

Cultural Rhetorics Unit
the contextual rhetoric of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

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cover letter

This unit asks students to compare the rhetoric Mark Twain employs in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* with the cultural rhetorics that surrounded Twain as he wrote the novel. Placing the novel into the context in which it was constructed will challenge students to better perceive the novel as its contemporaries did as well as develop the ability to read diverse rhetorics.

This particular lesson begins as an introduction to the novel, serves as a focal point of the reading of the novel, and as a study of a key piece of historic rhetoric. It is weaved into other lessons on writing style, narrative and authorial voice, Realism, and motif. Students generally have a tough time accessing *Huck Finn* at first, the dialect - particularly in Jim's dialogue, but also Huck's narrative voice. This unit should make the novel more accessible to students since it is a specific study of African American rhetoric, the interpretive illustrations of African Americans in the posters of the Minstrel Show and the interpretive African American dialect. Additionally, and more to pertinently, the unit requires students to read multi-genre cultural rhetorics and analyze those rhetorics to determine their social implications and make to judgements about a classic piece of literature.

This unit is part of a Carver High School American Literature curriculum that focuses on reading for author's purpose and writing literary analysis. This unit is designed particularly for a College Prep class in a system that divides its sophomore students up into Applied, College Prep, and Honors. The College Prep classes can be quite diverse in ability and/or performance, though not racially diverse. Carver High School is a middle class suburban town known for its cranberry bogs, a town that takes pride in its sports though a fairly small percentage of the student body participates in them, a town that has diverse perspectives on what education should be. The students are generally respectful, though often plagued by educational apathy. It takes some work to get the average Carver High student to buy into a novel like *Huck Finn*.

literature review

Jacqueline Jones Royster's "When the First Voice You Hear is Not Your Own" evokes the image of Mark Twain's Jim. With the novel as whole, Twain legitimized the American vernacular, but with what authority does Twain "legitimize" the voice of the black slave? Twain speaks through - what we may consider - his own voice, not the voice of the black slave; however, in conveying the black slave character and voice through Huck's narrative voice, Twain wields a great power. As readers of Twain and members of the culture in which he is an icon, our perception of what it was to be a black slave in America comes from Twain's own perspective. There is an interesting dynamic here: a black rhetoric is constructed by Twain's imperial white voice. Twain has second-handedly interpreted this foreign cultural rhetoric for his reader, controlling the public perception of the black slave, yet, in doing so, giving voice to a silenced people.

We ask whether Twain's endeavor has had a positive or negative impact. Though I would contend that competent readers appreciate the fact that Twain's novel epitomizes the potential fruitfulness of Pratt's "contact zone," there is a great potential danger in what Twain does. Twain, however, is able to construct such an authentic contact zone, without pretension or condescension, in which the white boy narrator grows to see the humanity in a black slave. Huck is able to appreciate Jim's humanity because Twain has written Jim with such depth and voice, as in Jim's feelings of betrayal upon the realization of Huck's prank: "En when I wake up en fine you back agin', all safe en soun', de tears come en I could a got down on my knees en kiss' yo' foot I's so thankful. En all you wuz thinkin 'bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie. Dat truck dah is trash; en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren's en makes 'em ashamed'"(Twain). Yes, Jim is made a fool in this scene, yet it is with such human emotion and sincerity that he responds, refusing to be an object of this boys gags, breaking free of the one dimensional stereotype.

But what would Royster say about *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*? She points out that "marginalized communities are not in a good position to ward off the intrusion of those authorized in mainstream communities to engage in willful action" (32). Certainly Jim is extracted from a marginalized people. Royster also, however, points out that "we must learn to treat the loved people and places of Others with care" and "resist locking ourselves into the tunnels of our own visions and direct experience" (33). Does Twain treat Jim with care, demonstrating respect for the culture from which his character was taken? Though, Royster's essay seems first to be critical of writing such as Twain's, it turns out to be more of a celebration of it. After all, Twain did not construct the vernacular of the black slave in America from illegitimate sources, but from black storytelling slaves themselves, with whom Twain shared rich experiences. We cannot rightly charge Twain with the type of misconduct of which Royster speaks in her first scene. Employing the guidelines she has set, we must propose that Twain also encourages us to "engage in better practices in cross-boundary discourse."

Melea Powell seems to be saying that knowledge has been codified by imperialists for the purposes of imposing it more efficiently upon the colonized. To draw another analogy to teaching, this is the teacher who imposes a strict structure on his students' writing, forcing

students to fit the mold instead of allowing for a genuine exploration and discovery. Powell says, "We have cut the wholeness of knowledge into little bits, scattered them to the four winds and now begin to reorganize them into categories invented to enable empire by bringing order to chaos and civilization to the savage." It's funny how true this rings to the classroom teacher. As high school teachers - of English in particular - we bring "civilization to the savage" teen - many instances - force-feeding them literacy and culture, by instructing them on what is great literature. I don't disagree with this exercise. In fact, I believe that it is of the utmost importance for students to read "great" literature; however, we must recognize the power we wield and wield it with respect and responsibility. It is also a shame, I agree, that we have compartmentalized knowledge and no amount of cross-curricular, integrated units is going to correct the injustice. It is a culture shift we need and it is through discourse, perhaps, that we attain this shift. For these reasons I believe it is important to teach a book as historically and culturally significant as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. For these reasons I believe also that it is vital to teach it well, which in this case means taking seriously the racially charged content of the novel and dealing with it realistically and constructively.

We draw further justification for this lesson also from Malea Powell's "Alt Dis: Alternative Discourses and the Academy," which states that "all acts of scholarship are battles in a war of words, and of worlds." The line brings together the traditional notion of rhetoric as synonymous with argumentation and the more broad sense of rhetoric as anything expressing the values of culture. Thus, in the act of, for example, assembling a curriculum for an American Literature course, we necessarily thrust certain voices and values forward while squelching others. We are players in the game to which Powell refers, a game of rhetorical power.

