

GROUP THEME PROJECT ASSIGNMENT

Huckleberry Finn

PROMPT

As you read the book *Huckleberry Finn*, you will notice that certain ideas or themes keep popping up over and over again. Five of the main themes are freedom, religion, superstition, education, and nature.

Your class has been (or will shortly be) divided up into five groups, one group for each of the above-mentioned themes. You will do a series of assignments relating to the theme you have been assigned, and the assignments will all lead towards a final class-period-long presentation your group will create and present.

Put away your ideas of a stuffy, practically dusty, old-time, boring presentation. Nope. We'll have none of that. Your presentation will be a one-of-a-kind masterpiece filled with your own interesting ideas combined with knowledge you gain from collecting information from various sources and presented with your skillful use of modern technology.

DESCRIPTION

Your project is divided into several parts. A description of each part follows:

* Part One: This first part is an important base for the rest of your work. You are to keep a journal. (Don't groan!) As you read the book *Huckleberry Finn*, keep a record of all the references to your theme that you can find. Jot down the chapter and page numbers and a brief summary of the reference. For example, "Chapter 6, pages 55-57, Huck is kept prisoner by his father" could be a sample entry for the theme of freedom. In another section of your journal, keep a little list of your own thoughts and things you have heard about that relate to your theme, either in fiction or in real life. The last pages of your journal will pull together all of your fragmented references and will incorporate many of your ideas. See Writing Assignment #1 for complete instructions.

*Part Two: There is a saying that art imitates life; in other words, what we read in books, see in movies, or hear in our music reflects the things that are (or were) going on in real life. Examining real life, then, is the point to examining books, movies, or music. We look at and listen to these things to better understand our world and ourselves. In Part One, we dealt mostly with the book. In Part Two, we will deal mostly with the real world. Your assignment in Part Two is to look at your theme in our world today. What things, what issues, what topics, what ideas in our world today relate to your theme? Your group will brainstorm a list of ways your theme relates to our world today. You will then divide up your list and go get some facts to back up and fill out your ideas. See the Making It Relevant page for complete instructions.

* Part Three: You have looked at your theme both in the text and in real life. Now you need to create a presentation to convey all the ideas you have gathered. Your presentations must include information from the text you read (*Huck Finn*) and information from your "real world" pool of ideas. See Presentation Guidelines for complete instructions.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT #1 - *Huckleberry Finn*

PROMPT

In your journal, you have kept two kinds of information: a list of references to your theme in the text and a list of ideas you have had about your theme. After you have finished reading the book and have finished making your journal entries, you are to write a composition about your theme as it relates to the book.

PREWRITING

Most of your prewriting has been done already through the work you did in your journal. Now it is time for you to analyze the data you have collected while you were reading. Go back and read through all of your journal entries.

- Freedom: Do all of your entries deal with the same kinds of freedom or are there examples of many kinds of freedom/bondage? What different kinds are there? Note which of your examples in your journal support which different aspects of freedom/bondage. After you have grouped them, look at your data for each set. What does each set of examples seem to be showing?
- Religion: If you look carefully at your journal entries, you will probably see that different characters in the book have different opinions about religion, and through those characters, Twain also gives his opinions. Categorize your data by characters. After you have done so, look at the examples of what each character says or does relating to the theme of religion. Jot down your notes about each character's views on the topic. What do you think Twain's view is?
- Superstition: Most of the references to superstitions in the book are put forth by Huck and Jim. Group your examples accordingly. Look at your examples, then, for each character. What are Huck's attitudes towards superstitions? What are Jim's?
- Education: As you look at your examples in your journal, you will probably see that there are two main ideas presented about this topic. Some characters think book learning is more important than practical knowledge from/about life experiences, and some characters think vice versa. Group your data into these two categories. Then, make notes about which characters believe schooling is more important and which characters believe practical knowledge from life experiences is more important. What do you think Twain believed?

Nature: There is a basic conflict between nature and civilization. Look at your data references to nature. What kinds of things happen when the characters are in nature, away from civilization? Think back to the story and jot down a few notes about what things happen when the characters are back in "civilization." Judging from this data, what do you think Twain was perhaps trying to tell us about nature, civilization, and people?

DRAFTING

Freedom: Write an introductory paragraph explaining that there are several different kinds of freedom/bondage shown in the novel *Huckleberry Finn*. Specify what they are. In the body of your paper, write one paragraph for each of the different types you found. As a format for each paragraph, you could make a statement about the kind of freedom/bondage you will discuss in the paragraph and then use the examples you found in the book to support and explain your statement. After you have completed the paragraphs in the body of your composition, write a concluding paragraph (based on the information you have just presented) explaining what you think Twain intended to point out about the theme of freedom.

Religion: Write an introductory paragraph in which you explain that religion is one of the major themes in the novel *Huckleberry Finn* and point out that Twain has given the characters in the book definite opinions on the subject through which Twain's own opinions can be heard. In the body of your paper, write one paragraph for each character who has opinions about religion. Write a topic sentence stating who the character is and what his/her opinion of religion seems to be. Use the specific examples you found in the text to support your statements. Then write a concluding paragraph in which you tell what you think Twain's opinion was, based on the information you have just set forth.

Superstition: Your composition can probably most easily be written as a comparison-contrast essay comparing and contrasting the views Huck and Jim have of superstitions. Write an introductory paragraph in which you introduce the idea that superstition is one of the themes in the novel and that most of the theme is developed through Huck and Jim. State briefly the main way(s) their attitudes towards superstitions are different. In the body of your paper, take (at least) one paragraph to explore Jim's attitudes towards superstitions and (at least) one paragraph to discuss Huck's attitudes about it. Use the specific examples you have gathered to support your statements. Then write a concluding paragraph in which you tell what you think Twain was trying to point out through his use of superstition in the book.

