

Huckleberry Finn and Censorship

90 Minutes

English: High School

DESIRED RESULTS

What are the “big ideas” that drive this lesson?

- ❖ There has been frequent controversy surrounding the use of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (AHF)* in schools.
- ❖ Students will be able to analyze primary and secondary sources and understand the reasons for this continuing controversy.
- ❖ Students will develop an awareness of the continuing controversy over *AHF* as a foundation for their reading and analysis of the book, and develop a final conclusion about whether the claims made by critics and proponents of *AHF* are worthy of study by students.

What are the “essential questions” that students must answer in order to understand the “big ideas?”

- ❖ What are the main arguments for and against the teaching of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*?
- ❖ How reasonable are the arguments for and against this novel as a subject for study in school?
- ❖ What hypothesis do you have about *AHF* based on your review of the criticism and support of the book?

CORE UNDERSTANDINGS

Identify what students will know and/or be able to do.

- ❖ Students will identify and evaluate the arguments for and against teaching *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.
- ❖ Students will synthesize the arguments and formulate and effectively express their own position on the debate over teaching *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

LIST SUGGESTED ASSESSMENT(S)

- ❖ Students participation in group discussion and work
- ❖ Participation in class-wide discussions
- ❖ T- chart

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

What are the specific activities and sequence of instruction that will be used to engage students in this lesson?

1. The teacher will provide students with various national and local newspaper, magazine and journal articles from the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries that present both sides of the *AHF* debate.
2. Each student will read one article for homework and, when next in class, will present, cite, and explain “Who? Where? When? What? Why?” concerning their assigned news story about *AHF*. The rest of the class listens, asks questions, and takes notes on two “T-charts” – one chart for “pro” arguments and one for “con” arguments - that will organize direct quotations according to whether they are either in favor of or against the teaching of *AHF*.
3. The following day, students will use this T-chart when they meet in small groups to discuss the articles and develop their own view on the controversy.
4. After the small group discussion, each student will be asked to write a paragraph that defines their hypothesis about the controversy over *AHF*, which will be referenced by each student during their reading of *AHF* for the purpose of testing its validity.
5. Extended assignment: Upon completion of the novel, students will use their T-charts and hypothesis to write a critical analysis paper that

outlines the two sides of the AHF debate and expresses their own thesis as to the validity of their original hypothesis.

“COMMON CORE” CONNECTIONS:

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1](#) Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.7](#) Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

MATERIALS AND ATTACHMENTS

- ❖ 1885 article from *Boston Transcript*—Huckleberry Finn and the Concord Public Library
- ❖ 1982 article from *The Nation*—Expelling Huck Finn
- ❖ 1984 article from *New York Times*—Huckleberry Finn, Alive at 100
- ❖ 1992 article from *The Hartford Courant*—School is right to throw out ‘Huck Finn’
- ❖ 1994 article from *Civilization*—In Praise of Huckleberry Finn
- ❖ 1995 article from *New Haven Register*—Huck Finn rose above the bigotry
- ❖ 1996 article from *The Washington Post*—Finn’s Wake: Twain’s ‘Huckleberry’ is a flawed masterpiece
- ❖ 2008 article from *Hartford Courant*—Huck Still Raising Raft of Concerns
- ❖ 2008 article from *Time*—Getting Past Black and White

SUGGESTED LESSON EXTENSIONS TO ENHANCE STUDENT LEARNING

- ❖ Students can research other books that have either been censored or have an historical and/or current controversy about them and ask students to compare the

similarities and/or the differences with the controversy over AHF. In presenting their information, students can create a PowerPoint or poster.