Academia is traditionally the abstract body that places value upon rhetoric and values: it writes the rule book. Anything that is not "academic" is alternative, like an alternative text that may be taught in an English classroom as a kind of break from the established canon. In questioning the word "alternative" as applied to discourse (a discourse which is "alternative" to the academic discourse) Powell bears to light the problematic hegemony of discourses. To label a certain discourse or rhetoric as alternative to "academic discourse" is to say that it is subordinate to that which is at the center. This is sticky. I certainly believe that there is an inherent hegemony in, for example, literature. I believe in a "canon" of literature, but that's the easy part. The strenuous exercise is constructing it, though I suppose even this is much easier than not constructing it: having it handed down to you as if on tablets from God is dangerously passive. There must be ceaseless discourse on several levels: discourse about which texts are given space at the front of the shelf, discourse about the discourse among texts, and discourse about the connotations of words and expressions. Twain gives us this ceaseless discourse, though we must hear him out. Throughout his life he was in tuned to the African American slave discourse to which he gives voice in this novel. No, he did not sit down with a panel of whites and blacks to construct the discourse we read in the novel, but he humanized blacks for an America that saw blacks as less than human. Twain himself was on the outside of the literary academia for much of his career, even as he attained great success. His style was antithetical to what academia represented. It is our era that unjustly reduces him to the genteel racist Civil War white. It is a

worthwhile effort to set the record straight by appreciating the value of a literary figure who valued the voices to the voiceless.

Twain did not promote or perpetuate "Academic Imperialism," as Powell coins it. He attempted to even the academic playing field. And we will never really gain understanding of each other if we merely "tolerate." We must make sure that "the discipline of rhetoric and composition [does not] become more than just another site of "Academic imperialism." In my opinion, we must not "tolerate" anything at all. We need to be individually intolerant of those things that compromise the integrity of truth and beauty as we know it. And the means to this end must not be to squelch that voice, but to rhetorically engage it in discourse.

Texts - whether literature or war memorials are constructed at a particular time for a particular reason. We must bring the texts alive for students by reconstructing the moment of construction or unveiling. Valuable texts - I'm thinking of literature in particular - are valuable as art for art's sake, valuable for their beauty, style, and so on, but we must help our students to appreciate these texts on a historical level as well. Though to keep the focus on the text itself, perhaps a better phrasing would be "take advantage of the larger context of the text in order to better appreciate the text."

Though inducing memory may not be the primary function of literary texts- though for some it unmistakably is - all texts contain some mnemonic quality. Since every text is a product of its time, every text must necessarily remind us, at least indirectly, of the moment in which it was written. This matter of context may have profound effects on our curriculum. Taking advantage of a cliched example, especially and perhaps only when we consider the historical context in which Twain was writing, do we grasp the absurdity of the question "Is Mark Twain racist?" And that is not to say that we cannot judge him racist on some level when we examine him from our place in the modern world, but more significantly, we come to see that he was ahead of his time.

materials review

To complete this lessons student will need a few basic items:

- a copy of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*
- multi-genre representations of the Minstrel Show
- critical essays on the the rhetoric of *Huck Finn*

This is a literary analysis unit. The major work of the unit is done in the novel itself. The materials that bring the Minstrel Show to life serve as a point of comparison for the novel. Students also need make use of academic critical essays on the novel. The essay included here makes claim that Twain uses the rhetoric of the Minstrel Show as a backdrop on which to establish the character of Jim and extend beyond it into the human realm. This and other essays that students must find on their own, provide for students examples of critical thinking and serve as a basis for their own critical thinking.

part # 1: Reading the Rhetoric of the Minstrel Show

Schedule:

- Throughout the first week of the five week comprehensive *Huck Finn* unit, students will examine the Minstrel Show in its various forms. As students encounter the character and rhetoric of Jim, they will already be setting themselves up for the essential question Is *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* just another Minstrel Show in its depiction of the African American slave Jim.

Directions:

- Examine the poster of the Minstrel Show, read the script, and view the show at the following link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfiNT6AKG0s&feature=related>.
- Get a sense for the rhetorical moves employed in images, the jokes, the mannerisms, etc., addressing the issue of power: whites exercising power over African Americans by controlling how they are perceived.
- Discuss how this rhetoric is achieved and why it is employed, and to what effect it was employed.
 - To draw out further discussion, throw into the mix examples like white colonizers depicting Native Americans as cannibals in order to justify conquering of them.
 - To develop further, read the rhetoric of photos and postcards from www.withoutsanctuary.org and discuss how the commemorative photography of lynchings informs us further as to the context in which Twain wrote.

Objectives

- Demonstrate an understanding of the rhetoric employed in the Minstrel Show.
- Demonstrate the ability to discuss how African Americans are depicted in the advertisement, the script, and the video of the minstrel show.

WOOD'S THEATRE

Regularly Established for the Season as a Temple of Minstrelsy

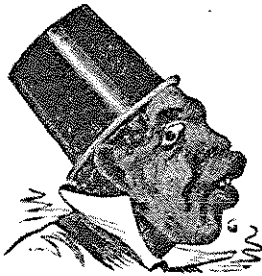
Manager and Proprietor,..... W. W. NEWCOMB

TUESDAY Evening, Oct. 29th, 1867.

INCREASED ATTRACTION WITH THE POPULAR

NEWCOMB'S

SECOND APPEARANCE OF



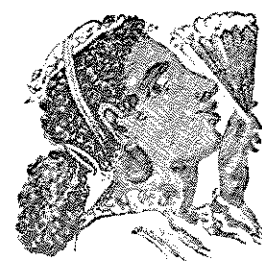
DICK PARKER!