Education: Write an introductory paragraph in which you introduce the idea that one of the conflicts the story is book learning versus practical knowledge from life experiences and that Twain uses his characters to set forth his views on this topic. In the body of your composition, write one paragraph for each character about whom you have collected data. Write a topic sentence telling that character's views about education and then use examples from the text you have collected to support your statement. In your concluding paragraph, tell what you think Twain's point was about education, based on the information you have just compiled.

Nature: Write an introductory paragraph in which you introduce the idea that nature versus civilization is one of the main conflicts in *Huckleberry Finn*. Write one paragraph in which you detail what kinds of events take place in nature in the story and then one paragraph in which you detail what kinds of things happen in civilization. In your concluding paragraph, explain what you think Twain was trying to tell us through the actions of his characters.

PROMPT

When you finish the rough draft of your paper, ask a student who sits near you to read it. After reading your rough draft, he/she should tell you what he/she liked best about your work, which parts were difficult to understand, and ways in which your work could be improved. Reread your paper considering your critic's comments and make the corrections you think are necessary.

MAKING IT RELEVANT

Huck Finn Project Assignment Part II

PROMPT

You have read enough of the book *Huckleberry Finn* and have made enough journal entries to get some ideas about your theme in the book. Now take a look at that theme in real life. In this part of your project, you will be brainstorming and gathering information for the "real life" portion of your presentation.

HOW TO BEGIN

Get together with the other members of your group. Brainstorm a list of ideas of current topics that relate to your theme. If you get stuck (or perhaps in preparation for your group discussion), ask your parents, neighbors, friends, etc. what current topics might be appropriate for your theme. If you are still stuck, go to the library and look in the guide to periodicals. That should have a lot of suggestions.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

You have a list of topics. Decide which topics you think will work best for your presentation. Which topics do you think will have the most written and visual information readily available for you? Which topics most interest you? Narrow your list down to one topic for each of your group members.

GET THE FACTS

Each group member needs to gather information about his/her topic.

Go to the library and find a bunch of articles from various publications and read them. Take notes. Be sure to identify the source of your notes somewhere on your page so you know from where your information came. If your topic is broad, find information about many different aspects of it so your information is well-rounded.

Don't limit yourself to the library and periodicals. Check for videos, news clips from your local TV station, posters, or other materials available from agencies related to your topics. Interview real, live people who are knowledgeable about your topic. If you do interviews with real people, take a video camera along. That will help give you more materials for your presentation. You are an investigative reporter uncovering as much material as you can for your story. Take video pictures of things in your area that relate to your topic. Be active! You are Diane Sawyer or Barbara Walters or Sam Donaldson or Ed Bradley. Do you think they just half-heartedly browse through a few old, stuffy periodicals? No way! Get the latest scoop!

Keep in mind that you will have to make a presentation to the class. In that presentation you will have to use visual materials. Be on the lookout for things that could possibly be used.

PUT IT TOGETHER

Look at all the stuff you've found! You have notes from articles, some great pictures, some video footage or sound recordings from newscasts, and who knows what else--other goodies you were able to scoop up. What to do with it all? Weed and organize. Weed out the things that are not important and keep the things that are essential for your story. Organize the things you decide to keep so that you have a compact nucleus of material that explains the essence of your topic.

After each group member has done his research (and weeded and organized it), get back together as a group to look at the entire body of research that has been done. Evaluate your work yourselves.

PRESENTATION GUIDELINES *Huck Finn* Project Assignment Part III

PROMPT

You have taken a close look at your theme in the text and in real life. Now it is time to put it all together into a presentation. You are no longer an investigative reporter; you are a director, editor and producer of a prime-time television special about your topic.

REQUIREMENTS

1. This must be a multi-media presentation. That is, you can't just stand up there in front of the class and read a boring report to the class. You must incorporate audio or visual materials -- photos, drawings, charts, maps, video tapes, and/or models, sound recordings -- you can even dress up as the characters if you want to -- anything that will give some life to your presentation.

2. Every group member must have at least one specific assignment contributing to the production and/or presentation of your project.

3. You must include information about your topic in the text, information about your topic in real life, and a closing which summarizes your main points and ties the two portions of your presentation together if possible.

4. Your presentation must last between ____ and ____ minutes.

Note: These are not the only things on which you will be graded, but they are the basic requirements for the assignment. You will also be graded on how well these requirements are fulfilled, how thoroughly you cover your topic, and how well you actually do your presentation.

HOW TO BEGIN

Get together in your group. You have two main bodies of information to work with in your presentation: your topic in the text and your topic in real life. Look at all the information you have gathered. The best way to organize your presentation is probably to present all the information about the text and then present all the information about real life (or vice-versa) and then have a short summary connecting the two if possible.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

There's no way to do this but to roll up your sleeves and dig in.

1. Answer these questions:
 - How much time do you have for your total presentation?
 - How much time will you allow for the portion of the presentation about the text?
 - How much time will you allow for the portion of the presentation about real life?
 - How much time will you allow for the summary/closing?
2. Will you present the text portion first or the real life portion first?
3. Organize your first portion of the presentation by making an outline.
 - What points do you want to make about your topic in the text?
 - What materials do you have available (or can you create) to make these points?
 - In what order will it be best to present these materials? (Make your outline.)
 - Check to make sure you can present these materials in the time allotted.
4. Organize your second portion of the presentation by making an outline.
 - What related current topics do you want to present?
 - What materials do you have available (or can you create) to make these points?
 - In what order will it be best to present these materials? (Make your outline.)
 - Check to make sure you can present these materials in the time allotted.
5. Make a list of things that need to be done for your presentation. Assign tasks to each group member.
6. Do the tasks that are assigned.
7. Have a "dress rehearsal" of your presentation if you have time.