

Themes in Huckleberry Finn Notes

Emancipation Proclamation - September 2, 1862, freed slaves in area of rebellion, did not free slaves in areas under Union control

Reconstruction - Period after the Civil War, rebidding the South and readmitting them into the Union

Jim Crow Laws - Southern Laws restricting colored people, for example must not strike a white, but have to give up a seat for a white

Allegory - something that can have a hidden meaning or message

Superstition - belief in supernatural beings, i.e. ghosts

Precept - mental concept that is developed because of a perception

Mob Mentality - the ways in which mob thinks and then in-turn respond to events

Bildungsroman - a novel dealing with one person's formative years or spiritual education

Hypocrisy - the practice of claiming to have moral standards to which one own's behavior does not conform

Satire - the use of humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices

Irony - the expression of one's meaning by using language that signifies the opposite

Dialect - form of language particular to one region

Parody - an imitation of the style of a particular writer, i.e. Star Wars and Star Balls, Star Balls is a parody of Star Wars

Themes:

Racism and Slavery -

written after Emancipation Proclamation which abolished slavery, but time period of story set during slavery

during Reconstruction, a less institutionalized form of slavery existed in the South (Jim Crow laws)

allegorical portrayal of conditions of "Blacks" in U.S. after end of slavery

Hypocrisy of "Civilized" Society

society's laws vs. higher moral values

rulers and precepts that reflect faulty logic

civilized vs. natural

a "just" society that condones slavery

unsteady justice is blinded by cowardice, prejudice, and a lack of common sense

seemingly good and character are slave owner

hypocrisy of civilized society which values morality, but condones slavery

Freedom

importance of individual thinking and ideas

escaping an illogical and oppressive society

Mississippi River as a safe haven

slavery vs. liberty

outcasts labeled by citizens (mob mentality) are arguably the only truly free characters

Food

food plays a prominent role in the novel

in Huck's childhood, he often fights pigs for food and eats out of "a barrel of odds and ends"

thus, provided Huck with food becomes a symbol of people caring for and protecting him

for example, in the first chapter, the Widow Douglas feeds Huck, and later on Jim becomes his symbolic caretakers, feeding and watching over him on Jackson's Island