The Celebrated Ethiopian Comedian,



IN HIS WONDERFUL



ECCENTRICITIES!

SUCCESS UNABATED!



"A Working Model"

[That's the title Paskman and Spaeth gave the "typical" minstrel show they included in their eulogistic study "Gentlemen, Be Seated!" They provided the model in 1928 to "those who may wish to try their hand at an amateur revival of this practical and still popular form of entertainment." The selection from it below tries to give you an idea of what the "entertainment" actually consisted of.]

INTERLOCUTOR: Gentlemen, be seated. [*Chord in G; accompanied by Tambourine.*] Well, Mr. Bones, how are you feeling this evening?

BONES: Very well, Mr. Interlocutor, and how are you -- how are all your folks?

INTERLOCUTOR: We're all well, excepting my brother. You see, a team of horses ran away with him, and he's been laid up since.

BONES: That's a very strange coincidence, same thing happened to my brother.

INTERLOCUTOR: You don't say.

BONES: The only difference is, it was my brother who ran away with the team of horses; he's been laid up ever since, but they'll let him out next month.

...

[Cross-fire between Bones and Tambo.]

BONES: Music makes me feel so happy!

TAMBO: Well, you ain't going to be happy no more. You're going to be a soldier and I'm going to train you. I'm a first-class soldier trainer, I is. I'm a regular lion trainer, I is.

BONES: You is a lion trainer?

TAMBO: That's what I said. I'se a hard-boiled lioner trainer, I is.

BONES: You're a lion son of a gun.

TAMBO: What's that you said -- what's that you said?

BONES: I said I'd like to be trying that gun.

TAMBO: When I says you try that gun, you'll try it and not before. Remember, I'se de boss. Has you made up your mind to be a good soldier, boy? -- Cause, if you hasn't, I'se going to start right in to make it up for you.

BONES: Of course I is, of course I is.

TAMBO: Now, soldier, if you was to see the enemy coming, would you run or would you follow me?

BONES: I'd be doing both, because, if any enemy approaches, I'll be running right behind you.

TAMBO: Was your pappy a soldier?

BONES: Yessir, he was at the battle of Bull Run. He was one of the ones that run. [*All laugh.*]

...

INTERLOCUTOR: Our golden-voiced baritone will sing that touching ballad, *Darling Nelly Gray*.

There's a low green valley on the old Kentucky shore,
There I've whiled many happy hours away,
A-sitting and a-singing by the little cottage door,
Where lived my darling Nelly Gray.

[CHORUS:]

Oh! my poor Nelly Gray, they have taken you away,
And I'll never see my darling any more,
I'm sitting by the river and I'm weeping all the day,
For you've gone from the old Kentucky shore.

When the moon had climbed the mountain, and the stars were shining
too,
Then I'd take my darling Nelly Gray,
And we'd float down the river in my little red canoe.
While my banjo sweetly I would play. [Chorus]

One night I went to see her, but "She's gone!" the neighbors say,
The white man bound her with his chain;
They have taken her to Georgia for to wear her life away,
As she toils in the cotton and the cane. [Chorus]

My canoe is under water, and my banjo is unstrung,
I'm tired of living any more,
My eyes shall look downward, and my song shall be unsung,
While I stay on the old Kentucky shore. [Chorus]

My eyes are getting blinded, and I cannot see my way;
Hark! there's somebody knocking at the door --
Oh! I hear the angels calling, and I see my Nelly Gray,
Farewell to the old Kentucky shore.

INTERLOCUTOR: Now, Tambo, didn't that song touch you?

TAMBO: No, but the fellow that sang it did. He still owes me five.

INTERLOCUTOR: Enough! Enough!

TAMBO: He sure has got enough from me, I'll say he has.

INTERLOCUTOR: I'm astonished at you, Why, the idea of a man of your mental calibre talking about such sordid matters, right after listening to such a beautiful song! Have you no sentiment left?

TAMBO: No, I haven't got a cent left.

INTERLOCUTOR: I didn't say cent, I said sentiment -- sentiment -- the tender thought that rules the world -- the language of the flowers -- the music of Mendelssohn -- all that arouses sweet feelings. Why, man, can't you feel?

TAMBO: I feel he ain't never going to pay me my five back. [All laugh.]

INTERLOCUTOR: I'm afraid that music, the divine attribute of genius, does not appeal to you -- music, the subtle harmonies of which have led men to battle for their country, to die without a thought of the future.

TAMBO: When they die, how are they going to pay me my money back?

INTERLOCUTOR: I'm not talking about money, but about music. Doesn't it soothe you? Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast, and you have no love for music! Bones, do you love music?

BONES: I should say I do. Why, whenever I hears music, my heart goes bumpity-bump.

INTERLOCUTOR: You're mistaken, your heart does nothing of the kind.

BONES: I guess I ought to know what my heart is doing.

INTERLOCUTOR: I tell you that you are mistaken. Your heart has nothing to do with your emotion. Your heart has no feeling, it is dumb.

BONES: My heart is bum?

INTERLOCUTOR: Not bum -- dumb!

BONES: I got a bum heart?

INTERLOCUTOR: No, you haven't a bum heart. What I mean is that it isn't in your heart that your feeling exists.

BONES: It is.

INTERLOCUTOR: It isn't.

BONES: Say, whose heart is this, anyhow? [All laugh]

INTERLOCUTOR: Tambo, I hear you were up before the judge the other day. What seemed to be the reason for your being summoned?

TAMBO: Well, I'll tell you, Mr. Interlocutor, I was summoned to appear befo' de judge fo' participatin' in rollin' out those African dominoes.

INTERLOCUTOR: Oh, I see, you were playing dice.

TAMBO: Yessir, that's it.

