

Decision Education Foundation English Curriculum

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

by Mark Twain

Unit Snapshot

<i>Designed For</i>	High School Students (Grades 11 or 12)
<i>Essential Questions</i>	What makes some decision so much harder to make than others? How do choices affect community?
<i>Content and Skill Focus</i>	<p>Decision Topics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• questions for assessing decision quality• decisions end with action• diversity of opinion and experience improve decisions• role of values and society in decision making• facing hard choices with both head and heart <p>English Topics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• use of irony to create meaning• importance of narrative voice• literary motif: nature vs. nurture• close reading and attention to detail as means to successful literary analysis
<i>Expected Outcomes</i>	Knowledge of six decision quality questions Ability to apply those questions to both literary and personal situations Understanding of how decisions reveal characters' values Improved speaking and writing skills
<i>Kinds of Assessment</i>	Essay on Huck's decision making Decision journal Two in-class close reading exercises Optional performance task that explores the decision of whether or not the novel should be banned
<i>Time Required</i>	A minimum of four class periods
<i>Comments</i>	Intended to supplement an existing plan of study for <i>The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> , this unit focuses students attention on Huck's challenging decision of whether or not to betray his friend, Jim. As they explore Huck's thinking and feelings, students will have a chance to apply what they learn to a difficult personal decision.

(Version 7)

Overview

General Description: This plan, designed for students in grades 11-12, is intended to be part of a larger unit on Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Through exercises and discussion focused on significant decisions in the story, students will explore character development, motivation, irony, and conflict in the novel. With minor adjustments teachers can use the material either as an introduction to elements of good decision making, or as a review once students have explored the individual topics in greater depth.

Duration: This plan is designed for four class periods, but teachers will need to devote homework time for students to complete the essay assignment and additional class time for the **Optional Performance Task** (see **Assessment**).

Background and Decision Perspective: Ever since it first appeared in the late nineteenth century, Mark Twain's novel has inspired lively controversy:

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, first published in America in January 1885, has always been in trouble. According to Ernest Hemingway, it was the "one book" from which "all modern American literature" came, and contemporary critics and scholars have treated it as one of the greatest American works of art. Of all MT's novels, it was also the one that sold best at its initial appearance. On the other hand, it was condemned by many reviewers in MT's time as coarse and by many commentators in our time as racist. In 1885 it was banished from the shelves of the Concord Public Library, an act that attracted a lot of publicity and discussion in the press. It is still frequently in the news, as various schools and school systems across the country either ban it from or restore it to their classrooms. (From *Mark Twain and His Times* by Stephen Railton, English Department, University of Virginia, <http://etext.virginia.edu/railton/huckfinn/huchompg.html>)

While Mark Twain's novel is an engaging story about the adventures of an abused boy and a slave on their quest for better lives, as Railton suggests it is also much more. The controversy this novel has stirred up, particularly current issues about language, provide students with a way to enter the conversation about racial conflict that is still a part of American life. Before the first reading assignment, teachers should take the time to help students understand both Mark Twain's purpose to provide an accurate sketch of his times as well as the various reactions to the novel since it was published. Once students understand the context and controversy, they will be equipped to form their own opinions about the racially charged language they encounter. For an introductory framework and specific background lesson plans, the Cherry Hill conflict about teaching the novel is a good place for teachers to start (see <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/cultureshock/teachers/huck/index.html>). In this unit an optional exercise based on the Cherry Hill situation allows students to take on various roles in deciding whether or not the novel should be banned from high school English classrooms.

This unit plan focuses primarily on one of Huck's most challenging decisions in the novel: whether or not he will turn in his friend Jim because Jim is a slave who belongs to the Miss Watson (Chapter 16). In addition to exploring Huck's thinking and feelings about this dilemma, students will also have the opportunity to apply what they learn to one of their own hard decisions.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

Unit Contents

1. Learning Plan

- **First Class: Difficult Decisions (page 4)**
 - Handout 1—Why is that decision difficult? (page 6)
 - Teacher Notes for Handout 1 (page 7)
- **Second Class: Huck Changes his Mind (page 8)**
 - Handout 2—Two Decisions in Chapter 16 (page 9)
 - Teacher Notes for Handout 2 (page 11)
 - Essay Assignment Directions for Students (page 12)
- **Third Class: Further Discussion and Writing Workshop (page 13)**
 - Decision Journal Directions for Students (page 14)
 - Teacher Resource: Additional Decisions in the Novel (page 15)

2. Assessment

- Essay Assignment (page 18)
- Optional Performance Task: *To Ban, or Not to Ban?* (page 19)
- Decision Journal (page 20)

3. Resources on the Web (page 21)

1. Learning Plan

First Class: Difficult Decisions

(immediately before students read Chapter 16)

Materials

Handout 1—Why is that decision difficult?

