

Huckleberry Finn

The idea Miss Watson has of Huck Finn being a dirty, nasty, vulgar little boy who smokes, swears, and stays away from Sunday school is not a justifiable description of him. Huck's character goes much deeper. Huck is a literal-minded, imaginative, trustworthy boy who is greatly impacted by the inhuman ways of society. His society driven conscience is in constant conflict with his free, loyal heart. A mind of the greatest literalness is represented by Huck and what he calls his "conscience". Huck's conscience is the belief in the inhuman rights of slave owners not to be deprived of their property. Huck's conscience is a portrayal of the moral values of society. The idea of slavery is drilled by society into every one of its members, including the otherwise free tramp like Huck- and the "natural", human rights of Jim. Huck's heart follows the opposite views of his conscience. Huck has been listening to Jim's excited talk about what he will do when he is free and it has disturbed what Huck calls his conscience. "Conscience says to me, 'What had poor Miss Watson don't to you that you could see her nigger go off right under your eyes and never say one single word? What did that poor women do to you that you could treat her so mean?'" (92) Jim, as a man, has the right to be free. Huck does not realize this because of the views society has instilled in him. Jim has the right to love his wife and yearn for his children. Jim has the determination to work and save up his money and never spend a scent in order to buy his children out of slavery. The final plan he considers, getting "an Ab'litionist to go and steal" (93) his children if their owner refuses to sell them. The consideration of this plan is a shock to Huck's conscience that awakens him to the wickedness of consorting with Jim and helping him run away from the society-conforming Miss Watson. Miss Watson holds Jim in chattel slavery and Huck in the more subtle slavery of civilized conduct. Huck's conscience is thus badly shaken by Jim's wicked talk of stealing his children from an innocent owner. He decides that it is his moral duty to betray Jim. This decision is a great relief to him, and the minute they sight a town he sets off in the canoe to find somebody to capture Jim. Unluckily, as he is leaving Jim says to him, "I'se a free man, en I couldn't ever been free ef it hadn't been for Huck...you's de bes' fren' Jim's ever had; en you's de only fren' ole Jim's got now" (93). This innocent expression of human affection and gratitude is very ill-timed for Huck; as he says, "I was paddling off, all in a sweat to tell on him; but when he says this it seemed to kind of take the tuck all out of me" (93). As a result, when on some men in a canoe who are actually looking for runaway slaves Huck finds he is not "man enough" to betray Jim. This explains Huck's loyalty and dedication to keeping his promise to Jim- his promise not to turn Jim in for escaping slavery. Instead he finds himself inventing and performing with great skill a complicated lie that persuades the men in the canoe not to go near the raft where Jim is hiding: he makes them believe- he never says so himself- that there are three people with small pox on the raft. Not only does this illustrate that Huck has a great level of imagination it shows the he has a profound knowledge of human nature. This knowledge allows him to create stories, which play upon the selfishness and pettiness of society. He is deeply discouraged to find himself acting this way, as if he "hadn't the spunk of a rabbit" (94). "I knowed very well," he says, "that I had done wrong, and I see it warn't no use for me to try to learn to do right; a body that don't get started right when he's little ain't got no show- when the pinch comes there ain't nothing to back him up and keep him to his work, and so he gets beat...So I reckoned I wouldn't bother no more about it, but after this always do whichever cam handiest at the time" (95). Huck's heart conquers his moral views of society. Huck's heart wins as he battles the moral conflict of society. He conquers this society with his realistic-mindedness, creativeness, and loyalty. His heart defies society's inhuman acts while his conscience pushes him towards the routine ways of society. The victory of Huck's heart is attributable to his character traits and ultimately makes him a good person.