

**File Name: A8R Years Gone By**

**Argument/Opinion**

**Grade 8**

**Range of Writing**

## **Years Gone By;**

### **The Importance of Great Literature**

“That one day little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today.”

-Martin Luther King, Jr.

As years have gone by, as we take actions and feel emotions, we embark upon a search for something to describe the indescribable, to understand the most complicated of thoughts, and to ease unrelenting pain. It is in this search that we stumble upon literature, and we have learned that it can be one of the most effective tools to both spiritually and bodily heal the wounds of human nature.

Martin Luther King, Jr.’s message of equality is one that has stayed rooted deep in American history. He speaks of a problem that must not be neglected. In many cases, the key to problems such as these is understanding and awareness. Through literature we find that we benefit through both. Really great literature speaks to you forever, despite years of actions taken and emotions felt.

An example of such literature is the book *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain. Through its main character, Huckleberry Finn, a young, boisterous white boy who has recently run away, and his friend Jim, a runaway slave, live the values of America and the values of a very turbulent, but loyal friendship.

Regardless of its message, Mark Twain’s talent and its ability to withstand, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is at risk of being taken off the shelves of schools across the country. As an American student, I firmly believe that we must make a stand against this potentially great loss, and make sure that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is kept in our schools

#### **Introduces a claim:**

Introduction sets stage for claim to follow, connecting the purpose of great literature with the American ideal of equality

Defines problem / issue at hand (*Huckleberry Finn* being challenged in curriculum)

States focus / claim

and in our minds for the sake of describing the indescribable, understanding the most complicated of thoughts and easing pain.

Some may disagree with the message conveyed by Mark Twain in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. With fire in their eyes they say that such a book encourages bad behavior and addresses racism in such a way that it should not be on school shelves.

First, they find that Huck is too unlawful a child to be portrayed as a hero. He steals, lies, and runs away. He has no problem going against the law or his own conscience and takes pride in achievements he has been taught not to strive for, they point out. However, to this point we shake our head. Many, many books have characters that lead lives that today's children are taught against. Among the pages of The Old Testament, Cain, brother of Able, stands clearly as a wrong-doer in order to help us better understand the negative forces of human nature. Though some may believe that Huck is among these undying wrong-doers, he may well be, like Cain, an example of how not to act. Yet you cannot classify Huck as a bad or good person, he is one of the many complicated characters that call the pages of great literature home. When stealing, Huck is actually "borrowing", his lies cause him great stress and come back to haunt him. When he runs away, he is running from an abusive father, taking control of a situation that was headed for disaster. When he goes against his conscience it is for the sake of a friend. In that case, Huck decides that the laws of human nature are more important than the laws that are ignorant, laws that discriminate, laws that could undeservingly take away what is yours. Huck is indeed no criminal, and if anything his values are something to be admired.

Those who still believe that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* should be taken off our schools' shelves say that it addresses racism in a way that is inappropriate for students. But that point, like the other, holds no water. It addresses racism in an appropriate and indeed necessary format. Like Martin Luther King Jr.'s message, it enables us to understand

**Distinguishes claim from opposing claims in a series of counterclaims**

Explains counterclaim thoroughly

**Phrases and clauses clarify relationships within reasons and evidence.**

**Acknowledges an opposing claim, which the writer distinguishes from the claim and then counters with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, demonstrating a deep understanding of the text and topic**

**Organizes the reasons and evidence logically  
Establishes and maintains a formal style.**

**Uses words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim, counterclaim, reasons, and evidence**

and at the same time helps us become aware of how poorly African-Americans were treated during the time the book was set, and it does this in a true-to-life and very real layout. Also, Huck and Jim strike a friendship that white people and slaves could not have in the limits of society during the time period and this reminds the reader in many places that everyone deserves the same freedom and equality.

You must also take into account that if there is any place to read a book with possibly risky content it would be inside classrooms, classrooms where the material would certainly be discussed and explained. In class is perhaps the safest place for one to read this book, or any book that could result in conflicting viewpoints. To take it off the shelves of schools would be to take away the ability to help children understand and be aware of the deeper meaning, and therefore they would be worse off than if it were to be in their schools.

In light of the past arguments, we must now press on to show you what an excellent book *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain really is. It is a book that contains important illustrations of racism and how to overcome it, as well as many American values.

First, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* illustrates a struggle that has been deeply rooted in our past, and remains deeply rooted in the present. Though we have come a long way, a wall built of racial cloud still stands. Huck and Jim find a way to get past this wall and despite slavery and the examples set in society, treat each other as equals. In Chapter 15, titled “Fooling Poor Old Jim” Huck tries to play a trick on Jim to make fun of him, not thinking about Jim’s feelings. When Jim discovers the truth he is deeply hurt, but is able to express that to Huck. Hearing of his friend’s sadness, Huck in turn apologizes for his actions.

“En when I wake up en fine you back agin, all safe en soun’, de tears come, en I could ‘a’ got down on my knees en kiss yo’ foot, I’s so thankful. En all you wuz thinking’ ‘bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie. Dat truck dah is *trash*; en trash is what people is dat puts

**Supports the claim with logical reasoning and relevant evidence**, thereby demonstrating deep understanding of the text and topic, including broader ideas about education

**Uses words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim, counterclaim, reasons, and evidence**

**Supports the claim with logical reasoning and relevant evidence**, including direct quotations, thereby demonstrating deep understanding of the text and topic; uses precise references to text which are thoroughly analyzed and explained

dirt on de head er dey fren's en makes 'em ashamed.' Then he got up slow and walked to the wigwam, and went in there without saying anything but that. But that was enough. It made me feel so mean I could almost kissed *his* foot to get him to take it back. It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger – but I done it and I wahren't every sorry for it afterward, neither. I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd 'a' knowed it would make him feel that way.”

It is a very important time in this book when Jim is able to express to Huck how being lied to hurt him, especially when he thought of Huck as a friend. After Jim has spoken of feelings and retired for bed, Huck takes time to reflect upon his actions, and how they made Jim feel. Fifteen minutes later, despite what society taught him, Huck apologies to Jim as only a friend would, and takes what Jim says to heart.

Not only does *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* address racism in an appropriate way and remarkably find a way to overcome it, but in many ways it reminds the reader of the important values that can only too often be forgotten in America. One of the biggest is freedom. Both Huck and Jim are searching for freedom, escaping the imprisonment of slavery and an abusive father. Another value that is evident is equality. As expressed in the quote above, Huck and Jim find that equality is an essential in their friendship. Through this understanding, they manage to stay friends despite all that life throws their way.

One clear and significant value shows in this book is perseverance. Both Huck and Jim set a valiant and enduring example of this value throughout the book. Despite Huck's father and slave catchers close on their trail; a rattlesnake skin that constantly brings them bad luck; a wrecked ship that accommodated a murder plot; a tumultuous friendship and a family blinded by bloodshed, Huck and Jim find themselves pushing that much harder to reach the freedom that their hearts desire. They find courage and want within each other, and as a heroic duo conquer all that flows to them

**Uses words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim, counterclaim, reasons, and evidence**

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upon the river of life.

There are many values evident in this book that are set down in the Declaration of Independence, and values that have stood the test of time. This brings us back to the fact that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* must be taught in schools. As Huck and Jim lead their lives they set the examples that are crucial to students' education. When people learn how to treat each other and learn significant values at a young age, they are given the opportunity to apply those lessons to their future and in turn teach their children. To leave these lessons behind would be doing these students a disservice, for it is lessons like these that teach us who we are, who we need to be.

Great literature is a food that is scarce, but it will always be universal. Do your part to foster its presence in your life, and the life of the youth of America. As years have gone by, as actions are taken and emotions are felt, we all search for something to describe the indescribable, to understand an idea that is conflicting, or to ease unrelenting pain. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain is a possible outcome of that search, teaching the significance of friendship, freedom and equality. Under the nose of a visceral world, two differing runaways find shelter in a friendship banned from society. In this friendship, they teach the world the importance of understanding and the importance of great literature.

**Provides a concluding section that follows from and supports the argument presented**

In this assignment from a language arts class, the student was asked, after studying *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, to take a position on whether or not the book should continue to be included in the school curriculum. She gives an introduction of some background / context on the issue, and makes a claim that the book should continue to be included.

The writer develops her claim with several reasons, which she supports thoroughly and thoughtfully with relevant, accurate evidence from the text, showing deep understanding of both the text and the issue, and even of broader connections to bigger ideas like equality and the purpose of education. In a clearly organized essay, she relies on logical reasoning to develop her claim and persuade her audience of the correctness of her position. In addition, she thoroughly and thoughtfully acknowledges the counterclaim that there are reasons to eliminate the book, then refutes that counterclaim with clear and logical, text-based reasoning.

The writer maintains a formal style throughout the piece. The conclusion follows from the argument presented and synthesizes the key points.

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