Teacher Notes for Handout 1

Procedure

- Ask students to write down three decisions that were easy to make, and three that were difficult. Tell them that no one will see their notes, and they will not be required to share what they have listed.
- Write the following question on the board, and begin a class discussion by soliciting responses from students.

Why are some decisions so much harder to make than others?

- Once discussion gains momentum, ask students to take a few minutes to think of some future decisions that they expect to be challenging. Ask them to list 2 or 3 examples in their class notes. Remind them they will not be required to share the list.
- After the group has had time to think and list, ask if there are any volunteers willing to share some examples of hard decisions (ones that are appropriate for class discussion). At this juncture, the goal is for students to hear what their classmates view as difficult decisions--avoid discussing details about the choices at this point.
- *Option One:* Once everyone has had the chance to contribute an example, give students **Handout 1**, and ask them to spend fifteen minutes filling it out on their own. Their classmates' contributions may cause them to remember new examples they would like to explore; therefore, explain that they are not required to use decisions from the original list in their notes.
Option Two: Have students complete **Handout 1** in groups of four.
- Use the decision diagram to show students how to connect what they find challenging with the decision chain—to see which elements best describe the challenges students have identified. See **Teacher Notes for Handout 1** for more specific directions. The class can complete this exercise individually or in their groups of four..

- Explain that for homework, the class will look closely at a challenging decision situation Huck Finn faces in Chapter 16. Tell the class to hold on to what they have recorded in **Handout 1** because they will use it in a future exercise.

Next Steps

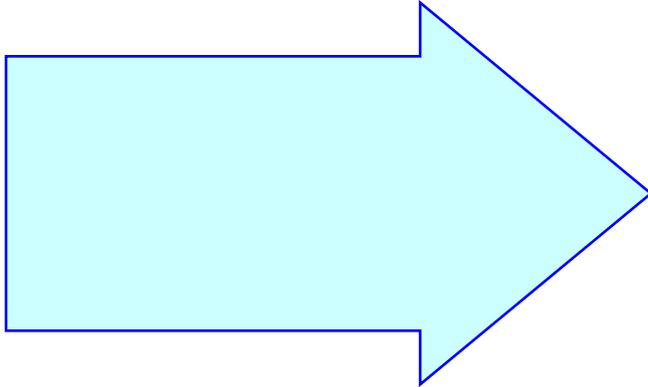
Homework Assignment: Read Chapter 16. List the decisions Huck makes in this chapter.

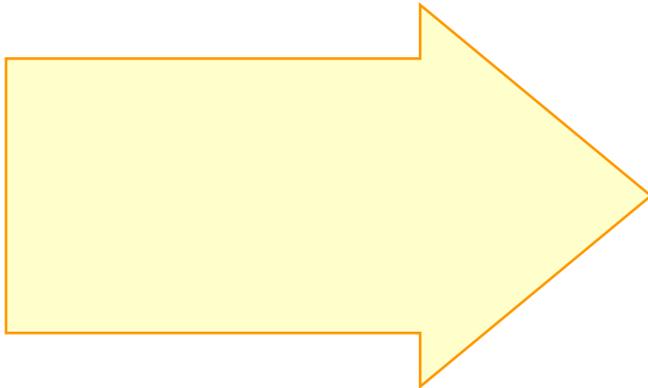
Handout 1. Why is that decision difficult?

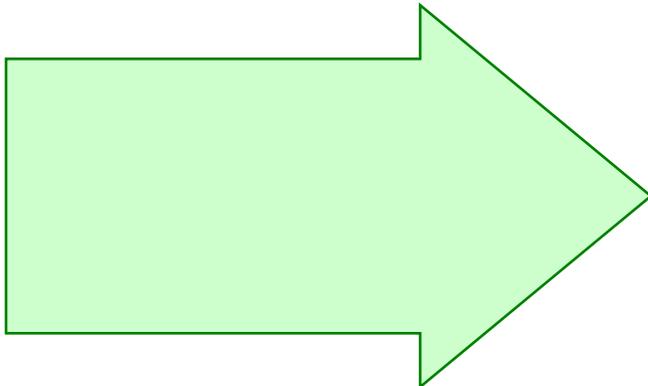
Directions: Inside the arrows on the left, list examples of hard decisions you are making now or expect to make. In the spaces next to each example, say what makes the decisions so challenging.

