Going Against the Grain to Find Your Identity: A Seven Week Conceptual Unit on Huckleberry Finn By Margaret Robbins

Context and Rationale

Context:

This spring, I will be teaching American Literature to juniors at Dacula High School. Dacula is a small town located on the outskirts of the suburban Atlanta area. Despite the size of the town, there is evidence that its residents are being immersed into suburbia. Many of the students wear designer clothes, implying that they are of privileged backgrounds. The area is considered conservative, and there is evidence of a majority churchgoing population.

My mentor teacher's classes include two honors, two college preparatory, and one technical class. My unit is designed for the honors and college preparatory classes.

Based on my practicum observations, the honors and college preparatory classes are run in a similar fashion. The only difference I have noticed is that the honors students sometimes have more projects. My current plan is to give the honors and college preparatory students the same number of projects, in hopes that the college prep students will stay at the same level as the honors students.

The classrooms I will teach in are majority white, with approximately three to five African-American students per class. There is one ESL student in her sixth period class and one Hispanic student in first period. The minority students are spread pretty evenly

across the tracks. The honors classes are approximately one-third males, two-thirds females. The other classes have approximately equal numbers of males and females.

Rationale for the Unit:

My conceptual unit is based around Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* because it is a book Gwinnett County teachers traditionally teach. There is currently controversy over the use of this book in public schools because of the nature of the language and some of the subject matter. My hope is that by teaching this unit, I can teach students to not only form their own opinions on the controversy, but also see value in the text despite of its derogatory language. There are aspects of American history that are not pleasant, including the treatment of minorities. However, we must learn about the unpleasant instances in order to prevent them from reoccurring in the future.

The central theme behind the unit is finding your own identity with an additional emphasis on going against the grain and acting according to your beliefs. An important turning point in *Huckleberry Finn* is when Huck decides not to tell Miss Watson about Jim's escape, even though he was raised to belief that abolitionists are "low down." Many teenagers may be able to identify with Huck's struggle between society's standards and his own beliefs about how human beings should be treated. Huck's upbringing, including negative experiences with his father, has influenced who he is. However, his own thoughts make him more compassionate towards Jim's situation. Hopefully, teenagers can learn that their own opinions are just as valuable, if not more valuable, than those they learn from society.

One may argue that the theme of identity and coming of age is cliché and overused. However, to teenagers, the idea of finding your own idea is not such a novel

one because it is one that they are still discovering. According to Carlsen, adolescents between the ages of fourteen and sixteen have a psychological need to test their own normality in light of the physical and emotional changes they are going through. Those who are sixteen and seventeen begin to think about issues of social justice and humanity. Many of my students, at ages sixteen and seventeen, are probably right in between the two phases described above. Therefore, they can still relate to the theme of identity because they are trying to find their own. They can relate to the themes of going against the grain and standing up for your own values because they can think about how the actions resulting from their chosen identities affect humanity and the world as a whole.

Another interesting aspect of *Huckleberry Finn* that teenagers should be able to relate to is peer influence. It is interesting to notice at the beginning and the end of the novel how Tom and Huck influence each other's devious acts. The reader is somewhat left to wonder whether Huck will continue his humanitarian beliefs and actions or if Tom Sawyer will eventually persuade him otherwise. For many teenagers, their peers sometimes influence their actions and eventually their beliefs.

One poem I chose to use in conjunction is "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" by Langston Hughes (see p. 45). This poem is in the "Connections" sections of one of the *Huckleberry Finn* versions I have. It is interesting to use in conjunction to *Huck Finn* because it is about a man who feels that his heritage, identity, and soul are tied to rivers in Africa and the United States.

There is river symbolism tied into this poem as well as *Huckleberry Finn*. Both Huck and Jim see the river as a source of freedom. On page 117, after the feud scene, Huck speaks on how happy he is to be on the raft: "We said there warn't no home like a

raft, after all. Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don't. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft." The river means freedom to Jim as well because when Huck and Jim pass Cairo on the raft, Jim has crossed into the land of freedom. It is interesting that Cairo is also a city in Egypt, paralleling Jim's African Heritage and the heritage of the speaker in "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." Teaching the poem while studying *Huckleberry Finn* will be a good opportunity for students to see how literary themes can carry across different genres.

Another poem I plan to use in conjunction to *Huckleberry Finn* is Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" (see p. 34). This poem strongly exemplifies the theme of making the choices that are best for you, which are not necessarily those made by others. I think it is especially effective to use after the students have read Chapter thirty-one, where Huck tears up the letter to Miss Watson revealing Jim's whereabouts. Students can be thinking about how taking the road less traveled by can influence one's life decisions and destiny. This will be especially interesting for students to reflect on when reading Chapter 32 of *Huck Finn*, where Tom Sawyer reappears.

One could argue that teaching poetry in the midst of a novel study could detract students from the study of the text. However, I think it is beneficial to students to have a different perspective from the one provided by the novel's author and characters. Also, using poems in conjunction can reinforce the novel's themes and teach students how some themes exist in multiple genres. Also, I think it is good for variety in lesson plans. Repeated discussions and activities based on one work could get monotonous.

After we have completed *Huckleberry Finn*, I would like the students to read and discuss two essays in small groups. The first is "But Was He a Racist?" by David

Bradley, presented in the "Connections" section of *Huckleberry Finn*. The second is "Racism and *Huckleberry Finn*: Censorship, Dialogue, and Change" by Allen Carey-Webb, from the *English Journal*. Some segments of the *English Journal* article may be more suitable for *Huck Finn* teachers; however, I think may parts of it would be beneficial to students and would therefore like my students to at least read excerpts of it. Both of these articles contain arguments both for and against teaching and reading the text in today's schools. Interestingly enough, the Bradley article, written by an African-American man, supports teaching the text. The *English Journal* article, written by a white teacher, states that in spite of the novel's anti-racist message, it should either be taught with extreme care or not taught at all in schools because of some of its character portrayal and language. Carey-Webb's article presents the viewpoints of famous authors, such as Hemingway and Morrison, and their contrasting viewpoints on the novel. After the small group discussions, I am going to have the students do a writer's notebook entry discussing their opinions on the issue.

