



P E N G U I N  C L A S S I C S

MARK TWAIN

THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER

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MARK TWAIN was born Samuel Langhorne Clemens on November 30, 1835, in Florida, Missouri, about forty miles southwest of Hannibal, the Mississippi River town he was to celebrate in his writing. In 1853, he left home, earning a living as an itinerant typesetter, and four years later became an apprentice pilot on the Mississippi, a career cut short by the outbreak of the Civil War. For five years, as a prospector and a journalist, Clemens lived in Nevada and California. In February 1863 he first signed the pseudonym "Mark Twain" to a newspaper article; and a trip to Europe and the Holy Land in 1867 became the basis of his first major book, *The Innocents Abroad* (1869). *Roughing It* (1872), his account of experiences in the West, was followed by a coauthored satirical novel, *The Gilded Age* (1873); *Sketches: New and Old* (1875); *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876); *A Tramp Abroad* (1880); *The Prince and the Pauper* (1881); *Life on the Mississippi* (1883); and his masterpiece, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885); *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889); and *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894). Compelled by debts, Mark Twain moved his family abroad during the 1890s and went on a round-the-world lecture tour in 1895–1896. His fortunes mended, he returned to America in 1900. He was as celebrated for his white suit and his mane of white hair as he was for his uncompromising stands against injustice and imperialism, as well as for his invariably quoted comments on any subject under the sun. Samuel Clemens died on April 21, 1910.

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Contents

<i>Introduction by</i> R. KENT RASMUSSEN	vii
<i>Suggestions for Further Reading</i>	xxiii
<i>Chronology</i>	xxvii
<i>A Note on the Text</i>	xxxvii

THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER

<i>Notes by</i> R. KENT RASMUSSEN	219
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July 1875, he wrote to Howells, "It is *not* a boy's book, at all. It will only be read by adults. It is only written for adults." He also expressed his desire to serialize the book in the *Atlantic Monthly*—a magazine edited by Howells that was decidedly not designed for children. When Howells finally read Mark Twain's manuscript the following November, he was entranced and admitted to having stayed up very late to finish it, "simply because it was impossible to leave." He went on to say,

It's altogether the best boy's story I ever read. It will be an immense success. But I think you ought to treat it explicitly *as* a boy's story. Grown-ups will enjoy it just as much if you do; and if you should put it forth as a study of boy character from the grown-up point of view, you'd give the wrong key to it.

In praising the book as a great "boy's story," Howells was doubtless imagining how Tom's titular "adventures" would appeal to young readers, especially boys. Even after Howells convinced him of the unwisdom of promoting the book as adult literature, however, Mark Twain could not resist using its preface to pitch the book to adults:

Although my book is intended mainly for the entertainment of boys and girls, I hope it will not be shunned by men and women on that account, for part of my plan has been to try to pleasantly remind adults of what they once were themselves, and of how they felt and thought and talked, and what queer enterprises they sometimes engaged in.

Here Mark Twain makes a valid point. The novel abounds with passages aimed at adult readers, and some of those passages probably leave younger readers unmoved or even bewildered. Chapter V, for example, describes how the solemn opening of a church service is broken by "tittering and whispering of the choir in the gallery. The choir always tittered and whispered all through service." Those lines might mildly amuse some children, but the poignant irony in the next two lines would probably go over their heads: "There was once a church choir that was not ill-bred, but I have forgotten where it was . . . I think it was in some foreign country."

Those sentences suggest much about Mark Twain's cynicism about church services. Almost all of chapter XXI expresses similarly cynical remarks about the village school's "Examination Evening" that are directed to adults.

A passage that addresses adults even more explicitly concludes the second chapter's famous episode in which Tom gets other boys to pay him to whitewash a fence. That episode, coincidentally, may also be the episode most beloved by children. Adult readers can appreciate the irony in Tom's triumph, but to be certain they draw the proper conclusions, Mark Twain spelled out Tom's moral lesson explicitly:

Tom . . . had discovered a great law of human action, without knowing it—namely, that in order to make a man or a boy covet a thing, it is only necessary to make the thing difficult to attain. If he had been a great and wise philosopher, like the writer of this book, he would now have comprehended that Work consists of whatever a body is *obliged* to do and that Play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do.

It is doubtful young readers draw any lessons from a passage such as that. Indeed, many probably resent the intrusion of irrelevant—and possibly incomprehensible—remarks about artificial flowers, treadmills, climbing mountains, and passenger-coaches.

In his introduction to the 1996 Oxford University Press reprint of *Tom Sawyer*, novelist E. L. Doctorow commented on the duality of the book's audience: "We can read with a child's eye or an adult's, and with a different focal resolution for each." Doctorow further suggested that the world in which Tom Sawyer lives is made up of "two distinct and, for the most part, irreconcilable life forms, the Child and the Adult." Doctorow is correct in asserting that children and adults in that world have different cultures that continually clash and produce friction. Those differences are reflected in the shifting perspectives of the book's readers.

Even if Mark Twain was correct in thinking *Tom Sawyer's* proper audience was adult readers, one need not look far for reasons why the book has always been popular among young readers. Modern American children may find the culture of its

mid-nineteenth-century midwestern setting quaintly strange but are nevertheless exhilarated by the sense of wide-open freedom the book conveys. In contrast to the rigidly structured routines governing modern children's daily lives—from schoolrooms and afterschool programs to music lessons, organized sports, and other activities supervised by adults—the lives of children in *Tom Sawyer's* world are almost completely unstructured. Apart from being expected to attend school and church services, Tom and his friends are so loosely supervised, they can simply run off to a forest to play Robin Hood, go to the river to swim or fish, and generally do whatever they want away from the oversight of interfering adults.