Challenging Decisions

Reasons they are Hard to Make

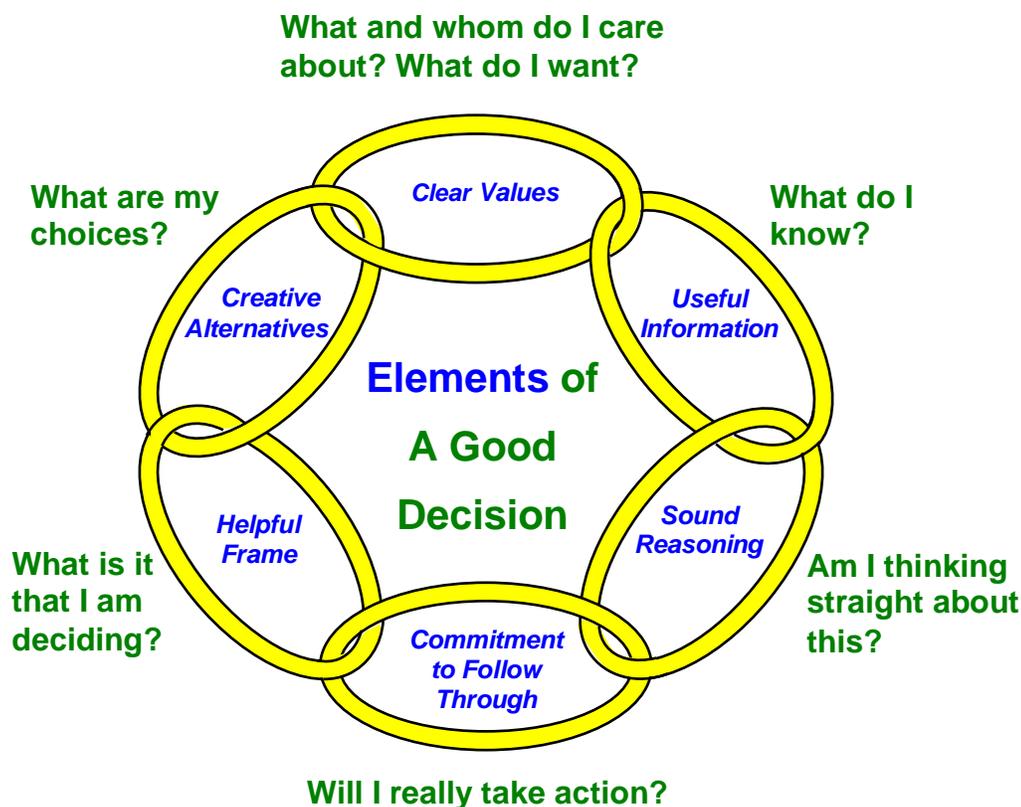






TEACHER NOTES FOR HANDOUT 1

1. Display or hand out the elements of a good decision diagram below:



2. Then ask students to connect the challenges they have listed with one of the elements. In other words, which element(s) or question(s) would be most likely to address the challenge? Below are some examples of possible decisions, challenges, and the elements that describe them:

Possible Decision	Challenge	Elements
--to spend more time on my homework	there are so many fun distractions	<i>Follow Through</i> —hard to stick with the decision
--buy a new bike	there are so many different kinds, it is hard to choose	<i>Information</i> —many models to consider <i>Values</i> —hard to know what I want
--solve a conflict with a friend	might get hurt feelings	<i>Values and Reasoning</i> —what am I willing to risk to get my friend back?
--improve the spirit in a nursing home	where and how to begin	<i>Alternatives</i> —so many to choose from <i>Frame</i> —how to narrow the scope

3. Label each challenge with one or more of the elements that it represents. Ask students to keep **Handout 1** and this information for later.

Second Class: Huck Changes his Mind

Materials

Handout 2—Two Decisions in Chapter 16
Teacher Notes for Handout 2
Directions for the essay assignment (see *Assessment*)

Procedures

- Review plot details of Chapter 16. List the decisions students have discovered in chapter 16. **Note:** Emphasize the following decisions: Huck decides to turn Jim in. Then Huck chooses to lie and save Jim. (By the end of the lesson, students should understand that the first example is not a decision because Huck does not follow through with his choice.)
- To explore Huck's decisions more closely, have students complete **Handout 2**.
- Begin class discussion of student responses. Refer to **Teacher Notes for Handout 2**.