INTERLOCUTOR: Well, what did the judge say to you?

TAMBO: Why, he jest sed, "I'm going to fine you

O Nancy Fat she was a gal, Fair and tall and slender,
The fairest gal I ever saw, In all the female gender,
A lovely foot I know she had, Into a boot to thrust,
Her ankles were made for use, To keep it from the dust.

[CHORUS:]

O Nancy Fat,
What are you at,
I love you as no other,
O Nancy Fat,
Get out of that,
With sweetness me you'll smother.

O Nancy Fat she had a mouth, I cannot now describe it,
It opened like a safety valve, when she wished to divide it;
And well I knows she had a nose, and everybody knows it,
The end of it just looks as if the brandy bottle froze it. [Chorus]

O Nancy Fat had two such eyes, like burnt holes in a blanket,
The inspiration from her soul, I took it in and drank it;
She says this darkey am so sweet, she loves me like molasses;
Dat small machine she calls her heart, goes pit-pat as it passes.
[Chorus]

If Nancy Fat does marry me, how nice we'll live together,
She and I and all the bairns, like ducks in rainy weather;
And as we march unto de church, and hear de bells a-ringin',
De joy will break dis nigger's heart, to hear de darkies singin'.

...

INTERLOCUTOR: Tambo, do you know anything about astronomy?

TAMBO: I haven't met the lady in years.

INTERLOCUTOR: No, no. Astronomy is the study of the nebular hypothesis, the study of planets. For instance, do you know that the sun is so far away it would take two thousand years for a wireless message to reach there?

TAMBO: Maybe you better send a picture postcard.

INTERLOCUTOR: Good heavens, man, don't you realize that the sun is often at a distance of ninety-three million miles?

TAMBO: Oh, that must be out near New Rochelle!

INTERLOCUTOR: New Rochelle! Nothing of the kind. Don't you know that the sun gives us all our light?

TAMBO: Sun may give us our light, but I notice that the gas company makes us pay for it.

INTERLOCUTOR: Scientists have estimated the sun travels toward the earth with great velocity.

TAMBO: I used to ride one.

INTERLOCUTOR: I don't believe you know what velocity is.

TAMBO: Sure I do; it's a bicycle with three legs.

INTERLOCUTOR: Do you know that the sun gives us life?

TAMBO: That's nothing. I know a judge who gives us the same thing! *[All laugh.]*

INTERLOCUTOR: Ladies and Gentlemen, we will now close our minstrel show with the entire company singing *Oh! Susanna*.

I came from Alabama, wid my banjo on my knee,
I'm g'wan to Louisiana, my true love for to see,
It rain'd all night the day I left, the weather it was dry,
The sun so hot I froze to death; Susanna, don't you cry.

Oh! Susannah, Oh don't you cry for me,
I've come from Alabama, wid my banjo on my knee.

I jumped aboard de telegraph, and travelled down de ribber,
De 'lectric fluid magnified, and killed five hundred nigger.
De bullgine bust, de horse runs off, I really thought I'd die;
I shut my eyes to hold my breath: Susanna, don't you cry.
[Chorus]

I had a dream the odder night, when eb'ry thing was still;
I thought I saw Susannah, a-coming down de hill.
De buckwheat cake war in her mouth, de tear was in her eye,
Says I, I'm coming from de South, Susanna, don't you cry.
[Chorus]

I soon will be in New Orleans, and den I'll look all round,
And when I find Susannah, I'll fall upon the ground.
But if I do not find her, dis darkie'll surely die;
And when I'm dead and buried, Susanna, don't you cry. [Chorus]

SOURCE: "*Gentlemen, Be Seated!*", by Dailey Paskman and Sigmund Spaeth
(Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1928)

Supplementary Rhetoric

from www.withoutsanctuary.org

Compare Huck to the boy smiling at the camera in one of the photos from Without Sanctuary: Huck might have similarly relished in such an "outing" because everyone else was relishing in it, but once Huck is taken out of the society, he is free to form his own opinion.



part # 2: Applying the Rhetoric of the Minstrel Show

Schedule:

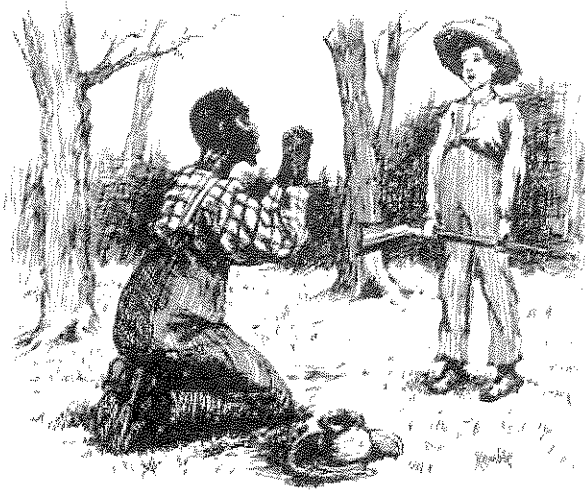
- Throughout weeks two through four of the five week comprehensive *Huck Finn* unit, students will examine Mark Twain's rhetoric in the novel, particularly his depiction or treatment of Jim. As students work their way through the text, they will employ what they've learned about its context from the Minstrel Show and examine how Huck, Pap, and Jim are depicted.

Directions:

- As you read through the novel highlight certain passages that exemplify Mark Twain's depiction of the main characters and make note of how they are depicted.
- As you read through the novel highlight certain passages that exemplify the relationships between Huck and Jim, focusing on pieces that make Jim look stupid or intelligent (though note distinctions between, for example, stupid and ignorant), unfeeling or humane in comparison to other characters.

Objectives:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the plot, relationships (particularly the relationship between Huck and Jim), and the language of the *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.
- Demonstrate the ability to effectively read *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* for its depiction and treatment of Jim and other characters to determine the overall ideology of the novel.



