



## Teaching Three Great Books with Dr. Flora Armetta

### Lesson 2: Huckleberry Finn, Part One

#### Outline:

##### Importance of Sharing Biographical Information

- Authors are shaped by experience and times.
- Quick Biography of Mark Twain
  - Born Samuel Langhorne Clemens in 1835 to a slaveholder family of Missouri
  - Lost 3 siblings and his father as a child
  - Became printer's apprentice in the 5th grade
  - Began writing newspaper articles at age 18 in New York and Philadelphia
  - Became apprentice riverboat pilot on Mississippi in 1857 and pilot in 1859
  - Published *Roughing It* after water traffic stopped during the Civil War (1861)
  - First used pseudonym "Mark Twain" (riverboat term meaning 2 fathoms, a safe depth for a steamboat) in 1863 while writing for the *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*
  - First book, *Innocents Abroad*, published in 1869
  - Married Olivia Langdon, daughter of abolitionist, and settled in Hartford, CT, in 1871
  - Had four children (eldest died at age 2)
  - Well-known works: *Tom Sawyer* (1876), *The Prince and the Pauper* (1881), *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), *Huckleberry Finn* (1885), *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889)
  - Created his own publishing house: Charles L. Webster, Co.
  - Later years: Fell into debt, became outspoken against imperialism, moved to Europe, lost two daughters to illnesses, and died in 1910 (buried in Elmira, NY)
- Twain's biography is reflected in *Huckleberry Finn*.
  - Branded as a sequel to *Tom Sawyer*, but entirely different in tone and purpose.
    - Conflict between slavery and abolition (reflection of Twain's own life)
    - Frequent casual references to death (mortality rate during 19th century tended to be high, as seen in Twain's own family).

##### Controversial Ideas to Address with Students and Parents

- Use of "N" word (see sample parent letter)
  - Suggestion: Replace with word "slave" when reading aloud



## Historical Setting

- Set prior to Civil War in the 1830s or 40s (see Title page)
  - Ask questions concerning circumstance, authority, comparison, and relationship based on historical setting.
  - Author's time setting suggests enlightened point of view (POV) of reader; the reader has information the characters do not have.
- Set in Missouri
  - Missouri Compromise - Missouri would enter Union as a slave state in 1821.
  - See "Background to Slavery" resource for slave laws.
    - Important: Jim breaks every one of these laws in the novel, and Huck also breaks these laws by aiding Jim.