Guidelines: If time allows, teachers can devote one full class to the first part of the handout (*Huck decides to turn in Jim.*) and a second class to the second section (*Huck lies and saves Jim.*). During the first class, hand out only the first part and save the second section for the following period.

- Hand out and discuss directions for the essay assignment.

Next Steps

Homework Assignment: Writing Exercise Step 1: Choose a topic.

Ask students to review class notes as well as **Handouts 1 and 2** to choose one of the three essay topics (see *Assessment*). They should bring brainstorming notes and a rough outline to class for group discussion.

Handout 2. Two Decisions in Chapter 16

As Huck faces different adventures on his journey down river, we watch him grow. At the end of Chapter 15 he discovers empathy:

It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger; but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterward, neither. I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd 'a' knowed it would make him feel that way. (p. 89)

The trick he plays on Jim teaches Huck that some of his assumptions based on views of the community that raised him are untrue: Huck learns that friendship and human feelings are not limited by race. A runaway slave cares for him more than Pap—his closest “kin,” and Huck regrets the pain he inflicts on Jim.

Chapter 16 describes another important incident that reveals more about the orientation of Huck’s moral compass. As you explore two of his decisions, see if you can distinguish Huck’s true character (nature) from the lessons he has learned from those who raised him (nurture).

Huck decides to turn Jim in.

1. Reread Chapter 16, pages 90-92 (stop at “He jumped and got the canoe ready.”) and note all of the places where you observe Huck using his ***mind***. Wherever you see him thinking or reasoning out an argument, draw a brain in the margin.

List two examples of Huck’s reasoning. Once you have briefly described his arguments, pick one and respond below to the following question: *Is Huck thinking straight?* Explain your opinion.

2. Now read the pages again, but this time look for all of the places where you see him using his ***heart***. Use a different color pen and wherever you see Huck express a feeling or emotion, draw a heart in the margin.

Describe the change in Huck’s feelings. Where and why do his feelings change in this passage?

Huck lies and saves Jim.

3. Reread the second part of this incident: pages 92 (begin at “He jumped and got the canoe ready”) through page 95 (stop at “Towards daybreak we stopped”). Mark with brain and heart drawings the places where you see Huck using analysis and feelings as you did on the previous pages.

a. List Huck’s reasons for changing his mind. Is he thinking straight here?

b. How do Huck’s feelings influence his thinking? Does he rely more on *head* or *heart* in making this choice? Explain.

c. Earlier in the novel when Huck first finds out Jim is a runaway slave, Jim reminds Huck he promised not to tell. Huck makes the following statement to Jim:

Well, I did. I said I wouldn’t, and I will stick to it. Honest injun, I will. People would call me a low-down Abolitionist and despise me for keeping mum—but that don’t make no difference. I ain’t a-going to tell.” (page 50)

How is this earlier incident and statement related to Huck’s decisions in Chapter 16? What do we learn about Huck’s values? commitment to follow through?

Teacher Notes for Handout 2

Some points to emphasize during discussion

Huck decides to turn Jim in.

- Ask students to consider who is involved with this decision. While Jim's comments about being free are what begin to bother Huck, it is "voices" from his past that cause the problem with his conscience. Ask students to list the names of the people who have influenced Huck (Pap, the widow, Miss Watson, Judge Thatcher, Tom) and to describe their various forms of influence. The decision concerns Huck and Jim, but we could also argue that others from Huck's past are also involved through what they have taught him—he cares about their views.
- Huck's concern for Miss Watson begins to weigh more than his concern for Jim. Ask students what they think about Huck's feelings for Miss Watson here. How is our view different? Mark Twain's view?
- Notice Huck's reaction to Jim's idea of hiring an "Ab'litionist." What is Huck's view of abolitionists? (Connect later with passage from page 50 cited under the *Huck lies and saves Jim* exercise.)
- Ask students to explore the irony of Huck's statement: "I was sorry to hear Jim say that, it was such a lowering of him" (page 92). Huck's moral outlook is upside down here. We admire Jim's dedication (as a father under extremely difficult circumstances) to reuniting his family. While Huck is shocked by Jim's statement that he would consider stealing, the boy fails to see the more shocking fact that this father must even consider buying or stealing his own children to reunite them with their parents. Ask students to explore the following different views apparent here: Huck's, Mark Twain's, and (possibly) the reader's. Ask them how irony leads to meaning. For example, Mark Twain startles us with the irony of Huck's statement thereby making us think carefully about the situation. Through Huck's odd combination of words and action, Mark Twain causes the reader to think about right and wrong, Jim's desires, Huck's feelings, the work of abolitionists, and the outrageous idea of treating human beings as property.