Aunt Polly tries to control Tom, but from the first page of the book, when Tom slips out of her grasp and disappears over a fence, it is clear her control is tenuous at best. She merely sighs and thinks, "He'll play hookey this evening, and I'll just be obleeged to make him work, to-morrow, to punish him." Tom does, in fact, play hooky (so much for having to go to school), and what happens when Polly makes him work the next day merely provides another example of his independence: he turns a tedious chore into a major entrepreneurial success and emerges with wealth that will lead him to another gratifying success at church the next day. Few young readers can resist sharing his triumphs, especially as they come at the expense of his rivals.

Tom's early triumphs are also demonstrations of his inventiveness. During an age when the technologies that would make possible movies, radio, television, computers, video games, and cell phones were well in the future, the children of Tom's technologically primitive world required little to find ways to keep busy and have fun. Tom needs only a bucket of paint and a brush to raise himself from poverty to wealth. (In a later chapter, another boy uses a paintbrush to score a much different kind of triumph.) The children's implements may be simple, but many of their games—such as Robin Hood, war, pirates, and robber gangs—are complex. Much of the pleasure they get out of their simple lives unfolds within their own imaginations.

During Mark Twain's time, the literary choices children had were far fewer than they are now. An avid reader from an early age, Mark Twain himself was frustrated by his limited choices in

reading matter as a boy. The autobiography he composed late in life recalled the books he was allowed to borrow from his Sunday-school as “dreary . . . for there was not a bad boy in the entire bookcase. They were all good boys and good girls and drearily uninteresting, but they were better society than none, and I was glad to have their company and disapprove of it.” One can see in that statement one of the seeds of *Tom Sawyer*.

Among the most widely read writers of children’s books in the period leading up to 1876, the year *Tom Sawyer* first appeared, was Jacob Abbott, a Congregationalist minister whose numerous works included many didactic stories for children. Abbott’s most popular books were in his Rollo series, published from the 1830s through the 1850s. With titles such as *Rollo at Work*, *Rollo at Play*, and *Rollo on the Atlantic*, each tale was designed to teach young readers a moral lesson. William Taylor Adams, better known by his pen name, “Oliver Optic,” wrote more than one hundred popular children’s books, mostly for boys, during the second half of the nineteenth century. The majority of his stories featured fearless, clean-living boys performing improbably heroic deeds in exciting adventures. Another prolific and widely read author of that era was Horatio Alger, Jr. His most famous book, *Ragged Dick; Or, Street Life in New York with the Bootblacks* (1868), is about a poor boy who rises to middle-class respectability through hard work, incorruptible honesty, and determination. Alger followed this enormously influential book with dozens of others on the same theme. The books of these and other authors of the time were mostly about good boys and girls who overcome hardships and adversity to achieve success and respectability. The origins of the young heroes may be rough, but their characters are consistently upright.

When *Tom Sawyer* was published, its title character must have struck young readers as a refreshing change from the well-behaved characters populating most of the books they read. Compared with them, he doubtless was perceived as a “bad boy.” Although an orphan, he comes from a respectable home but is a relentless rulebreaker who plays hooky from school, hates going to church, ignores adult instructions, and engages in forbidden and even perilous adventures. Mostly tame stuff, perhaps, by present-day standards, but doubtless deliciously subversive to

nineteenth-century children. However, even though many young nineteenth-century readers may have relished the idea of escaping from adult control, their consciences probably sent them a different message—that it really is better to be good than to be bad. They must, then, have been gratified to sense that despite his appealing misbehavior, Tom is actually a *safe* kind of bad boy. Yes, he breaks rules, but never to harm anyone. In fact, he is never deliberately malicious. Moreover, not only does he care strongly about friends and family, he also takes dangerous risks and makes generous sacrifices for their benefit. Nevertheless, the question of whether he is good or bad is not fully settled throughout most of the book. As late as chapter XXIII, when he performs an act of true heroism, some fellow villagers think he might become president of the United States . . . “if he escaped hanging.” Only when the novel reaches its climax do his future prospects seem certain.

As an essentially good boy who enjoys a great deal of fun and excitement while appearing to be bad, Tom Sawyer is similar to his modern literary descendant Harry Potter, the central figure in what is probably the most successful series of novels ever published. Harry’s creator, British author J. K. Rowling, has apparently never publicly acknowledged a debt to Mark Twain, but it is difficult to imagine she was not at least partly inspired by *Tom Sawyer*. Similarities between the boys and their adventures are too striking for them all to be products of mere coincidence.

Although Tom Sawyer’s age is never specified, it could easily be eleven—the same age as Harry Potter at the beginning of the latter’s seven-volume saga. Both boys are orphans being raised by their dead mothers’ sisters. Tom lives with a half-brother, Sid, his nemesis, whom he detests. Harry’s nemesis, with whom he lives, is his despised cousin, Dudley. Tom’s closest buddy is Huckleberry Finn, “the juvenile pariah of the village” and poorest and most disreputable boy he could possibly befriend. Harry’s best friend is Ron Weasley, not exactly a disreputable boy, but as a member of a notoriously impoverished family he is the frequent target of insults and disrespectful jokes. Harry experiences most of his adventures in the company of Ron and their female mutual friend, Hermione Granger. Tom experiences his most harrowing

adventures with Huck and with his sweetheart, Becky Thatcher. Similarities between Tom and Harry do not end there.