Twain's treatment of Jim

We went tip-toeing along a path amongst the trees back towards the end of the widow's garden, stooping down so as the branches wouldn't scrape our heads. When we was passing by the kitchen I fell over a root and made a noise. We scrouched down and laid still. Miss Watson's big nigger, named Jim, was setting in the kitchen door; we could see him pretty clear, because there was a light behind him. He got up and stretched his neck out about a minute, listening. Then he says:

"Who dah?"

He listened some more; then he come tip-toeing down and stood right between us; we could a touched him, nearly. Well, likely it was minutes and minutes that there warn't a sound, and we all there so close together. There was a place on my ankle that got to itching; but I dasn't scratch it; and then my ear begun to itch; and next my back,

right between my shoulders. Seemed like I'd die if I couldn't scratch. Well, I've noticed that thing plenty of times since. If you are with the quality, or at a funeral, or trying to go to sleep when you ain't sleepy- if you are anywheres where it won't do for you to scratch, why you will itch all over in upwards of a thousand places. Pretty soon Jim says:

"Say- who is you? What is you? Dog my cats ef I didn' hear sumf'n. Well, I knows what I's gwyne to do. I's gwyne to set down here and listen tell I hears it agin."

So he set down on the ground betwixt me and Tom. He leaned his back up against a tree, and stretched his legs out till one of them most touched one of mine. My nose begun to itch. It itched till the tears come into my eyes. But I dasn't scratch. Then it begun to itch on the inside. Next I got to itching underneath. I didn't know how I was going to set still. This miserableness went on as much as six or seven minutes; but it seemed a sight longer than that. I was itching in eleven different places now. I reckoned I couldn't stand it more'n a minute longer, but I set my teeth hard and got ready to try. Just then Jim begun to breathe heavy; next he begun to snore- and then I was pretty soon comfortable again.

Tom he made a sign to me- kind of a little noise with his mouth- and we went creeping away on our hands and knees. When we was ten foot off, Tom whispered to me and wanted to tie Jim to the tree for fun; but I said no; he might wake and make a disturbance, and then they'd find out I warn't in. Then Tom said he hadn't got candles enough, and he would slip in the kitchen and get some more. I didn't want him to try. I said Jim might wake up and come. But Tom wanted to resk it; so we slid in there and got three candles, and Tom laid five cents on the table for pay. Then we got out, and I was in a sweat to get away; but nothing would do Tom but he must crawl to where Jim was, on his hands and knees, and play something on him. I waited, and it seemed a good while, everything was so still and lonesome.

As soon as Tom was back, we cut along the path, around the garden fence, and by-and-by fetched up on the steep top of the hill the other side of the house. Tom said he slipped Jim's hat off of his head and hung it on the limb right over him, and Jim stirred a little, but he didn't wake. Afterwards Jim said the witches bewitched him and put him in a trance, and rode him all over the State, and then set him under the trees again and hung his hat on a limb to show who done it. And next time Jim told it he said they rode him down to New Orleans; and after that, every time he told it he spread it more and more, till by-and-by he said they rode him over the world, and tired him most to death, and his back was all over saddle-boils. Jim was monstrous proud about it, and he got so he wouldn't hardly notice the other niggers. Niggers would come miles to hear Jim tell about it, and he was more looked up to than any nigger in that country. Strange niggers would stand with their mouths open and look him all over, same as if he was a wonder. Niggers is always talking about witches in the dark by the kitchen fire; but whenever one was talking and letting on to know all about such things, Jim would happen in and say, "Hm! What you know 'bout witches?" and that nigger was corked up and had to take a back seat. Jim always kept that five-center piece around his neck with a string and said it was a charm the devil give to him with his own hands and told him he could cure anybody with it and fetch witches whenever he wanted to, just by saying something to it; but he never told what it was he said to it. Niggers would come from all around there and give Jim anything they had, just for a sight of that five-center piece; but they wouldn't touch it, because the devil had had his hands on it. Jim was most ruined, for a servant, because he got so stuck up on account of having seen the devil and been rode by witches.



Twain's treatment of Huck (a point of comparison)

The widow she cried over me, and called me a poor lost lamb, and she called me a lot of other names, too, but she never meant no harm by it. She put me in them new clothes again, and I couldn't do nothing but sweat and sweat, and feel all cramped up. Well, then, the old thing commenced again. The widow rung a bell for supper, and you had to come to time. When you got to the table you couldn't go right to eating, but you had to wait for the widow to tuck down her head and grumble a little over the victuals, though there wasn't really anything the matter with them. That is, nothing only everything was cooked by itself. In a barrel of odds and ends it is different; things get mixed up, and the juice kind of swaps around, and the things go better.

After supper she got out her book and learned me about Moses and the Bulrushers; and I was in a sweat to find out all about him; but by-and-by she let it out that Moses had been dead a considerable long time; so then I didn't care no more about him; because I don't take no stock in dead people.



Twain's treatment of Pap (as a point of comparison)

"Don't you give me none o' your lip," says he. "You've put on considerable many frills since I been away. I'll take you down a peg before I get done with you. You're educated, too, they say; can read and write. You think you're better'n your father, now, don't you, because he can't? I'll take it out of you. Who told you you might meddle with such hifalut'n foolishness, hey?- who told you you could?"

"The widow. She told me."

"The widow, hey?- and who told the widow she could put in her shovel about a thing that ain't none of her business?"

"Nobody never told her."

"Well, I'll learn her how to meddle. And looky here- you drop that school, you hear? I'll learn people to bring up a boy to put on airs over his own father and let on to be better'n what he is. You lemme catch you fooling around that school again, you hear? Your mother couldn't read, and she couldn't write, nuther, before she died. None of the family couldn't, before they died. I can't; and here you're a-swellin' yourself up

like this. I ain't the man to stand it- you hear? Say- lemme hear you read."