Huck lies and saves Jim.

- Even though he still feels "bad," Huck's own nature and experience have overcome the more destructive influence of others on his life (nurture—what and how we are taught to live and behave).
- Note that Huck's moral perspective is upside down here because of some of the more limiting lessons he has been taught about race and society. Ask students to think of ways that their own background and upbringing might have limited their perspectives. Ask them also to consider examples of experience or teaching that has widened their perceptions.
- Emphasize that good decision making thrives on diversity of perspective and opinion.
- Huck's decision to lie and save Jim marks an important step in his education: in this situation we watch him weigh various views and make an independent choice based on his own thinking and feelings. His experience so far on the raft has taught him to disregard a lesson from his past—that Jim is no more than a piece of property with no feelings or important human ties (family).
- Ask students to consider the difference between getting help with a decision (to clarify values and gather useful information) and relying too much on the view of a close friend, peer group, family member, teacher, or other influence.

Essay Assignment

Directions for Students: Your task is to write a clear, coherent, and convincing two-five page essay about one of the topics below. This writing assignment will give you the opportunity to reflect on what you have learned in this unit, your opinions of Huck, and your own life. Remember at the end of the process to create your own essay title—one that reflects what you think is the most important idea in your paper.

1. Huck's decision. Why is Huck's decision so challenging for him? What does he care about? Does he commit to follow through with his choices?

2. Huck's character. Huck calls himself a "low-down Abolitionist," and some characters in the novel might classify him as a liar and a thief. What do you think of Huck's character (moral compass, actions) up to this point in the novel? Do you admire his decisions? Explain.

3. Huck and me. Compare your decision making with Huck's. Use one of the challenging decisions you defined earlier in this lesson, and discuss the similarities and differences between the way you made your choice and Huck makes his.

Third Class: Further Discussion and Writing Workshop

Materials

Student Handout 2 (completed during previous class)
Teacher Notes for Handout 2
Decision Journal directions
Teacher Resource: Additional Decisions in the Novel

Procedures

- Continue and conclude previous class discussion.
- Writing workshop: students have time to work on their essays while the teacher check homework (progress on the assignment) and answer questions.
- Explain the **Decision Journal** (see **Assessment** for more specific instructions.)
- The **Teacher Resource: Additional Decisions in the Novel** provides information about significant decisions not found in Chapter 16. Teachers can use this list
 1. as a guide to discuss student decision journals.
 2. for review of the novel and decision concepts (for situations occurring before Chapter 16).

Next Steps

- **Homework Assignment:** Students continue work on their essays. Assign due dates for rough draft and final copies. Begin **Decision Journal** exercise with next reading assignment.
- Plan the **Optional Performance Task: To Ban, or not to Ban?** See **Assessment** for further detail.

Decision Journal

Directions: As you continue reading the novel, keep a record of significant decisions. Specific guidelines:

- Use a separate notebook for your journal so that it can be collected without interfering with your note taking during class.

- As you read, list significant and challenging decisions main characters make in the story. Once you have briefly described the decision (and noted the page number where it appears), write a few notes in response to the following questions:
 1. How well does the character balance *head* and *heart* to make this decision?
 2. What values guide this decision?
 3. Which elements of a good decision (refer to the decision diagram) do you see emphasized in this particular situation? Does the character neglect any of the elements?

- Be ready to share and discuss examples during class.

Teacher Resource: Additional Decisions in the Novel

Students can explore the following decision situations through class discussion, group work, or writing.