Although both Harry Potter and Tom Sawyer are notorious for breaking rules and flouting authority, both have big hearts, repeatedly take risks to save others from harm, and eventually emerge triumphantly as heroes. It might be argued that Harry's being a wizard with magical powers makes him fundamentally different from Tom, but almost the opposite is true. An uncritical believer in the power of magic, Tom is certain the woman known as old Mother Hopkins is a real witch. He believes dead cats can cure warts, properly performed rituals and incantations can find lost marbles, and anyone who violates an oath signed in blood with the proper "dismal ceremonies and incantations" will drop dead. His belief in magic is strong enough, in fact, to help drive *Tom Sawyer's* narrative—especially his fear of the consequences of breaking a blood oath. Tom would almost certainly jump at the chance of having magical powers like those of Harry if they were offered to him. Moreover, his midnight adventures with Huck in the graveyard and at the haunted house have spooky qualities suggesting supernatural forces are at work, much as they actually are in the Harry Potter stories. Tom's final and most perilous adventure occurs when he and Becky become lost in McDougal's cave, where he encounters the evil he most greatly fears. Can it be mere coincidence that most Harry Potter novels end with Harry confronting evil in dark, dungeonlike settings similar to the depths of McDougal's cave?

Whether or not *Tom Sawyer* actually influenced J. K. Rowling's creation of Harry Potter, the millions of modern young readers who relish her books find in them many of the same pleasures readers have always found in Mark Twain's book. Both Tom and Harry struggle against adversity, fight against evil, and are misunderstood but nevertheless emerge triumphantly in the end. Harry's triumphs are spread through his seven books, each of which covers a year in his life. Tom experiences seven distinct triumphs within the space of only a few months, but the novel's structure makes the period of time that elapses seem far longer, and Tom himself seems to age steadily and mature significantly.

Tom's first triumph comes early, when he gets other boys to pay

him to whitewash the fence Aunt Polly orders him to paint as punishment for playing hooky in chapter II. Children love tricksters, and what could be a better trick than getting other people to *pay* to do one's own work? Tom's next triumph follows quickly, made possible by the first. The next day, he carries his whitewashing loot to church and trades it to other boys for the "tickets" awarded in Sunday-school for reciting biblical verses. On that day, the august county judge Thatcher is visiting the Sunday-school, whose superintendent burns to "exhibit a prodigy" with enough tickets to receive a Bible prize for having recited two thousand verses of scripture. Tom shocks both the superintendent and readers by stepping forward with the requisite number of tickets to claim a prize. He then exults in the "glory and eclat" that come with the prize and with sharing the stage with the great judge.

In a later work Mark Twain wrote that "to be envied is the human being's chiefest joy." The pleasure derived from being envied is a persistent theme throughout his writings and is a concept children well understand. It certainly seems to be Tom Sawyer's chief joy, and there can be no doubt that young readers, more than adults, exult in his Sunday-school triumph for that very reason. Moreover, this second triumph is made even sweeter by the fact that Tom achieves it by buying tickets from many of the very same boys from whom he collected his loot the day before. Young readers need not be familiar with the adage, "Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me," to appreciate the dimensions of Tom's second triumph.

Adult readers may see the Sunday-school episode a little differently. Once again, Mark Twain addresses them directly. After receiving his Bible and being fawned over by the great judge, Tom is quickly humiliated when the judge and his wife press him to demonstrate his biblical knowledge by naming Christ's first two apostles. After nervously hemming and hawing, Tom blurts out, "David and Goliah!" Young readers may not know the correct answer is Simon and Andrew, but they should nevertheless know how spectacularly wrong Tom's answer is. Mark Twain's brief epilogue to the episode must bewilder them, however: "Let us draw the curtain of charity over the rest of the scene." Was Mark Twain merely being lazy when he wrote that line instead of describing the fiasco that must have followed? Or did he assume

adult readers would derive greater pleasure from imagining what happens next themselves than they would from any description he provided?

More calculated than Tom's first two triumphs, his third occurs at the conclusion of his pirating adventure on Jackson's Island with Huck Finn and Joe Harper. Tom accidentally learns because he and his friends have been missing so long they are assumed to have drowned in the river and their funeral is planned. At his suggestion, the boys suddenly appear at that funeral. There they are so joyfully received that when Tom sees how envious other children are, he considers it "the proudest moment of his life." Though doubtless a triumph in the eyes of children, his achievement must appear shabby in the eyes of adults. Tom wins his *éclat* by capitalizing on the pain felt by those mourning his presumed death—pain he could easily have spared them by letting villagers know he and his friends were still alive sooner. His selfish behavior is, however, due more to youthful thoughtlessness—as Aunt Polly points out—than to actual callousness. He does not mean to hurt others; he is simply heedless.

Part of Tom's maturation throughout the novel is his learning to think more about the feelings of others and less about his own interests. This change is dramatically evident in his next two triumphs. In chapter XX, Tom and Becky have a typically childish falling out that leaves them not speaking to each other at school. During the lunch hour, Tom enters the otherwise empty schoolroom and startles Becky while she is examining a mysterious book their teacher has left in an unlocked desk drawer. In her rush to return the book to its drawer, Becky tears its frontispiece page almost in half. She then turns savagely on Tom, berating him for intending to tell on her. Though feeling peevish and vengeful, Tom has no such intention, but only because he knows exactly how the teacher will get Becky to confess her crime. He also takes satisfaction in the certainty of her being whipped. His private thoughts on the matter reveal a great deal about his patronizing attitude toward girls. "What a curious kind of a fool a girl is," he thinks. "Never been licked in school! Shucks, what's a licking! That's just like a girl—they're so thin-skinned and chicken-hearted." He even feels a little proud for not telling on Becky, but that is only because he believes "Girls' faces always

tell on them. They ain't got any backbone," and Becky will be whipped without his intervention. As the teacher seeks the person responsible for damaging his book by directly questioning each child in turn, he eventually reaches Becky. When Tom sees the look of terror in her face, unexpected new feelings compel him to jump up and proclaim, "I done it!"

