

Letter to Parents: *Huckleberry Finn* in Literature Curriculum – Dr. Flora Armetta

Dear Families,

I wanted to let you all know that, beginning next week, we will be reading Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* as part of our Literature course.

This is an important piece of literature, but, because it contains material that can be difficult, and potentially upsetting, I would like you all to be aware of this reading ahead of time, and perhaps consider checking in with your children and discussing the reading at home in a supportive manner if you see fit.

Published in 1885, roughly twenty years after the end of the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation, *Huckleberry Finn* takes place in the American south in approximately the late 1840s. It is an episodic adventure and, more important, a narrative of the growing friendship between a young white boy, Huck, and an African-American man named Jim, who is an escaped slave, as they travel together along the Mississippi River.

What is disturbing about the novel is its language; Twain has his narrator, Huck, use the “n”-word to describe Jim and other black characters, and also uses a stereotyped dialect to represent Jim's speech. This may make it difficult for students, at first, to recognize the values inherent in the story: it depicts slavery, and racism, as definite evils; portrays Jim and Huck as complex and marvelous human beings with both flaws and deeply redeeming characteristics; and ultimately makes Jim, like Huck, a moving hero.

I will calmly and briefly let students know about the language issues before we begin reading, without overly emphasizing them. But I ask that you please be willing to talk with your students about any concerns that may arise for them as they read. Please also, as always, feel free to address any concerns of your own to me; I will be glad to talk any time.

Thanks as always,

Yours in Christ,

Flora Armetta