- **Huck resigns from Tom’s gang (pp. 21-23)**. Early in the novel, Tom, inspired by the adventure stories he has read, creates and leads a gang. (Note Huck’s creative alternative in joining the gang—pages 17-18: he offers up Miss Watson as his required family member to kill if he breaks the oath.) Huck has obviously thought carefully about resigning. Note his reasons and the different way he and Tom see the world around them. A good topic for discussion once students are finished reading the novel: Why does Mark Twain choose to begin and end Huck’s story with Tom?
- **Huck gives (signs over) his money to Judge Thatcher (pp. 24-25)**. Realizing his father is in the area, Huck rushes to the judge and begs him to take his money. Students should explore Huck’s thinking here. What does it reveal about Huck’s knowledge of his father? Huck’s forward and creative thinking? What value here enables Huck to be so confident in this strange decision?
- **The new judge decides to reform Pap (pp. 30-31)** A good example of Mark Twain’s satire: he ridicules sentimental notions of reform. Ask students to notice the imbalance of head and heart as they discuss this humorous scene.
- **Pap decides not to vote (pp. 34-36)** A racially poignant scene, Pap’s decision not to vote provides students with a great opportunity to see contrasting frames (Pap’s, the professors, Huck’s, ours). Have them explore Pap’s reasoning in this decision situation (the man explains his thinking in detail) and compare his character, skills, and education to those of the black professor Pap excoriates. Pap is narrow-minded and holds questionable or contradictory values; however, we can admire his commitment to follow through with his decision.
- **Huck decides to escape (pp.38-43)** Not wanting to live with either Pap or the widow, Huck comes up with a strikingly creative alternative. Note his careful plan (reasoning), clarity of values (he wants to survive and be free), ability to see the situation from various viewpoints (frame), and his commitment to follow through with the adventure. While Tom calls Huck a “sap head” for not being able to imagine more than a Sunday school group, Huck demonstrates here his ability to think creatively and execute the plans for a real adventure. And throughout his adventure Huck proves himself to be a master story teller who repeatedly uses quick thinking and imagination to extricate himself and others from trouble.
- **Huck and Jim decide to board a wrecked steamboat (pp. 71-80)** This scene provides a rich decision situation to explore. Some points to make during discussion: (1) Notice Tom’s influence in Huck’s decision (p 72). Ask students to discuss the way Huck ignores Jim’s opinion and measures his actions according to what Tom would think. Is Tom a good standard for him to use? (2) Compare the robbers’ view of “good morals” in regard to killing a man (p. 74) and Huck’s morals about leaving the murderers stranded on the boat (p. 76). Huck’s values lead him to make a second decision to save the crooks with the elaborate story about Miss Hooker (pp. 77-79). Note Huck’s perspective at the end: while Tom’s influence plays a part in beginning the adventure, the widow’s influence appears at the

end—Huck imagines what she would think about his decision to save the crooks. (p. 79).

- **Huck makes a joke at Jim’s expense (pp. 87-89)** Note the change in Huck’s values as a result of this choice. Jim’s identification of “trash” as the kind of people who disrespect others for no reason is significant: he names Huck his friend and criticizes his action as one that falls short of the respect friends expect of each other. We can imagine Pap playing this joke on Jim with a very different outcome. Unlike Pap, however, Huck listens to Jim, learns from this decision, and takes one more step away from the narrow perspective of his upbringing.
- **Buck decides to shoot Harney Shepherdson (pp. 106-118)** Buck’s choice provides an interesting discussion point to begin an exploration of Huck’s disturbing adventure with the Grangerford family. Ask students to identify Buck’s values in making this choice (pp. 109-110). Also note the gaps of information as Buck explains the reasons for the feud. Huck admits how disturbed he is by the experience (pp. 116-117), and students can compare Huck and Buck’s values. Mark Twain causes us to compare the boys through the similarities in their names: while their names rhyme, their backgrounds and values are noticeably different. Mark Twain raises a question here that recurs throughout the novel: What is the definition of a true gentleman? Or, What does a gentleman value? Notice the irony in Huck’s description of Colonel Grangerford (pp. 106-107) which begins with Huck describing the man as “a gentleman.” The mention of Pap in the same paragraph causes us to compare Huck and Buck’s parentage and upbringing. Some questions for discussion: Who has had the better upbringing, Huck or Buck? Whose decisions are closer to those of an ideal or real gentleman?
- **Colonel Sherburn shoots Boggs (pp. 140-146)** What are Sherburn’s reasons for shooting the man? What values does he reveal through this choice? Does he make a good decision? Are there other alternatives he could have considered? Note the example of “groupthink” when the mob decides to lynch Sherburn.
- **Jim slaps his daughter (pp. 151-152)** What does this example reveal about anger decision fitness? What does Jim learn from this choice? Jim’s reminiscence shows the man’s love for his family and his honest self-awareness. Jim admits his mistake, also a habit of Huck’s. Even though we sometimes disagree with Huck’s definition of right and wrong, good and bad, as with Jim in this scene, we admire Huck’s habit of honest self-reflection.
- **Huck steals money from the Duke and King (pp.171-174)** In spite of being afraid of what the king and duke might do to him and Jim, Huck decides to return the money to the “orphan” girls, and he steals it from the thieves. Question for discussion: What makes Huck finally willing to take a stand against the two frauds? Have his values changed? Also, notice the way Huck carefully considers alternatives and outcomes of this decision (pp 171-172).
- **Huck decides to tell Mary Jane the truth (pp. 181-189)** Huck comments on the risk of telling the truth. Ask students to unravel his logic here. Note that even in this situation where he must make a choice in the moment, he still takes the time to consider alternatives, outcomes, and risks. Ask students to look back at decisions Huck makes in the novel and to consider where he makes choices to mitigate risk for himself and where he makes choices based on the well-being of others as well as himself. Does Huck’s choice to tell the truth for the first time reflect any