The nobility in Tom's act of self-sacrifice goes beyond enduring "the most merciless flaying" the teacher had ever administered and staying after school for two hours. His greater sacrifice lies in violating the boys' unspoken custom of *always* denying wrongdoing in school, thereby earning the contempt of his schoolmates, who stare in perplexity at his "incredible folly." Young readers can certainly appreciate the sacrifice Tom makes in enduring a savage beating, but it is probably only older readers who fully appreciate the significance of his other sacrifice. For once, Tom's triumph lies not in winning the envy of his peers—quite the opposite in fact—but in making a double sacrifice purely out of love. Although he does not act in anticipation of reward, the look of gratitude and adoration he receives from Becky as he steps forward for his beating seems "pay enough for a hundred floggings." After he is released from his detention, Becky gratefully asks, "Tom, how *could* you be so noble!" When Becky's father, Judge Thatcher, later learns how Tom saved Becky from a beating, he calls Tom's action "a noble, a generous, a magnanimous lie."

Tom's fifth triumph rises to yet a higher level by requiring him to make an even greater sacrifice—one that may actually threaten his life. One of the novel's central narrative threads begins in chapter IX, when Tom and Huck witness a murder in the village graveyard, which they visited at midnight to perform a wart-removing ritual. They chance to see the village drunkard, Muff Potter, and the "murderin' half-breed" Injun Joe helping Dr. Robinson rob a fresh grave and then get in a fight that ends with Joe killing the doctor after Potter is knocked unconscious. After fleeing in fright, the boys sign a blood oath never to reveal what they have seen. The next day, they are astonished to overhear Joe claim Potter killed the doctor and not be struck dead for lying. Through the next fourteen chapters, Tom's conscience deeply troubles him as he imagines Potter being unjustly hanged. He believes if he breaks his blood oath by telling the truth about the

murder he may drop dead, and if that does not happen, Injun Joe may kill him. He thus assumes a doubly lethal risk when he finally testifies at Potter's trial. His unexpected appearance there causes another sensation and Tom finds himself "a glittering hero once more." This time, however, his triumph comes with a serious price. He does not drop dead, but "Injun Joe infested all his dreams, and always with doom in his eye." Like Voldemort, the "Dark Lord" who pursues Harry Potter, Injun Joe represents pure evil, and now Tom has a real reason to fear for his own life.

Tom's sixth triumph is less the stuff of a boyish adventurer than that of a resourceful and courageous young man. When Becky finally has the picnic discussed earlier in the book, she and Tom get lost for several days in McDougal's labyrinthine cave. Throughout their terrifying ordeal, Tom works to keep up Becky's spirits, while she seems resigned to dying, and hides from her the fact that he has seen Injun Joe in the cave. Just as all hope appears gone, Tom cleverly finds an opening through which he and Becky get out. For the second time, he appears to return to the village from the dead and is again celebrated as a glittering hero. Unlike his seemingly miraculous return at his own funeral, this time his triumph results from true valor and is one both young and old readers can applaud. By this point in the narrative readers who may have been wondering what kind of person Tom really is must accept the possibility that he is a true hero. Arriving at that conclusion helps make what happens next more palatable.

Before the cave episode, Tom and Huck spend time digging for buried pirate treasure near a supposedly haunted house. They chance to be inside the house when Injun Joe—now disguised as a "deef and dumb Spaniard" while evading arrest for murder—and his new partner find a chest of gold coins under the floorboards. Despite the risks involved in taking on these criminals, the boys determine to discover where the men hide the treasure so they can seize it for themselves. What begins as a childish quest for buried treasure thus becomes both real and dangerous. The cave episode interrupts Tom's involvement in the treasure search, leaving Huck to play a heroic role in preventing Injun Joe from assaulting the widow Douglas. Later, after Tom recuperates from his cave ordeal and learns that Joe has died inside the cave, he correctly deduces that the criminals have hidden the gold near

the spot where he saw Joe inside the cave. With Huck's help, he returns to the cave and finds the gold. Meanwhile, to show their appreciation for Tom and Huck's recent heroism, villagers gather to honor the boys and surprise them with gifts. This event sets the stage for Tom's own greatest surprise and most spectacular triumph—revealing to the villagers the \$12,000 in gold coins he and Huck have found. Readers, especially young ones, like their heroes to succeed, and it is hard to imagine a novel about a boy ending more satisfactorily.

It is unlikely young readers savoring Tom's greatest triumph pay much heed to the unfortunate Injun Joe's fate, except to feel relieved that he can no longer threaten Tom and Huck. For adults, however, Mark Twain provided a different kind of message by reporting that Joe's funeral was a festive occasion to which people flocked from miles around. Many "confessed that they had had almost as satisfactory a time at the funeral as they could have had at the hanging." Despite the general feeling of relief occasioned by Joe's death, there had been a movement in the village to petition the governor to pardon him for his crimes. Here Mark Twain speaks only to adults:

. . . many tearful and eloquent meetings had been held, and a committee of sappy women been appointed to go in deep mourning and wail around the governor and implore him to be a merciful ass and trample his duty under foot. Injun Joe was believed to have killed five citizens of the village, but what of that? If he had been Satan himself there would have been plenty of weaklings ready to scribble their names to a pardon-petition and drip a tear on it from their permanently impaired and leaky water-works.

These passages touch on another theme pervading Mark Twain's writings—the tendency of many people to feel greater sympathy for criminals than for their victims. In *Huckleberry Finn*, for example, when Huck tries to get help for murderers trapped on a wrecked steamboat, he wishes the widow Douglas knew what he was doing: "I judged she would be proud of me for helping these rascallions, because rascallions and dead beats is the kind the widow and good people takes the most interest in."

