the faulty historical and literary allusions they make. What is Twain suggesting by having the king and the duke pull their first “con” at a religious revival? Use evidence to explain how Twain characterizes the Arkansas townspeople. What is the author’s purpose in portraying them as he does? How is the success of the duke’s and king’s second advertised play Twain’s final jab at the town?

3. Motif: How does Twain again use weather to emphasize the mood and rising action of a conflict in Ch. 20?

4. Theme: What epiphany does Huck have in Ch. 23 that advances his inner conflict? What theme is Twain addressing?

5. Pathos: A quality in a work or a portion thereof that makes the reader experience pity, sorrow, or tenderness is called pathos. Generally the character is pathetic, helpless, and/or an innocent victim suffering through no fault of their own. Identify and explain an example of pathos in Ch. 23.
1. **Suspense:** Find examples of suspense in chapters 24-30. What events cause you to feel anxious for Huck? Do you think he is ever in genuine danger? Do you ever feel any anxiety for the duke and the king? Why, or why not?

2. **Foreshadowing:** What does the king’s conversation on the steamboat foreshadow?

3. **Dramatic Irony:** A situation that involves a discrepancy between a character’s perception and what the reader or audience know to be true is *dramatic irony*. Identify and explain an example of dramatic irony in Ch. 26.

4. **Theme:** How does Twain continue to question the morality of slavery in these chapters?

5. **Bildungsroman:** A *bildungsroman* novel recounts the development (psychological and sometimes spiritual) of an individual from childhood to maturity, to the point at which the protagonist recognizes his or her place and role in the world. How do these chapters illustrate growth on Huck’s part?

6. **Motif:** How does the weather in the graveyard scene in Ch. 29 contribute to the mood?
1. **Character:** A one-dimensional character, or *flat character*, is one who exhibits a single dominant quality. A three-dimensional character, or *round character*, is one who exhibits the complexity of traits associated with actual human beings. Would you call the king and the duke flat or round? To formulate your response, think about the following questions: Do the king and the duke ever feel any remorse for their actions? What traits do they exhibit? How do they compare with characters like Huck and Jim, who are round? Explain your response.

2. **Dramatic Irony:** How is Huck’s crisis of conscience and the decision he makes about Jim an example of dramatic irony? Consider how he describes his decision to help Jim: “a lowdown thing,” “wicked,” and “a disgrace.” What about his statement, “All right, then, I'll go to hell”? How do you think Twain intended the reader to regard Huck's decisions? What does the reader know that Huck does not know? Does Huck’s belief that his actions and his decision to follow his heart are wrong make his decision braver? more noble? Explain.

3. **Conflict:** What does the king and duke selling Jim signify? How does this event advance Huck’s moral conflict? What is the outcome of this conflict?

4. **Theme:** Part of Twain’s artistry is to attack something while not appearing to be attacking it. Explain how he does this in Ch. 31. What white attitude of the time does Twain attack in Huck’s conversation with Aunt Sally in Ch. 32? What theme does this reinforce?
1. **Irony:** Verbal Irony is characterized by a discrepancy between what a speaker or writer says and what he or she believes to be true. A speaker or writer using verbal irony will say the opposite of what he or she actually means. Explain the verbal irony in Huck's statement in Ch. 40: "We was all glad as we could be, but Tom was the gladdest of all because he had a bullet in the calf of his leg." What is the irony in Tom's escape plan for Jim? In the same way, how might you say that the entire voyage down the river is ironic? In what way is the escape of Huck from his father and Jim from slavery similarly ironic to Tom's elaborate release of Jim from his imprisonment? Was the voyage necessary for Jim or for Huck? In what ways was it necessary for their growth as characters?

2. **Characterization:** Using evidence from Ch. 34, contrast Tom's and Huck's ideas of social morality. How does this contribute to the characterization of these two? Analyze the change in Huck's character with the re-entry of Tom Sawyer into the story. Compare and contrast the character of Nat to Jim. What was Twain's purpose in introducing Nat to the story at this point? Describe the character of Jim and his relationship with Huck throughout the novel. When he learned earlier in the novel that Pap was the dead man in the floating house, why did he keep this information from Huck? Compare his concern for Huck to Pap's relationship with Huck. In what way is Jim the most honest, caring adult Huck has encountered?

3. **Tone:** Tone is the attitude of the author toward the reader or the subject matter. It may be serious, playful, mocking, angry, commanding, apologetic, and so forth. How does the return of Tom to the story in these last chapters result in a shift of tone and mood?

4. **Theme:** How has the entire episode of attempting to free Jim contributed to the idea of moral ambiguity? What startling revelation does Huck come to regarding Jim after Tom has been shot in Ch. 40? To what theme does this contribute? How does Tom's revealed knowledge of Miss Watson's will complete the idea of moral ambiguity?

5. **Symbolism:** Throughout the story, what does the river represent? The towns? In the last paragraph of the novel, where does Huck say is preferable? What is Twain's purpose for this?