significant change in his decision making? Have his values changed? (see top of page 82)

- **Huck follows Tom's plan to free Jim (pp. 224-225)** Is Huck thinking straight here? Are his values the same as Tom's. How does Huck try to be a friend to Tom? This decision leads to the elaborate "adventure" of freeing Jim, and Huck reverts to his role at the beginning of the story as Tom's sidekick. Tom and Huck's involved rescue plan is painful in light of the real adventures Huck and Jim have experienced together. Additionally, the fact (we learn later) that Tom knows Miss Watson has already set Jim free in her will reveals the boy's self-centered view of others—he uses Huck and Jim to create his own imaginary adventure for his own entertainment. Note that even though Huck submits to Tom's plan, their choices throughout the novel reveal very different values.
- **Jim risks his freedom to save Tom (pp. 263-264)** Faced with a wounded Tom, Jim and Huck must decide whether or not to continue running. Points to note about the high quality of this decision: 1) While we do not know exactly what they discuss, Huck consults Jim about what to do. 2) Instead of reacting only with emotion, they think and discuss before they decide. 3) It is clear that Huck lets Jim make the final choice—Jim has much more at risk. 4) Jim considers the perspective and needs of the others involved in making the decision, and Huck admires this quality (which is a solution to racism). Jim uses head and heart. 5) Still under the influence of racial stereotypes, Huck compliments Jim by saying he is "white inside." Also, Jim uses Tom as his example of selflessness, and it is Tom who has caused the dangerous situation and who chooses stylish adventure over empathy for others.
- **Jim gives up his freedom to help the doctor with Tom (pp. 272-273)** What values does Jim exhibit here? What values does the doctor reveal in turning him in? Have students reread and discuss the outcome of the doctor's report (page 273) to those who are treating him harshly. What effect does the story have on the men and Huck?

2. Assessment

Essay Assignment

Overview: The essay is intended to give students the opportunity to review and explore further what they have learned about Huck’s character up to this point in the novel and about the basic principles of decision making presented in the unit. While this exercise is designed to allow students choice of topic, teachers can change the directions to best suit the needs of the class. Other possible methods include the following:

- Assigning all three topics as whole class or group discussion exercises. (For group work: divide the class into three groups and give each one a different topic. The goal is to discuss the topic, gather the responses of the group, and present findings for whole class discussion.)
- Choosing one topic for everyone. If the goal is to help students apply what they have learned in the unit to their own lives, the third topic, or one like it, is the one to choose.
- Using the three topics as different sections of one writing assignment. With slight adjustment the topics can serve as guidelines for three parts of one essay. The questions build from a focus on Huck’s specific decision situation, to the student’s opinion of Huck’s choices, to personal self-reflection.

While it is important to emphasize that the essays need an introduction, body, and conclusion as well as illustration from the novel and the students’ lives, teachers should add additional writing guidelines according to the current needs of the class.

Directions for Students: Your task is to write a clear, coherent, and convincing two-five page essay about one of the topics below. This writing assignment will give you the opportunity to reflect on what you have learned in this unit, your opinions of Huck, and your own life. Remember at the end of the process to create your own essay title—one that reflects what you think is the most important idea in your paper.

1. Huck’s decision. Why is Huck’s decision so challenging for him? What does he care about? Does he commit to follow through with his choices?

2. Huck’s character. Huck calls himself a “low-down Abolitionist,” and some characters in the novel might classify him as a liar and a thief. What do you think of Huck’s character (moral compass, actions) up to this point in the novel? Do you admire his decisions? Explain.