Tom Sawyer is generally regarded as a boys' book for good

reason. Not only are its protagonist and his closest friends boys, the narrative has a decidedly antifeminist slant, as can be seen in Tom's dismissive thoughts about girls in the schoolroom scene. Mark Twain's preface states that the book is intended for both "boys and girls," but its narrative gives girls little show. The only significant female characters in the book are Tom's Aunt Polly, his cousin Mary, and his sweetheart, Becky Thatcher. Repeatedly referred to as "the old lady," Polly is essentially a desexed parent figure whose gender is relevant mainly because it permits her to express feelings of affection for Tom more openly than a male character easily could. Modeled on Mark Twain's older sister, Pamela Clemens, Mary appears frequently but has little to do beyond helping Tom prepare for church and worrying about him when he is in trouble. If she were completely removed from the novel, her absence would scarcely be noticed.

Becky Thatcher's name is closely associated with Tom's in popular perceptions of the book, but even she is given little to do beyond behaving coquettishly, reacting to Tom's initiatives, and needing him to rescue her from danger. She is mentioned, by name in almost half the chapters but ceases to help drive the narrative after her reconciliation with Tom in chapter XX. Mark Twain is known for rarely creating strong female characters in his fiction, and he makes Becky such a cipher it is even more difficult to estimate her age than that of Tom, who seems to grow older while she remains much younger. By the time Mark Twain started writing *Huckleberry Finn* he had so nearly forgotten Becky he wrote "Bessie Thatcher" in that novel's only mention of her name. He corrected the mistake in the book's proofs, but its typesetters overlooked his correction and "Becky" was not restored to the text until one hundred years after the first American edition.

Becky's rival for Tom's affections, his former sweetheart Amy Lawrence, fares even worse than Becky in *Tom Sawyer*. Depicted as fawning over Tom, she is mentioned in five chapters, but the only time she actually converses with Tom, her only quoted remark is a single word. Meanwhile Tom's growing impatience with her "happy prattle" is another reflection of his boyishly disapproving attitude toward girls in general.

Despite *Tom Sawyer*'s treatment of its female characters, girls seem to have liked the book as much as boys have. Among the

letters Mark Twain received from young readers, a surprising number were from girls. In 1883, for example, a nine-year-old Ohio girl named Florence Dean Cope (coincidentally, a distant relative of William Dean Howells) asked Mark Twain to write another book about Tom Sawyer, whom she described as “just perfect.” Writing in 1907, another Florence, fourteen-year-old Florence Benson of New York City, called Tom “the nicest boy I have ever known.” Eleven-year-old Fannie James of Wisconsin, writing in 1891, went further:

I am a little girl living in Eau Claire, and admire “Huckleberry Finn” and “Tom Sawyer.” Although I am a girl, I would like to play with them and get into such scrapes and would be delighted to find twelve thousand dollars. I didn’t like them to take the dead cat, to the graveyard; for I love kitties and wouldn’t have one killed for all the warts in Christendom.

As much as girls may have enjoyed reading *Tom Sawyer*, they have not failed to notice the book’s gender bias. In the prologue to her 1997 book *Lighting Out for the Territory*, the distinguished scholar Shelley Fisher Fishkin recalled thinking “Huck and Tom could be a lot of fun” when she was a child, but at the same time she “dismissed Becky Thatcher as a bore.” When novelist Lenore Hart was young, she had a similar view of Becky, whom she regarded as more “weepy and romantic and silly” than real girls are. Years later, she undertook to remedy that deficiency by writing *Becky: The Life and Loves of Becky Thatcher* (2008), a novel in which an elderly Becky relates the story of her life. She begins by correcting “lies” Sam Clemens told in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Hart’s Becky asserts she “was never that pale, limp, blond-curlled girl-child from a sentimental chromo. I was tough as any boy, and kept my own secrets.” She longed “to be part of Tom’s wild gang” and was even with Tom and Huck the night they saw Dr. Robinson murdered in the graveyard.

Mark Twain expressed profeminist views later in his life, but none are evident in *Tom Sawyer*, in whose world schoolboys are punished by being made to sit with girls. At the school’s “Examination Evening,” dainty girls—“their mothers before them, their grandmothers, and doubtless all their ancestors in the female line

clear back to the Crusades”—recite sappy, melancholic compositions.

Much of that chapter, incidentally, Mark Twain could have intended only for adults, as its humor lies mostly in the excruciating tediousness of the children's recitations. Those passages constitute a broad denunciation of the dreary monotony of exercises like "Examination Evening" in all schools. "There is no school in all our land where the young ladies do not feel obliged to close their compositions with a sermon . . . But enough of this. Homely truth is unpalatable."

Children who get through that entire chapter are rewarded at its conclusion with high comic relief. The long-suffering boys in Mr. Dobbins's class exact their revenge on the slightly drunk schoolmaster for his past cruelties by lowering a cat from the ceiling above his head as he struggles to draw a map on the blackboard. The cat removes his hairpiece and reveals his bald head has been painted gold by one of the boys when he was napping. "That broke up the meeting. The boys were avenged. Vacation had come."

