Motifs of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Okay, we have been collecting evidence of Huck’s character, how that character is affected by the people who populate his ever-changing environment, and most importantly the development of Huck’s sound heart over his deformed conscience as he moves down the river with Jim.

Now let’s dig deep with both hands into the meaty stuff of analysis. You might have noticed, and the alert reader will, some reoccurring elements throughout the work. Again, those reading with awareness will question what these reoccurring elements might suggest about the work as a whole. So let’s get to those elements…also known as motifs.

Denotation: A motif is something symbolic that shows up in a work to reinforce the work’s main theme. Usually, it’s a physical object, but sometimes it can take on a different form. **Motifs repeat throughout a work as opposed to only appearing once, and they must hold significance to the plot.**

Motifs typically are used in one of three ways:

* A single object that appears multiple times throughout the work with most of the emphasis placed on the item
* A collection of related objects that appear multiple times to emphasize the theme
* A collection of seemingly unrelated items that serve to draw attention to the theme in a subtler manner.

The reader will have to work to find the connection, but motifs serve the theme of the novel.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, for example, ideas like light vs. dark, sin vs. redemption, the forest vs. civilization, the number 7, the number 3, the scaffold all work to suggest larger universal ideas known as theme.

**Directions**: The following elements appear several times – either directly or indirectly – throughout *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Your job: cite at least two examples (quotes with real parenthetical citations). Explain how these two quotes work together to express that larger universal idea. Consider the commonality in the two quotes, Twain’s attitude toward the subjects, and the commentary Twain makes about this idea.

Your meditation here is an insight, an inference of the nonliteral ideas you believe the work suggests. A theme should emerge in your answer. Consider all the ideas you unearthed on our previous Huck Finn assignments and let them guide you.

* It is fine to use bullets
* Please use appropriate grammar, punctuation, and capitalization (lose the gerunds)
* No taboo.
* Invoke the “how” where you see fit.
Know your audience and your register.
* Make sure you reread both the directions and your completed work.

Childhood vs. Adulthood

Cons and Lies

The Individual vs. Society

Religion vs. Superstition

Huck’s “Death” and “Rebirth”

Loneliness and isolation

Man’s inhumanity to man

Romanticism vs. Realism

The River vs. the Shore

Clothing and Nakedness

Direction (North, South, East, West)

Parenthood