

***Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Offensive Language in Literature**

In Mark Twain's classic 1884 novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, regional and time-specific language is used in a way that offends some 21st century readers. Particular words are so disturbing that individuals across the country are still, to this day, attempting to have the book banned in schools and libraries. The idea that any book should be tucked away in a vault, let alone an example of a beloved American classic such as this, is ludicrous and against what America stands for. Works of art, like this book, should be used to learn and to open up dialogue and analysis on both the piece itself and the society from which it came. With this particular Twain novel, we should be having a discussion about why the offending words are so offensive, and why it's important that a record of these words and attitudes exist.

Words carry weight, and the weight of the "N" word in *Huckleberry Finn* is heavy and dripping with sordid history. It is a term that holds an impassable amount of cultural appropriation and painful association. The word, used in a classic literary context, is then a perfect way to open up a dialogue about issues that are difficult to talk about. Political correctness, racial slurs, America's dark past—these are all topics that can be used to teach young people how to have a gentle conversation about a torrid subject matter. Instead of banning the book and ignoring the past, we should be embracing the story and teaching people how to deal with the words in a tactful and progressive way.

Moving forward from America's shameful history of racism is difficult and taxing. But the only way we make steps to a new and more comfortable future is to learn from our past mistakes. Twain was a product of his time, putting words into the mouths of his characters that would easily have come from the mouths of real people. It's also important to remember that the character of Huck Finn himself is anti-racist, so teaching the book to young people is not teaching racism, but acceptance. It is imperative to connect with the period of history that *Huckleberry Finn* comes from because shoving it to the side will only render us blind.

Banning books is an effective way to censor, and censorship goes against a lot of what Americans believe to be a very important personal right. The right to free speech is sacred, and it is mostly untouched even in circumstances where highly polarizing or hateful words are being used. A work of fiction that integrates dialogue containing the "N" word may seem hateful to some, but it is certainly the intention of the author to use it in a context of satire. Censorship will just close the book when what we really need is to open it up in a different light.

At a time when it is nearly impossible to find an adult engaged in a healthy debate or discussion, teaching our children how to think and speak analytically and fairly is a dire need. Using fictional novels such as *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as a jumping-off point of what used to be, and what has become, is the perfect opportunity for creating the ability to do this. By keeping books deemed controversial in rotation and out of the vault, we can begin to understand the preciousness of our own rights to speak our mind, as well as being able to speak to others with respect and with knowledge of the past.