For whom, finally, is *Tom Sawyer* best suited? Children, adults, or both? Regardless of Mark Twain's intentions, it is clear that for well over a century, both children and adults have loved the book, so perhaps the more pertinent question is whether children and adults are reading the *same* book. For this reason, it is crucial that readers remain aware constantly of the perspective they themselves bring to *Tom Sawyer* as they read it.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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Chronology

- Nov. 30, 1835 Samuel Langhorne Clemens—later better known as Mark Twain—is born in the northeastern Missouri village of Florida. The sixth of seven children of John Marshall and Jane Lampton Clemens, he will outlive all his siblings, his wife, and three of his own four children.
- 1839–1853 Lives in Missouri’s Mississippi River town of Hannibal, on which he will later model the fictional St. Petersburg of *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*. After leaving school at eleven, he does printing work for local newspapers, including his brother Orion’s papers, and writes occasional sketches and essays.
- Mar. 24, 1847 John Marshall Clemens’s death leaves his family impoverished.
- 1853–1856 Sam Clemens leaves Missouri to work as a printer in St. Louis, Philadelphia, and New York; after returning to the Midwest, he does similar work for Orion in southern Iowa.
- May 1857–
Apr. 1861 Spends two years training as a steamboat pilot on the Lower Mississippi—mostly under Horace Bixby—and two more years as a licensed pilot.
- June 13, 1858 Steamboat *Pennsylvania* blows up south of Memphis, severely injuring his younger brother, Henry, who dies eight days later.
- Apr. 12, 1861 Civil War begins when Confederates fire on Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina. Clemens, who is in New Orleans, will soon end his piloting career when war stops steamboat traffic on the lower Mississippi.

- June 1861** Clemens drills for about two weeks with a Missouri militia unit called up by the state's pro-Confederate governor.
- July 1861** Crosses the plains with his brother Orion, who has been appointed secretary to the government of the newly created Nevada Territory.
- July 1861–
Sept. 1862** Prospects and collects mining claims in western Nevada.
- Sept. 1862–
May 1864** Works as a reporter for the *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*.
- Feb. 3, 1863** Uses the pen name "Mark Twain" for the first time in a report written in Carson City for the *Enterprise*.
- June 1864–
Dec. 1866** After relocating to California, briefly reports for the *San Francisco Morning Call*, does some prospecting in the depleted goldfields of Tuolumne and Calaveras counties, and writes for a variety of publications.
- Nov. 18, 1865** Publication of his jumping frog story in New York's *Saturday Press* helps build his national reputation.
- Mar.–Aug. 1866** Visits the Hawaiian (Sandwich) Islands as a correspondent for the *Sacramento Union*. After returning to San Francisco, he launches what will become a long and successful lecturing career by speaking on the islands in northern California and western Nevada.
- May 14, 1867** Publishes his first book, *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County and Other Sketches*.
- June–Nov. 1867** Tours Mediterranean Europe and the Holy Land with the *Quaker City* excursion; his travel letters to San Francisco and New York newspapers are widely reprinted, expanding his reputation. After he returns, Elisha Bliss of the American Publishing Co. (APC) of Hartford, Connecticut, invites him to write the book about his travels that will become *The Innocents Abroad*.
- Mar.–July 1868** Visits California for the last time to secure the rights to his *Quaker City* letters from the *San Francisco Alta California*; while there, he finishes writing his book with the help of Bret Harte.

- July 20, 1869** APC publishes *The Innocents Abroad, Or, The New Pilgrims' Progress*, the first of Clemens's five travel books, which will be his best-selling book throughout his lifetime and the best-selling American travel book of the nineteenth century.
- Aug. 1869** Clemens buys an interest in the *Buffalo Express* and becomes one of the newspaper's editors. After settling in Buffalo, New York, he begins the first of several major eastern lecture tours.
- Feb. 2, 1870** Marries Olivia (Livy) Langdon, the daughter of a wealthy Elmira, New York, coal magnate. The newlyweds settle in a Buffalo house given to them by Livy's father.
- Nov. 7, 1870** The couple's first child, a son named Langdon, is born; he will live only twenty-two months.
- Feb. 1871** Isaac Sheldon publishes *Mark Twain's Burlesque Autobiography and First Romance*, the first part of which is essentially a farce about imaginary ancestors that Clemens would later regret having published.
- Mar. 1871** After a year of family misfortunes, Clemens sells his Buffalo house and interest in the *Express* and relocates to Elmira, where his family stays on the Quarry Farm of Livy's sister, Susan Crane. Over the next two decades, his family will spend most of their summers on the farm, where Clemens will do much of his most important writing.
- Oct. 1871** His family settles in Hartford, Connecticut, before he starts another long lecture tour. His first daughter, Susy, is born the following March. In September 1874, the family will move into a magnificent new house that will be their home until 1891.
- Feb. 29, 1872** APC publishes *Roughing It*, an embellished account of Clemens's years in the Far West and Hawaii.
- Aug.–Nov. 1872** Clemens makes his first visit to England, to which he will soon return with his family.
- Dec. 1873** APC publishes *The Gilded Age*, a novel by Clemens and his Hartford neighbor Charles Dudley Warner.

- Clemens's portions of the novel revolve around events modeled on his own family's history.
- June 1874** Clemens begins writing *Tom Sawyer* in earnest during the same month his second daughter, Clara, is born.
- Jan.–Aug. 1875** Publishes “Old Times on the Mississippi,” his first extended work about steamboating, in a seven-part series in the *Atlantic Monthly*.
- July 5, 1875** Tells William Dean Howells he has finished writing *Tom Sawyer* and turns to dramatizing the story.
- July 21, 1875** APC publishes *Mark Twain's Sketches New and Old*.
- Nov. 5, 1875** Delivers manuscript of *Tom Sawyer* to APC.
- June 9, 1876** *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is published in England first because American publication is delayed.
- June 28, 1876** Belford Brothers in Canada publishes a pirated edition of *Tom Sawyer* that soon floods American markets.
- c. Dec. 8, 1876** APC publishes the first American edition of *Tom Sawyer*.
- Dec. 17, 1877** Clemens delivers burlesque speech at a Boston birthday banquet for poet John Greenleaf Whittier that afterward causes him great embarrassment.
- Apr. 1878–
Aug. 1879** Travels in western Europe with his family.
- Nov. 12, 1879** Delivers triumphant speech honoring Gen. Ulysses S. Grant at a Union army reunion in Chicago.
- Mar. 13, 1880** APC publishes *A Tramp Abroad*, a fictionalized account of episodes from Clemens's recent European travels.
- Dec. 12, 1881** James Osgood of Boston publishes *The Prince and the Pauper*, Clemens's novel about boys switching places during sixteenth-century England.
- Apr.–May 1882** Clemens travels by steamboat from St. Louis, Missouri to New Orleans, and then upriver to St. Paul, Minnesota, to gather material for the book to be called *Life on the Mississippi*.

