

Grade level: 9th-12th Grade

Subject: Language Arts

Rationale:

Students will examine the use of theme in the Manga Classics adaptation of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Students will be asked to focus on specific illustrations in the novel and consider how the artist creates meaning with the visual medium of a graphic novel.

Instructional Duration: 3-4 hours

Objectives:

Students will:

- ✓ Read the graphic *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and consider it as a visual adaptation of a classic piece of literature.
- ✓ Use images from the novel to answer specific essential questions.
- ✓ Understand the concept of theme as it pertains to a graphic novel adaptation of a classic text

Front-loaded information / understanding:

Theme - Students should be able to define and identify one or more themes from the original text. This lesson will translate that concept for the graphic novel medium.

Imagery - Students should be able to define and identify imagery in the original text. This lesson will translate that concept for the graphic novel medium.

Symbolism – Students should be able to define and identify one or more symbol from the original text. This lesson will translate that concept for the graphic novel medium.

Irony – Students should be able to define and identify the use of dramatic irony in the text. This lesson will translate that concept for the graphic novel medium.

Manga – Many students have not been exposed to this type of reading. Prior to assigning any reading in the Manga Classic Text, instructors should cover the “How to read manga” section at the beginning of the book with their students to ensure understanding.

Instructional Strategies:

NOTE: The lessons contained below assume that students are reading the Manga Classic adaptation after having already been exposed to all or some part of the original text. If you are using the graphic novel adaptation as an alternative to reading the original novel, the lessons can still be utilized with modifications.

Students should have read the original novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. Have them share with the class what they know about the text itself. Specific attention should be paid to how students visualize some of the more crucial moments of the text including, but not limited to, character appearance, conflict, thematic elements, irony, and symbolism.

Activity #1 – Answering Essential Questions (Pre-Reading)

Students should be asked to recall their experiences reading Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Instruct them to think about what parts of the novel stood out to them and why. Students should then be broken into groups of 3-4 and asked to consider how they themselves would adapt the text to a visual medium. In doing so, they will answer the following essential questions:

- ✓ *What is one major theme of the novel?*
- ✓ *Which 3 scenes from the novel serve to best illustrate one of these themes?*
- ✓ *Why did you choose each of these scenes?*
- ✓ *How would you utilize visual imagery to make these scenes come to life?*

Students will then be asked to provide three sketches (one for each scene selected). These sketches do not need to be elaborate but should stage the scene in some way (position of characters, background, and objects). Sketches should include some sort of caption that contains specific guiding information that explains how the images shape understanding of the text (2-3 sentences).

NOTE: These sketches should be kept in order to compare them to the Manga Classics text and the version of that scene as represented by the artist.

Activity #2 – Historical Context

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn has been both lauded and decried in its 130-year lifespan. It has been regarded as the wellspring from which true American literature has emerged and it has been banned for being a racist tome. In order to establish their own opinions of what the novel was, is, and will be, it is crucial to understand the time from which it was borne.

Have students dig into the history of both Twain, the post Civil War Era when it was released and the pre-Civil War Era (around the 1830's-1840's) when it is set. Have them reconcile all of these points of origins individually, in small groups, or as a class.

Some sample questions could include (but are not limited to):

1. What kind of man was Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens)? How was he known by his contemporaries?
2. What was the general attitude towards African Americans in the late 1800s? How had this changed (if you feel it did change) from the mid-1800s?
3. In the states that the novel takes place (Missouri, Illinois, Kentucky, Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Louisiana) what was happening politically in the country in the mid to late 1800s?
4. When did the Civil War start and how did each of the above states respond to the outbreak of conflict during this time?
5. What was the general public's attitude towards this book when it was originally published in 1885?
6. Trace the novel's impact through the first 100 years of its existence. Explore how schools and other government agencies have reacted to having this book included in lessons or on the shelves in public libraries.

Activity #3 – Racism

Students should look at the depiction of Jim, the use of racially biased language in the text, and the attitudes towards African Americans expressed by the characters of the novel. Have them isolate 3-5 specific moments in the text where these themes are at play and explore how the artist chose to represent them visually. Individually or in small groups, have them analyze these images and answer the following question.

In the image(s) your team analyzed and the original novel's intent, explain whether you feel this novel should be labeled as "racist." In doing so, focus on how Jim is depicted both textually and visually, how Huck feels towards him, how other characters in the novel (The Duke and the King in particular) treat him, and how the minor characters interact with him and talk about him.

Students can share their thoughts to the class as a presentation or a simple discussion.

Activity #4 – Theme Identification

There are a lot of moments where the themes of this novel which include (but are not limited to) racism, the desire to escape civilization, the journey, and fantasy versus reality are represented visually in the Manga Classics adaptation. Select specific points in the novel where the artwork illustrated this theme in a particularly compelling manner. For example:

Page 9 – Huck struggles with being “sivilized”

Page 13 – Huck Finn and superstition

Pages 16-19 – Jim’s first appearance in the novel

Pages 26-29 – The fantasies of Tom Sawyer and the reality of their lives

Page 37 – Pap’s appearance (note the overlay of images of Pap)

Page 49 – Huck’s plan to escape the captivity of his father

Page 56 – Huck sets up camp in nature, away from “civilization”

Page 60 – Jim’s superstition

Pages 74-77 – The rattlesnake attacks (nature fights back)

Page 93 – Return to the river for Huck and Jim

Page 98 – The deception and barbarism of Turner and Bill

Pages 110-113 – The story of King Solomon and Jim’s interpretation

Page 133 – The hole in Huck’s heart

Page 148 – The feud of the Grangerfords vs. the Shepardsons

Pages 177-180 – The deception of the scoundrels (The Duke and the King)

Page 187 – A reward for the capture of Jim

Page 218 – The deception of the King

Pages 223, 231 – The innocence and trusting nature of the Wilks women

Pages 252-253 – Huck’s crisis of conscience

Page 275 – Huck returns to the river

Pages 284-290 – Huck realizes Jim’s true worth and makes the choice to save him

Pages 318-319 – Tom’s foolishness

Pages 346-347 – Jim refuses to leave unless Tom gets medical attention

Page 361 – Setting Jim free and what it means

Or any others where you feel the artwork creates a visual representation of the idea of foreshadowing within the novel that you find particularly compelling. Have students answer the following question about the image with a short essay:

What elements of the artwork bring a strong understanding of foreshadowing within the novel on the page that text alone could not?

Final Assessment:

The novel is largely believed to be a satiric look at the nature of what was considered “civilized” culture of America in the 1800’s. Huck’s desire to detach from civilization and live a more natural life traveling down the river and camping along the way allows the reader to compare the young boy’s lessons of the road to the foolish and unkind attitudes of those he meets along the way. The criminals, charlatans, violent acts, and feuding families all paint a picture of something definitively savage and the idyllic life of Huck and Jim outside of all that becomes far more appealing to the reader. Write a short, thesis driven essay that uses the Manga Classic Adaptation as the primary source evidence and explores how the novel represents civilization versus nature and how they impact the impression of the text as a whole.

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