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The Value of Good Moral Standards

Due to the fact that morality can easily shape the personality and life of an individual, it plays an important role in society. Even today, families stress the idea of having good moral standards to their children since it can affect a child's future. As children gradually grow older and turn into young adults, they slowly develop their own morals and may even go against the morals that are true in his or her society. Mark Twain illustrates the importance and impact of moral growth on a child in his famous novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. During the novel, the protagonist, Huckleberry Finn, goes through an adventure that changes his life forever. His experience with a runaway slave named Jim, the Duke and King, and the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons, gradually changes his personality, opinions, and morals.

Throughout the novel, Huckleberry Finn spends a great deal of time with Miss Watson's slave, Jim. At the beginning of the story, Huck treats Jim as an average slave who holds an inferior role from the white community. The two of them end up meeting at Jackson's Island and begin to have a strong, meaningful friendship. As Huck spends more and more time with Jim, he realizes that Jim is a normal person and feels sorry for his mistreatment. During their time at Jackson's island, Jim and Huck once gets lost in the fog and do not find each other until the next day. That morning, Huck tells a lie to Jim by telling him that everything that happened the night before was all a dream. Once Jim discovers Huck's lie, he tells Huck, "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 dirt on de head er dey fren's en makes 'em ashamed" (86). By hearing these words, Huck regrets his deceptions towards Jim and realizes his fault. Huck finally gathers courage and humbles himself to Jim and actually apologizes. He then states to himself, "...and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither. I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd known it would make him feel that way" (87). Since Huck was born in a white community that mistreated slaves, Huck was taught to never humble himself to a slave since slaves were nothing but objects. By apologizing to Jim, Huck goes against the moral values of his own community. He changes his opinion and decides that any person, despite his or her race, deserves to be apologized when he or she is offended. This action also portrays Huck's development in personality since he is slowly turning into a caring, sympathetic, unselfish person. Throughout their adventure, Huck listens to Jim's dream of being free and sees how harsh and different Jim's life is compared to his own. Huck's views towards slavery begin to change since for the first time, he hears a story that is from a black slave's point of view and realizes how horrible slavery is. Later on during the story, Huck constantly keeps thinking that he is the reason why Jim is running away to freedom. Inside, his conscience tells him that the right thing to do is to inform someone about Jim's whereabouts. After Huck finally writes a letter to Miss Watson, he thinks to himself:

"... I was the best friend old Jim ever had in the world, and the *only* one he's got now; and then I happened to look around, and see that paper... 'All right, then, I'll go to hell"—and tore it up... I would take up wickedness again... And for a starter, I would go to work to steal Jim out of slavery again" (215)

This major decision that Huck makes illustrates a turning point in his life. Not only does he agree to help Jim reach freedom, despite the consequences he may have to face from the people of his community, he even says he will go to hell for this action. This shows Huck's strong

determination and his moral growth. Since his conscience is based on the white community, Huck is willing to go against his conscience. Thus, he no longer agrees with any of the moral standards he was raised from as a child and creates his own set of morals. He sees that treating blacks as inferior people is wrong and that helping Jim get to freedom is the moral way.

Huck also spends time with a family called the Grangerfords. For many years, a feud between the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons has existed. When Miss Sophia runs away to marry a son from the Shepherdson family, the two families fight a battle, which Huck is forced to encounter. Before Huck went to Jackson's island, he and Tom Sawyer decide to become a secret gang of pirates. They make a vow to never leave the gang and to kill any member who reveals their secrets. Huck considers murdering people as a joke and considers it as a game. His opinion, however, goes through a complete change after he sees two members of the Grangerford family shot to death. After seeing this event, he states, "It made me so sick I most fell out of the tree...I wished I hadn't ever come ashore that night, to see such things. I ain't every going to shut of them—lots of times I dream about them" (116). This event seems to have permanently scarred Huck's memory. He no longer sees murder as a game but as a devastating situation that results from hate. Huck now knows that he should never murder anyone since it will only bring grief and misery to others. This also shows that Huck is increasing his maturity level since he is experiencing many things that are not normally what a boy his own age would experience. His escalating maturity level molds his moral standards, opinions, and personality since these three things result from his large knowledge about the world.

During his adventure, Huck also meets two con men, who he refers to as the duke and the king. Throughout the story, these dishonest men tell numerous lies to innocent people in order to

receive money. Huck observes the Duke and King and learns a great deal about deception.

When the Duke and King pretend to be the brothers of Peter Wilks, who have returned to Peter's town in order to receive the money from his will, Huck looks at the two men with disgust as they fool the entire town. While the duke and king cry over Peter's death, Huck remarks, "It was enough to make a body ashamed of the human race" (164). At first, Huck admires the two men's craftiness at stealing and trickery but later sees the pain it causes to innocent civilians. After the con men decide to sell everything from the Wilks family, Huck realizes that they have gone too far and decides to steal some of the money and give it back to the girls. Huck states to himself, "...this is *another* one that I'm letting him rob her of her money...I felt so ornery and low down and mean, that I says to myself, My mind's made up; I'll hive that money for them or bust." (176-177). Not only does Huck steal the money from the con men, he also reveals to Mary Jane the truth about the two frauds. Thus, Huck sees that deception can be used in both a positive and negative way. He seems to understand this difference and knows when to lie and when not to lie. His understanding also reveals his moral growth and a change in opinions. He now sees stealing as a terrible thing that only harms others and that honesty will usually be the right direction to follow.

Once Huck completes his long adventure with Jim, he turns into a sophisticated young boy who has his own moral standards, personality, and opinions. This complete change that Huck goes through shows great significance to the novel since it shows the readers the values and rewards of having good moral standards and personality. By living a life with good morals, a person will go to the correct direction that leads to a path of success.