

# **Background Context of The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn**

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# The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

By

Mark Twain





## *Slavery in America*

**In 1620, English private citizens brought the first slaves to Virginia. The second half of the 17th century saw steep growth in the slave trade, in particular in the US South, where the big cotton, tobacco and sugar cane plantations were located. Due to the high demand of slave labour, legislation changed – no surprise in this time of political liberalism. Slaves became the property of their buyers, who could do whatever they wanted to them. Rape, mutilation, branding and murder were the order of the day.**

**Technological progress further divided the North and the South. While industry took over the North, the South remained dependent on agriculture and therefore on its slaves. People in the North opposed slavery, and tension between North and South further heightened over the question of whether slavery should be permitted in the new states joining the Union. When Abraham Lincoln, an abolitionist, was elected president in 1860, seven slave-holding states in the South left the Union and founded the Confederate States of America – also referred to as the Confederacy – in 1861. The US government declared the Confederacy illegitimate. The Confederate attack on Fort Sumter – a Union fort in South Carolina – in 1861 started the bloody Civil War between the Union and the Confederacy. The war ended with the capitulation of the Confederacy in April 1865 and a death toll of more than 620,000 military men. On paper, this also put an end to slavery in America. However, during the Reconstruction Era (1865–1877), which was intended to reintegrate the secession states into the Union, it became clear that racial issues were far from resolved.**





Samuel Langhorne Clemens, Mark Twain's given name, was born on November 30, 1835 in the small river town of Florida, Missouri.



**Twain was the sixth child born to  
John Marshall Clemens and Jane  
Lampton.**

**At the age of four, Twain's family moved to Hannibal, Missouri in hopes of improving their living situation.**

As a young boy, Twain was mischievous and he was the prototype of his character, Tom Sawyer. Although he experienced poor health during his childhood, “by age nine he had already learned to smoke, led a small band of pranksters, and had developed an aversion to school.”



**Twain's formal schooling ended after  
age 12, due to the death of his  
father.**

Twain began working as an apprentice in a printer's shop and eventually worked under his brother, Orion, at the Hannibal Journal.



**At the age of 17, Twain published his  
first literary pieces.**



Twain eventually grew tired of his printing jobs and worked as a riverboat pilot on the Mississippi River for the next four years. Twain was 24.



**With the beginning of the Civil War,  
Twain gave up his “traveling  
lifestyle” and enlisted as a  
Confederate soldier. His military  
career was short and he, along with  
many other young men, moved  
West to avoid the draft.**

Twain hoped to become rich from mining silver and gold, but after realizing the impossibility of his dream, he began to write again, and, in 1863, he adopted the pseudonym (pen name) Mark Twain, a river pilot term that describes safe navigating conditions.



**Twain was a man who was familiar  
with hard times. He struggled  
financially during his literary career  
and he experienced the loss of his  
son Langdon to Diphtheria.**

Twain died on April 21, 1910 a highly acclaimed author of works such as The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, The Prince and the Pauper, *and* The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.



*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is an extremely controversial piece of literature. In some Southern states, the novel was banned due to its “extensive criticism of the hypocrisy of slavery.”

Some circles feel that the novel is racist because of the frequent use of the word “nigger.”

**Sadly, many readers do not understand Twain's motive in using this word which was for the purpose of “simply projecting a realistic portrayal of Southern society” during the period surrounding the 1830s.**