

Talking about *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (censored)*

by Mark Twain · the free ebook lives at youngreaderguide.org/books/huckleberry-finn-censored/

Warming up

Easy openers. Anyone at the table can answer these, including the youngest.

1. Huck and Jim's raft has a wigwam, a lantern, fishing lines, and a spare canoe. You get one raft and one river: what three things do you want aboard?
2. Huck fakes his own death with a slaughtered pig and a trail of blood, then hides on an island and watches the town drag the river for his body. Would you want to see what people said about you if they thought you were gone?

The real conversation

Pick two or three, not all of them. Parents answer too, honestly.

1. Huck writes the letter turning Jim in, feels good and clean for the first time in months, then thinks about the raft, tears it up, and says he'll go to hell instead. He is certain he has just chosen to be wicked. Why does he think that? Has doing the right thing ever felt to you like breaking a rule?
2. Huck lies at nearly every landing — a new name, a new dead family, smallpox on the raft. Some of the lies protect Jim and some are just for the pleasure of it. Which of Huck's lies would you defend, and where's your line?
3. Huck tricks Jim into believing he dreamed the whole night in the fog, and Jim tells him plainly that a friend who does that is trash. It takes Huck fifteen minutes to make himself apologize. What was so expensive about those fifteen minutes? What's the hardest apology anyone here has made?
4. Colonel Sherburn steps onto his porch alone and tells a whole lynch mob that not one of them is brave, that a crowd is just a lot of cowards borrowing nerve from each other — and they leave. Is he right about crowds? When have you done something in a group you wouldn't have done by yourself?
5. Tom Sawyer turns up at the end already knowing Jim has been set free, and puts him through weeks of a made-up escape anyway, for the fun of it. Huck goes along. Why is that so much harder to read than anything the Duke and the King do?

The big *one*

Save it for last.

Everything Huck was ever taught told him that helping Jim was stealing another person's property, and everything he actually felt on the raft told him Jim was his friend. He trusted the feeling and concluded he must be wicked. Is there anything the people at this table were taught was right that their gut still argues with? How would you know which one to trust?

Do it *together*

Land at a new town. Every time Huck steps ashore he is somebody else, with a whole family history invented on the walk up from the water. Each of you invents one: a name, where you're from, why you're traveling alone, and one detail so specific that nobody would think to make it up. Then the rest of the table questions you for two minutes and you have to hold it together. Huck's stories always tore on the detail he hadn't thought about in advance, so the point isn't to win — it's to find where yours goes thin. Youngest asks the first question.