

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 Tom Sawyer*. Students will be asked to focus on specific illustrations in the novel and consider how the artist creates meaning within the visual medium of a graphic novel.

Instructional Duration: 3-4 hours

Objectives:

Students will:

- ✓ Read the graphic *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* 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.

Bildungsroman – Students should be able to define and identify the nature of a coming of age story within 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 Tom Sawyer* 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, bildungsroman, and symbolism.

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

Students should be asked to recall their experiences reading Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. 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 – Satire

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer is a seminal text from one of our most celebrated satirists. Understanding satire, how it manifests itself, and what it is meant to do can be tricky.

Satire is designed to use humor (usually through some form of ridicule or parody) in order to crack open and expose the foolishness of a person, place, or concept. In the case of *Tom Sawyer*, the satire is aimed directly at the nature of life in Missouri in the late 1800's. It includes commentary on religion, education, racism and other biases, and the nature of coming of age.

In order to illustrate satire, the teacher can front load this concept prior to (or immediately after) reading the Manga Classics adaptation. Show the students recent political cartoons or excerpts from satirical films (*Dr. Strangelove*, *The Great Dictator*, *Monty Python and*

the Holy Grail, or others can serve this purpose) and demonstrate how these texts create humor around the behavior of people or sociopolitical systems.

Next, point to specific pages in the text which serve as examples of satire in the book. For example, page 15 when Tom has convinced the neighborhood boys to do his work for him. This satirizes human nature and the desire to obtain something that is unobtainable, regardless of whether one should *want* to obtain it. By making the job of whitewashing the fence something that he does not want to give up, the other boys want it all the more.

Finally, have students create their own satirical cartoon based on criteria of the teacher's discretion. It could be a school-based, local, or national policy or any other sociopolitical ideology that they use humor to satirize.

Activity #3 – Bildungsroman

Tom Sawyer is something of a coming-of-age story, with a satirical twist (see Activity #2 above). Consider how the characters of Tom Sawyer and, to a lesser degree, Huck Finn grow up during the course of the novel. Ask students to point to specific elements of the Manga Classics text where they see some form of development or regression in the characters.

Put students into groups and create a “Growth Timeline” for Tom where they trace his maturity across a predetermined spectrum. This can be tricky to measure so perhaps the class can agree upon a unit of measure and a scale prior to starting the activity. Each time Tom acts immaturely (for example, when he fantasizes about dying and the impact it might have on those who hurt his feelings), they drop on the growth scale. Each time Tom does something selfless (for example, when he takes Becky's punishment for ripping the book), they go up on the growth scale. Establish whether Tom has ended the novel higher or lower on the scale by the end of the novel.

The larger question is to consider what Sawyer is saying about the nature of growing up and its complexity when looking closely at characters like Tom (and others in the novel).

Activity #4 – Theme Identification

There are a lot of moments where the themes of this novel which include (but are not limited to) growing up, running away, superstition, justice, 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 6 – Whitewashing the fence

Page 15 – Tom's scheme

Page 30-32 – Tom's frustration and “death fantasy”

Page 42 – Religion and memorization and Tom's knowledge gaps

Page 46 – Huck's logic and medicinal “practices”

- Page 54 – Tom’s message of love to Becky
Page 60 – Naïve youth and innocence and how “love” and marriage is perceived between children
Page 65-66 – Tom as a pirate or as Robin Hood (fantasies to escape reality)
Page 74 – Injun Joe as the shadow of death (real death)
Page 83-84 – The superstition of a howling dog and what it means for Muff
Page 108 – Tom running away again to escape his problems (again)
Page 116 – The boys seek freedom through imagination
Page 124-125 – The “death fantasy” comes true and the grim reality of what it means to be thought as dead
Page 130 – Tom and Joe’s family missing him and what that means to Tom
Page 136 – The loneliness of freedom
Page 144 – The boys return!
Page 168 – Tom’s note to Aunt Polly as an illustration of fantasy versus reality
Page 183 – Tom’s selfless act to protect Becky
Page 188 – Everyone finds religion
Page 202-203 – Tom does the right thing in court
Page 214 – Injun Joe’s disguise
Page 226 – Are they ghosts or devils, or are they manifestations of the boys’ concept of evil?
Page 247 – Huck’s selfless act to protect the Widow Douglas
Page 261-263 – Tom protects and saves Becky in the cave
Page 269-270 – The gruesome death of Injun Joe

Or any others where you feel the artwork creates a visual representation of the idea of theme 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 a specific theme within the novel on the page that text alone could not?

Final Assessment:

Tom Sawyer is a complex novel with multiple consecutive storylines happening simultaneously as the events in fictional St. Petersburg, Missouri play out. Tom, through his actions, manages to find himself at the center of all these stories. From witnessing a murder to living on an island with Huck and Joe to nearly dying in a cave with Becky Thatcher, Tom’s adventure seem to never end, until they do. Students should choose one of the main storylines and rewrite and create a minicomic of the story from the perspective of a character other than Tom. For example, consider the murder plotline from the perspective of Muff Potter and have students speculate on how he and Injun Joe managed to connect, what he was thinking while in custody, and how his story might have ended after he was free of the murder charges due to Tom’s testimony. The parameters of this assignment (length, number of panels, scope) can be determined by the teacher.

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