I took up a book and begun something about General Washington and the wars. When I'd read about a half a minute, he fetched the book a whack with his hand and knocked it across the house. He says:

"It's so. You can do it. I had my doubts when you told me. Now looky here; you stop that putting on frills. I won't have it. I'll lay for you, my smarty; and if I catch you about that school I'll tan you good. First you know you'll get religion, too. I never see such a son."

He took up a little blue and yaller picture of some cows and a boy, and says:

"What's this?"

"It's something they give me for learning my lessons good." He tore it up, and says-

"I'll give you something better- I'll give you a cowhide."

He set there a-mumbling and a-growling a minute, and then he says-

"Ain't you a sweet-scented dandy, though? A bed; and bedclothes; and a look'n-glass; and a piece of carpet on the floor- and your own father got to sleep with the hogs in the tanyard. I never see such a son. I bet I'll take some o' these frills out o' you before I'm done with you. Why there ain't no end to your airs- they say you're rich. Hey?- how's that?"

"They lie- that's how."

"Looky here- mind how you talk to me; I'm a-standing about all I can stand, now- so don't gimme no sass. I've been in town two days, and I hain't heard nothing but about you bein' rich. I heard about it away down the river, too. That's why I come. You git me that money to-morrow- I want it."

"I hain't got no money."

"It's a lie. Judge Thatcher's got it. You git it. I want it."

"I hain't got no money, I tell you. You ask Judge Thatcher; he'll tell you the same."

"All right. I'll ask him; and I'll make him pungle, too, or I'll know the reason why. Say- how much you got in your pocket? I want it."

"I hain't got only a dollar, and I want that to-"

"It don't make no difference what you want it for- you just shell it out."



Twain's treatment of BOTH Jim and Huck

It did come, too. It was a Tuesday that we had that talk. Well, after dinner Friday, we was laying around in the grass at the upper end of the ridge, and got out of tobacco. I went to the cavern to get some, and found a rattlesnake in there. I killed him, and curled him up on the foot of Jim's blanket, ever so natural, thinking there'd be some fun when Jim found him there. Well, by night I forgot all about the snake, and when Jim flung himself down on the blanket while I struck a light, the snake's mate was there, and bit him.

He jumped up yelling, and the first thing the light showed was the varmit curled up and ready for another spring. I laid him out in a second with a stick, and Jim grabbed pap's whisky jug and begun to pour it down.

He was barefooted, and the snake bit him on the heel. That all comes of my being such a fool as to not remember that wherever you leave a dead snake its mate always comes and curls around it. Jim told me to chop off the snake's head and throw it away, and then skin the body and roast a piece of it. I done it, and he eat it and said it would help cure him. He made me take off the rattles and tie them around his wrist, too. He said that would help. Then I slid out quiet and throwed the snakes clear away amongst the bushes; for I warn't going to let Jim find out it was all my fault, not if I could help it.

Jim sucked and sucked at the jug, and now and then he got out of his head and pitched around and yelled; but every time he come to himself he went to sucking at the jug again. His foot swelled up pretty big, and so did his leg; but by-and-by the drunk begun to come, and so I judged he was all right; but I'd druther been bit with a snake than pap's whisky.

Jim was laid up for four days and nights. Then the swelling was all gone and he was around again. I made up my mind I wouldn't ever take ahold of a snake-skin again with my hands, now that I see what had come of it. Jim said he reckoned I would believe him next time. And he said that handling a snake-skin was such awful bad luck that

maybe we hadn't got to the end of it yet. He said he druther see the new moon over his left shoulder as much as a thousand times than take up a snake-skin in his hand. Well, I was getting to feel that way myself, though I've always reckoned that looking at the new moon over your left shoulder is one of the carelessest and foolishhest things a body can do. Old Hank Bunker done it once, and bragged about it; and in less than two years he got drunk and fell off of the shot tower and spread himself out so that he was just a kind of a layer, as you may say; and they slid him edgeways between two barn doors for a coffin, and buried him so, so they say, but I didn't see it. Pap told me. But anyway, it all come of looking at the moon that way, like a fool.

part # 3: Developing a Position on Twain's Rhetoric and the Implications of that Rhetoric

Schedule:

- Throughout week five of the of the five week comprehensive *Huck Finn* unit, students will compare the rhetoric of the Minstrel Show with Mark Twain's rhetoric in the novel. The cultural rhetoric unit and the comprehensive unit will culminate at the end of the week with an in-class essay test and a multi-genre homework project.

Directions:

- Develop a thesis that establishes a position on Twain rhetoric in the novel, asserting some level of similarity or difference between his rhetoric and the rhetoric of the Minstrel Show.
- After you have constructed a thesis, read two or more critical essays and determine how the assertions in those essays compare with your own.

Optional Activity:

- Compare the rhetoric of the Minstrel Show with the rhetoric of contemporary African American culture as presented in the following video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kc4EwD5hoA>.

Objectives:

- Students will demonstrate an understanding of at least two critical essays on the rhetoric of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to compare the rhetoric of the Minstrel Show with the rhetoric of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by accessing the knowledge they've acquired thus far and developing a comparative critical discussion.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to formulate a thesis about Twain's treatment of Jim.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to express the rhetoric of

responding to critical essays

Finding Jim Behind the Mask: The Revelation of African American Humanity in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

by Leslie Gregory

Lauded by literary critics, writers and the general reading public, Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* commands one of the highest positions in the canon of American literature. On an international level, it is "a fixture among the classics of world literature" (Kaplan 352). It "is a staple from junior high . . . to graduate school" and "is second only to Shakespeare in the frequency with which it appears in the classroom . . ." (Carey-Webb 22). During the push for school desegregation in the 1950s, however, many parents raised serious objections to the teaching of this text. These objections centered around Twain's negative characterization of Jim and his extensive use of the term "nigger" throughout the text. Many people felt this characterization, along with the most powerful racial epithet in the English language, were insensitive to African American heritage and personally offensive in racially mixed classrooms.