- May 17, 1883 Osgood publishes *Life on the Mississippi*, which expands Clemens's 1875 "Old Times on the Mississippi" articles and adds new material from his 1882 return to the river.
- May 1, 1884 Clemens founds his own publishing house, Charles L. Webster & Co., with Webster, his nephew by marriage, as company president.
- July 1884 Begins writing unfinished sequel to *Huckleberry Finn* that will be first published in the Dec. 20, 1968, *Life* magazine as "Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer Among the Indians."
- Dec. 10, 1884 *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* sees its first publication in England, by Chatto & Windus, which will become Clemens's only authorized English publisher.
- Feb. 18, 1885 *Huckleberry Finn* is belatedly released in America by Webster.
- Dec. 10, 1889 Webster publishes *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Clemens's novel about a contemporary American thrust back to sixth-century England.
- Oct. 27, 1890 Jane Lampton Clemens, Clemens's mother, dies at the age of eighty-seven.
- June 1891–
May 1895 Clemens family members close down the Hartford house—to which they will never return—and go to Europe to live to cut down living expenses. As they move around in western Europe, Clemens makes numerous quick trips to the United States to look after his failing business interests.
- May 1892 Webster publishes *The American Claimant*, Clemens's novel about an American who claims to be heir to an English earldom.
- 1893–1894 Clemens publishes *Tom Sawyer Abroad*, first as a serial in *St. Nicholas* magazine, then as the last book issued by his firm Webster & Co., which goes into bankruptcy in April 1894.
- Nov. 28, 1894 APC publishes *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Clemens's novel about slavery and miscegenation set in another fictional Missouri town modeled on Hannibal.

- Apr. 1895–
Apr. 1896 *Harper's Magazine* serializes Clemens's novel *The Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*, which afterward is issued in book form by Harper and Brothers, Clemens's new authorized American publisher. Harper will soon begin reissuing all his books in uniform editions.
- May 1895–
July 1896 Leaves England with his family, beginning a round-the-world lecturing trip. After summering at Elmira, he, Livy, and daughter Clara travel cross-country to British Columbia, whence they cross the Pacific to Hawaii, Fiji, Australia, and New Zealand, and then cross the Indian Ocean to Ceylon, India, and South Africa, before returning to England. Meanwhile, daughters Susy and Jean remain behind in Elmira. Profits from the lecturing tour will pay off debts from his publishing firm's bankruptcy, and he will return to America hailed as a triumphant hero.
- July 1896–
Oct. 1900 After being rejoined by daughter Jean, the family remains in Europe four more years.
- Aug. 18, 1896 Daughter Susy dies of spinal meningitis while Clemens is in England.
- Aug.–Sept. 1896 Publishes *Tom Sawyer, Detective* as a serial in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*.
- Nov. 13, 1897 Harper and APC publish Clemens's fifth travel book, *Following the Equator*, a relatively sober account of his round-the-world trip.
- Dec. 11, 1897 Orion Clemens dies.
- Oct. 15, 1900 After an unbroken absence of five years, Clemens returns to the United States with his family and rents a house in New York City.
- Apr. 10, 1902 Harper publishes Clemens's *A Double-Barrelled Detective Story*, a novella that includes Sherlock Holmes as a bumbling detective.
- May 1902 Clemens pays his last visit to Hannibal and the Mississippi River during a trip to Columbia to accept an honorary degree from the University of Missouri.
- Nov. 1903–
June 1904 Takes his family to Florence, Italy, hoping the mild climate will help his wife Livy's failing health.

- Jan. 14, 1904 Begins dictating his autobiography to his family secretary, Isabel Lyon.
- June 5, 1904 Livy dies in Florence; the rest of the family soon returns to the United States.
- Aug. 31, 1904 Pamela Clemens Moffett, Clemens's last surviving sibling, dies.
- Sept. 1904–
June 1908 Clemens takes up residence on Fifth Avenue in New York City, where he is lionized as a public speaker and banquet guest.
- Dec. 5, 1905 Colonel George Harvey, president of Harper and Brothers and editor of *Harper's Weekly*, hosts a grand seventieth birthday banquet for Clemens at New York's Delmonico's restaurant.
- Jan. 1906 Albert Bigelow Paine moves into Clemens's home to begin work as Clemens's authorized biographer.
- June–July 1907 Clemens makes last transatlantic voyage, to accept an honorary degree at Oxford University in England.
- June 18, 1908 Clemens moves into his last home, Stormfield, a newly built house outside Redding, Connecticut.
- Apr. 8, 1909 Publishes *Is Shakespeare Dead?*
- Dec. 24, 1909 His youngest daughter, Jean, dies of a heart attack suffered during a seizure.
- Jan.–Apr. 1910 Visits Bermuda on his last trip outside the United States. When his health seriously declines, Paine goes to Bermuda to bring him home.
- Apr. 21, 1910 Samuel Langhorne Clemens dies of heart failure in his Stormfield home at the age of seventy-four. Three days later, he is buried in Elmira's Woodlawn Cemetery, where all members of his family will eventually be interred.
- Aug. 18, 1910 His only grandchild, Nina Gabrilowitsch, is born to Clara at Stormfield.
- Sept. 1910 William Dean Howells publishes *My Mark Twain*, a personal tribute to his close friend.
- Aug. 1912 Now Clemens's literary executor, Paine publishes his three-volume *Mark Twain: A Biography*. Over the

next quarter century he will edit and publish numerous collections of Clemens's previously unpublished writings.