3. Huck and me. Compare your decision making with Huck’s. Use one of the challenging decisions you defined earlier in this lesson, and discuss the similarities and differences between the way you made your choice and Huck makes his.

2. Assessment (continued)

Optional Performance Task: *To Ban, or Not to Ban?*

Goal: Use the Cherry Hill School District’s experience as a case study for students to wrestle with the decision of whether or not *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* should be banned from their high school classrooms. The Cherry Hill case provides the framework for students to think about their own school.

Role: Five groups of students will represent the five groups involved in the case: students, parents, teachers, administrators, and professors.

Audience: The principal and top school administrators.

Situation: The class has been asked to make a recommendation to the principal and other top administrators about whether or not the school should teach *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Products: (1) Town Hall discussion of the major issues. The class will conduct a meeting in which the five constituencies will present the major issues that group has defined and discussed. (2) A one page report form each of the five groups summarizing main concerns and points of that particular group.

Standards and Criteria for Success:

- (1) Specific list of the particular group’s concerns with explanations of each.
- (2) Specific suggestions to address those concerns.
- (3) Organized presentation in the Town Hall meeting (including 1 & 2 above).
- (4) One page “executive report” for the principal. This report should include 1 & 2 above.

Teacher Directions:

- Introduce the Cherry Hill situation by reading only the first four paragraphs found on the following web page:
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/cultureshock/teachers/huck/controversy.html>
 Explain to the class that they will use the Cherry Hill conflict as a framework to explore whether they think the novel should be taught in their school. Have students research the population statistics for their school.
- Divide the class into five groups and assign them their roles (students, parents, teachers, administrators, professors). Explain that they will address the question ONLY from their assigned perspectives. Give the groups time to do the following:
 - Brainstorm and make a list of all the issues (positive and negative) they think their constituency has about teaching the novel to high school students.
 - Organize the list with the benefits listed first and the problems listed next—in order of importance, if possible.
 - Discuss the problems further and list all possible solutions that arise from the conversation.

- Once groups have had a chance to create their lists, use excerpts from “Perspectives from Cherry Hill” (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/cultureshock/teachers/huck/perspectives.html>) as needed to help groups with their discussions. Encourage them to make any necessary distinctions between Cherry Hill and their school. Notice that there is a section for each of the five constituencies.
- Ask each person to write an executive summary for their group, and the next day give the groups time to share, discuss, pick, and revise a final version to hand to the principal (and you).
- Schedule the Town Meeting and invite the principal and other administrators to listen and observe. At the end of the discussion, vote by secret ballot on the issue. Include visitors’ and your own vote.

Decision Journal for the *Adventure of Huckleberry Finn*

Directions: As students continue reading from Chapter 16, ask them to keep a decision journal according to the following guidelines:

- Use a notebook or create a separate section in your class notes* to keep a decision journal while you read the rest of the novel.
- As you read, list significant decisions main characters make in the story. Once you have briefly described the decision (and noted the page number where it appears), write a few notes in response to the following questions:
 1. How well does the character balance *head* and *heart* to make this decision?
 2. Which elements of a good decision (refer to the decision diagram) do you see emphasized in this particular situation? Does the character neglect any of the elements?
- Be ready to share and discuss examples during class.

Note to Teachers: Explain to students how they will present examples from their journals to the class. Below are some possible methods:

--Assign students different sections of the novel so they know when they will be expected to present.

--At the beginning of a class discussion, ask students to share the decisions they discovered in the previous night’s reading. Allow students to help you determine which deserve discussion and select presenters accordingly.

--You choose the decision you want students to discuss in class, and assign them ahead of time.

--Explain to the class that you plan to collect the decision journals from time to time both to check student understanding and to gain insight about the direction for future discussions. It is best if students have a separate notebook solely dedicated to the decision journal. When you collect journals, students will still have their class notes.

3. Resources on the Web

Mark Twain in his Times

<http://etext.virginia.edu/railton/index2.html>

Stephen Railton's (English Department, University of Virginia) website includes a wealth of information, links, and background information. He explores the controversy caused by the novel and includes an e-text version. Also has illustrations from the original publications. Great site for students to begin research on the novel and author.

PBS Culture Shock

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/cultureshock/teachers/huck/index.html>

Describes the controversy in the Cherry Hill School District over teaching the novel. Includes excellent teaching framework and materials that grew out of that conversation.