Twain's stereotypical depiction of Jim originates from traditions of his time: "Writing at a time when the blackfaced minstrel was still popular, and shortly after a war which left even the abolitionists weary of those problems associated with the Negro, Twain fitted Jim into the outlines of the minstrel tradition . . ." (Ellison 421-22). Minstrel shows, first appearing in the 1840s, were theatrical productions typically performed by white actors who blackened their faces with greasepaint and wore white gloves "to render comic burlesques of African American speech and manners" (Carey-Webb 24). The function of the minstrel mask, the "black-faced figure of white fun," was "to veil the humanity of Negroes thus reduced to a sign, and to repress the white audience's awareness of its moral identification with its own acts and with the human ambiguities pushed behind the mask" (Elision 421).

Twain completed *Huckleberry Finn* in 1884, at a time when black identity in American society was undefined. Even though blacks had been granted citizenship in 1870 by the 15th Amendment to the Constitution, Southern white society still looked upon them as sub-human creatures without souls or feelings. Post-Civil War Federal Reconstruction programs had failed miserably in their goal to re-unite a divided nation and to give economic and legal assistance to blacks struggling to find their place in white mainstream society. Instead of improving the status of blacks and establishing in practice those rights to which they were constitutionally entitled, the programs only succeeded in proliferating the alienation of an already demoralized white South and escalating racial tensions. The subsequent passage of Jim Crow Laws fortified the existing chasm between whites and blacks by legalizing segregation and institutionalizing the disenfranchisement of blacks from American society. W. E. B. DuBois frames a tragic but accurate picture of black status during this time in his work *The Souls of Black Folk*: "The shades of the prison-house closed round about us all: walls strait and stubborn to the whitest, but relentlessly narrow, tall, and unscalable to sons of the night who must plod darkly on in

resignation, or beat unavailing palms against the stone, or steadily, half hopelessly, watch the streak of blue above" (45).

Within the context of this historical period, Twain penned Jim, stereotyping him in the "minstrel tradition," with Negro slave dialect and a mind imbued with superstition (Ellison 422). In defense of Twain's characterization of Jim, however, Daniel Hoffman writes, "The minstrel stereotype . . . was the only possible starting-point for a [Southern-born] white author attempting to deal with Negro character a century ago" (435). Although Twain may have used a negative stereotype in his creation of Jim, throughout the novel he provides his audience with a clear view of Jim's humanity behind the minstrel mask. This contradiction reflects the confused view that many held of African Americans in Twain's time, which considered blacks as subhuman with no feelings and emotions even while this view began to be challenged.

In order to subvert Huck's misconception of "nigger" Jim, Twain first exposes Jim's humanity when the two are separated from each other on the river during a dense fog. Huck, alone in a canoe, searches for Jim, who is alone on the raft. When Huck finally catches up with the raft, he finds Jim asleep, apparently exhausted from the terrifying ordeal. Instead of waking Jim and celebrating their reunion, Huck decides to play a trick on him. Lying down beside Jim, Huck awakens him and says, "Hello, Jim, have I been asleep? Why didn't you stir me up?" (285). Jim is overjoyed to see his friend alive and tells him so. Huck, however, acts as if he had never left the raft and convinces Jim that he has dreamed the entire episode. Confused and intimidated by Huck's foolery, Jim acquiesces to the lie and thus his own sense of inferiority. Jim reverts to the only means he knows to help him rationalize his bewilderment--superstition. He redefines his real experience with a fictitious interpolation "painted up considerable" with supernatural warnings and signs (287).

However, when Huck mockingly points to "the leaves and rubbish on the raft, and the smashed oar" and asks "what does these things stand for?" Jim realizes that Huck has played a mean trick on him (287). Jim is deeply hurt by Huck's cruelty and exposes the depth of his feelings by telling Huck:

What do dey stan' for? I's gwyne to tell you. When I got all wore out wid work, en wid de callin' for you, en went to sleep, my heart wuz mos' broke bekase you wuz los, en I didn' k'yer no mo what become er me en de raf'. En when I wake up en fine you back agin', all safe en soun', de tears come en I could a got down on my knees en kiss you' foot I's so thankful. En all you wuz thinking 'bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie. (287)

Jim chastises Huck telling him he is no better than the pile of trash on the raft: "trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head or dey fren's en makes 'em ashamed" (287). Huck is surprised at Jim's capacity to possess such strong, "human" feelings. His perception of Jim is so subverted that he, despite some reluctance--"It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself to go and humble myself to a nigger"--acknowledges Jim's feelings and his humanity by apologizing to him. Huck decides that he wouldn't "do him no more mean tricks; and I wouldn't done that one if I'd knowed it would make him feel that way" (287).

Twain's audience is given another view of Jim's humanity when Jim shows his capacity to feel lonesome for his family. "Huck overhears Jim often lamenting the loss of his family . . .

"(Camfield 105). One morning, Huck sees him "setting there with his head down betwixt his knees, moaning and mourning to himself" (337). Huck admits: "I do believe he cared just as much for his people as white folks does for their'n. It don't seem natural, but I reckon it's so" (337). Although this statement clearly reflects Huck's "white version of the meaning of blackness," he nonetheless acknowledges Jim's capacity for human love (Jones 177).