- 1917-1918 Silent film adaptation of *Tom Sawyer* is released in two parts: *Tom Sawyer* and *Huck and Tom; Or, the Further Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Jack Pickford, Mary Pickford's brother, plays Tom and Robert Gordon plays Huck.
- Feb. 1920 Silent film adaptation of *Huckleberry Finn* is released.
- Dec. 1930 First sound film adaptation of *Tom Sawyer* is released, with Jackie Coogan as Tom and Junior Durkin as Huck Finn.
- Aug. 1931 First sound film adaptation of *Huckleberry Finn* is released, with the same leads as the previous year's *Tom Sawyer*.
- Dec. 1931 American copyright of *Tom Sawyer* expires; many unauthorized editions soon follow.
- Apr. 9, 1937 Paine dies in New Smyrna, Florida; Bernard DeVoto succeeds him as editor of the Mark Twain Papers.
- Feb. 1938 David O. Selznick releases first color film adaptation of *Tom Sawyer*, with Tommy Kelly as Tom.
- Mar. 1939 MGM releases *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* with Mickey Rooney as Huck and Rex Ingram as Jim.
- 1940 American copyright of *Huckleberry Finn* expires, and unauthorized new editions begin appearing.
- Jan. 1946 DeVoto resigns as editor of the Mark Twain Papers. His successor, Dixon Wecter, will move the collection to the University of California at Berkeley three years later.
- 1960 MGM releases first color film adaptation of *Huckleberry Finn* as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, with Eddie Hodges as Huck and boxer Archie Moore as Jim.
- Nov. 19, 1962 Clara Clemens Samossoud, Clemens's last surviving child, dies in San Diego, Calif.
- Jan. 16, 1966 Nina Gabrilowitsch, Clemens's only grandchild and last direct descendant, dies in Los Angeles.

- 1970 Scholar John Seelye publishes *The True Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; he will issue a revised version in 1987.
- Oct. 13, 1972 U.S. Post Office issues eight-cent "Tom Sawyer" stamp using illustration painted by Norman Rockwell.
- Apr. 1973 Reader's Digest releases musical film adaptation of *Tom Sawyer*, with Johnny Whitaker as Tom, Jeff East as Huck Finn, and Jodie Foster as Becky Thatcher.
- Apr. 1974 Reader's Digest and United Artists release musical film adaptation of *Huckleberry Finn*, with Jeff East returning as Huck, Paul Winfield as Jim, Harvey Korman as the king, and David Wayne as the duke.
- Mar. 1975 Twenty-one-year-old Ron Howard plays Huck in television production of *Huckleberry Finn*, with Antonio Fargas as Jim.
- 1980 University of California Press publishes first corrected edition of *Tom Sawyer* based directly on original manuscript material, prepared by the editors of the Mark Twain Papers.
- July 1981 Kurt Ida plays Huck in new television adaptation of *Huckleberry Finn*, with Brock Peters as Jim.
- 1982 Georgetown University Library publishes two-volume facsimile edition of original handwritten manuscript of *Tom Sawyer*.
- Feb. 1984 *Big River*, an award-winning musical adaptation of *Huckleberry Finn*, opens on Broadway.
- 1985 University of California Press publishes the first edition of *Huckleberry Finn* corrected by the editors of the Mark Twain Papers.
- Feb.–Mar. 1986 Public Broadcasting System broadcasts four-hour adaptation *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* over four weeks, with Patrick Day as Huck, Samm-Art Williams as Jim, and Lillian Gish as Mrs. Loftus.
- Feb. 1991 Long-missing first half of original manuscript of *Huckleberry Finn* is found in Los Angeles, just as Victor A. Doyno is about to publish *Writing "Huck Finn": Mark Twain's Creative Process*.

“He was not the Model Boy of the village.
He knew the model boy very well though—
and loathed him.”

Few books have taken so deep and enduring a hold on the American imagination as *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Younger readers delight in the sheer pleasure of following the rollicking, mischievous adventures of Tom, a consummate prankster with a quick wit. Yet older readers recognize the somber undercurrents lurking dangerously beneath the secure and wondrous world of boyhood. Through the novel's nostalgic portraits of life on the Mississippi River and humorous escapades—from the famous episodes of the whitewashed fence and the ordeal in the cave to the trial of Injun Joe—Mark Twain explores the deeper, darker themes of the adult world Tom is one day destined to join. A classic that has lost neither its popularity nor its capacity to delight, *Tom Sawyer* is a treasure of American literature.

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INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY R. KENT RASMUSSEN

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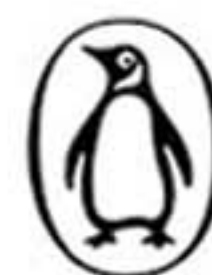
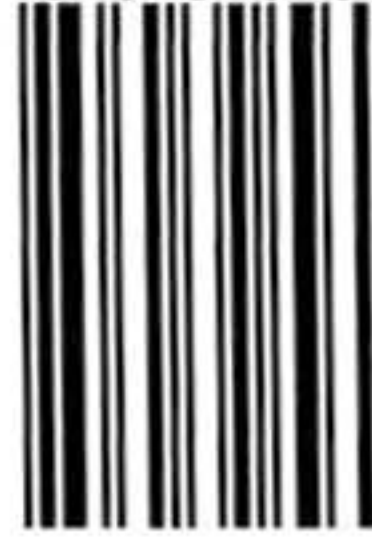
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