Twain once again looks behind the minstrel mask to reveal Jim's humanity in a profoundly moving story told by Jim to Huck about a time when he struck his four-year-old daughter, 'Lizabeth: "'one day she was a-stannin' around', en I says to her, I says: 'Shet de do!' She never done it; jis' stood dah, kiner smilin' up at me. It make me mad . . .'" (337). Jim tells her again, but she still does not respond, so he "'fetch' her a slap side de head dat sont her a'sprawlin'" (337). Jim is unaware that his daughter's recent bout with scarlet fever has made her deaf. He orders her to get to work one more time, but she still does not respond. Just as he is about to strike her again, Jim notices that she does not react to their cabin door slamming shut from a gust of wind: "'de chile never move!'" (338). Jim finally realizes that his daughter never heard him. He knows now that she could not respond to him because "'she was plumb deaf en dumb'" (338). Overcome with deep remorse, Jim tells Huck: "I bust out a-cryin' en grab her up in my arms en say, 'Oh, de po' little thing! de Lord God Amighty fogive po' ole Jim, kaze he never gwyne to fogive hissself as long's he live!'" (338). Huck is noticeably silent at the end of Jim's story, leaving Twain's audience with the responsibility of acknowledging Jim's humanity on their own.

A final view of Jim's humanity comes at the end of the text. Jim is a prisoner on the Phelps's Farm awaiting his return to slavery. Huck has discovered where Jim is being held and has decided to help him escape. Then Tom arrives on the farm, and they both begin to plan the escape. Huck "went to thinking out a plan," but he soon defers to Tom's elaborate but ludicrous plan: "I see in a minute it was worth fifteen of mine, for style, and would make Jim just as free a man as mine would . . ." (384). Jim has little choice but to bow to Tom's dehumanizing, manipulative plan, hiding behind the protective minstrel mask of "humility, ignorance, emotional deadpan, deference and placatory compliance" that all slaves were forced to wear in order to survive under white supremacy and hostility (MacLeod 12). Despite literary criticism to the contrary, however, Jim does not relinquish his humanity. "What Twain shows us, rather, is that Jim is and continues to be a man--but a man under the ugly compulsion to enact a demeaning stereotype, as defensive mask against those who would deny his humanity" (MacLeod 12).

Nowhere in the novel is Jim's humanity more apparent than when he offers the ultimate sacrifice--his freedom--to save Tom's life. Huck and Tom help Jim escape from the Phelps' Farm, and in the process, Tom is wounded. It soon becomes apparent that his injuries are serious. Jim volunteers to stay with Tom while Huck fetches a doctor, even though he knows that he will probably be captured and returned to slavery. Believing that Tom would do the same for him if their places were reversed, Jim says:

Ef it wuz him dat 'uz bein' sot free, en one er de boys wuz to git shot, would he say, 'Go on en save me, nemmine 'bout a doctor f'r to save dis one? Is dat like Mars Tom Sawyer? Would he say dat: You bet he wouldn't! Well, den, is Jim gwyne to say it? No, sah--I doan 'budge a step out'n dis place, 'dout a doctor; not if it's forty year! (408)

Huck acknowledges Jim's unselfish act of humanity through the only perspective he knows--his white consciousness: "I knowed he was white inside, and I reckoned he'd say what he did say--so it was all right, now, and I told Tom I was agoing for a doctor" (408). Huck goes to town, finds the doctor, and sends him to where Tom is lying. Jim hides in the bushes and waits. When the doctor finds Tom and realizes the seriousness of his wounds he says, "I got to have help, somehow; and the minute I says it, out crawls this nigger from somewheres, and says he'll help, and he done it too, and done it very well" (414). Even though the doctor admits, "I never see a nigger that was a better nuss or faithfuller, and yet he was resking his freedom to do it . . ." he does what he considers his rightful duty and has Jim captured (414).

Twain used the minstrel tradition in his creation of Jim's character. However, throughout the novel, he also provided his audience with a clear view of Jim's humanity behind the minstrel mask. Twain's juxtaposition of Jim the minstrel and Jim the human being is reflective of the ambiguity of black humanity in the late 1800s. Perhaps this image was also reflective of Twain's own personal search to identify black humanity. Ralph Ellison writes: "it is from behind this stereotype mask that we see Jim's dignity and human complexity--or Twain's complexity--emerge" (422).

In *Was Huck Black?* Shelley Fishkin writes: "In *Huckleberry Finn* and throughout his life and work, Mark Twain interrogated his culture's categories and conventions of what it meant to be 'black or white'" (79). Fishkin contends that Twain may not have done this "consistently or consciously, or that he invariably succeeded in transcending those categories and conventions. On the contrary, it could be argued that, in a number of key ways, he left them in place" (79). However, by giving Jim one of the central voices in the novel and demonstrating Jim's capacity to feel deep, human emotions, Twain demonstrates the contradictions of his culture, portraying Jim through the minstrel stereotype meanwhile revealing the fundamental reality of African American humanity.

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assessment

long composition

Twain is categorized as a humorist. Is he only a humorist, or is he trying to do more than make you laugh?

Is Twain's treatment of Jim consistent with the type of base, degrading humor of the Minstrel Show, or is its rhetoric contradictory with the rhetoric of the Minstrel Show? Within this original essay include excerpt of and reaction to some of the critical reading we've done on the subject to ground ground your own assertions within established scholarly thought.

- supplementary description of the assignment -

Students will analyze the author's treatment of a key character to discern whether or not Twain was "ahead of his time" or consistent with the time, a point that will be weighed against the treatment of blacks in one of the most popular forms of entertainment at the time of the novel's conception and at the time of the setting of the novel: the minstrel show. Upon making this case with ample analysis of both the text of the novel and the minstrel show, students will use this case as a basis by which to agree or disagree with the certain scholarly articles on Twain's rhetoric in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Students will write 5- 7 double-spaced typed, twelve-font pages with an original title that enhances the reader's understanding of the composition.