I want to make the disclaimer that I am not necessarily trying to encourage students to rebel against the education system. I am simply trying to present different viewpoints to them and help them form their own opinions on a controversial issue. I think that reading different perspectives on the issue and discussing these viewpoints with their classmates will assist them in thinking about their own opinions.

When we have completed the *Huckleberry Finn* readings, I will allow the students to watch a movie version (most likely the one released on 1993). I think this will be an enjoyable activity for the students that will bring the novel to life for them. The 1993

movie re-emphasizes the idea that just because an idea is popular, it does not mean it is right. This theme is repeatedly present in our unit.

Works that I plan to incorporate at the end of our unit are excerpts from Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*, including "Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut and Papaya Juice on Tuesdays" (see p. 46-47) and "A House of My Own" (see p. 48). The first excerpt presents a woman who is trapped and unfulfilled in a marriage. The second excerpt, which presents the speaker of all of the vignettes, represents her desire for freedom and independence. The second excerpt presents a woman who does not want a traditional life—she does not simply want to get married. She wants her own house, "not a man's house," with her own belongings. Therefore, she is a contrast to the woman presented in the first excerpt. Like Huckleberry Finn, she takes the road less traveled by, for most of the women presented in *The House on Mango Street* are similar to Rafaela.

There are people who may argue that *The House on Mango Street* is too different from the other works to be considered for this unit. However, I think these excerpts will bring a female voice into a unit otherwise dominated by male characters. I think it will also give a modern spin to *Huckleberry Finn* and the other works presented in this unit. Since *The House on Mango Street* is set in more modern times, it may help the students better relate to the themes present in these excerpts and the other works we are studying.

Rationale for Assessments:

One of my introduction activities for the *Huckleberry Finn* unit is an Opinionnaire (see p. 26). The opinionnaire asks students to rate their opinions on issues with strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. I avoided the "no opinion" option because I wanted students to think about where they most closely stand on an issue. I will have the

students answer the questions individually first; then, we will discuss them as a class. The questions focus on such issues as friendships, parental roles, and laws of society. Having students think and speak beforehand about issues in *Huck Finn* will help them engage with the text early on.

My second pre-reading exercise is an activity on dialect and slang (see p. 27). The hand out defines dialect and slang and explains the differences between them. It then asks students to identify the dialect and slang they use, where they use it, and with whom they use it. The dialect in *Huckleberry Finn* is difficult to read. Hopefully, though, this activity will help the students to realize that dialect serves the purpose of bringing the reader into the time period in which the novel was written. They can also learn how this concept applies to their daily lives.

The first journal entry assignment asks the students to read chapter one and identify a paragraph that is heavy in dialect and/or slang. Then, they are supposed to rewrite the paragraph in their own words. This assignment addresses the difficulty of the text and teaches students how to "decode" the difficult language.

My main goal for the ongoing assessments was variety. I figured that the students and I would get bored with assessments that were extremely consistent. One ongoing assessment that will be assigned throughout the unit will be the writer's notebook. The writer's notebook will consist of four entries (see p. 39). The purpose of the writer's notebook is to have students think and write about issues we discuss in class. After each of the four entries is complete, I will check it quickly for a homework grade. At the end of the unit, I will collect the notebook for a test grade and read each entry more

thoroughly. I think this is less pressure on students than large papers and a good way to check their understanding of a number of works as opposed to just one.

A beginning assessment is a quiz over the first nine chapters of *Huckleberry Finn*. There are two different quizzes, each with five questions (see p. 28-29). One is for the students who have my class before lunch; one is for the students who have class after lunch. This way, they will not "happen to hear" their friends discussing quiz questions during lunch. I thought a traditional, "did you read it" quiz would be a good way to start because I do not know the students well enough at this point to know their full creative capabilities. Also, a quiz will increase the likelihood that they will actually read the chapters.

Another form of assessment for *Huckleberry Finn* will be the literature circles project for chapters 12-18 (see p. 30-31). There is sometimes concern that some small groups will not work well together. At the beginning of my student teaching, I will have the students fill out a survey a so I can get to know them a little bit better. I will ask them to name people who they would enjoy working with and people who they would not enjoy working with. Using this information, advice from my mentor teacher, and my own observations of their work habits, I will place them into groups and assign them roles. I think that a small group discussion before the class discussion will help them to gather their thoughts. Also, this will give some of the shyer students in the class a voice within a smaller group. After these chapters have been completed, I will have the students do a writer's notebook entry about how sections of these chapters parallel the poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" by Langston Hughes.

For the next set of Huckleberry Finn chapters, 22-30, I will ask the students to create their own discussion questions. I figure they will have some practice with this activity after the literature circles project. They will discuss their own questions in their small groups, and we will discuss some questions as a whole class. At the end of the period, they will need to give their written or typed questions to me for a homework grade. This activity gives the students an opportunity to explore issues they find relevant.

Another form of ongoing assessment will be weekly SAT vocabulary homework and quizzes. Every Monday, I will introduce the new set of words to the students. By Thursday, they need to complete the following for each word: a definition, a listed synonym and antonym, and one constructed sentence. Synonyms and antonyms are listed on the AKS as necessary knowledge. I think creating sentences for new vocabulary words will help the students to learn vocabulary in context.

An assessment that I will give after chapter thirty-one of *Huckleberry Finn* is the activity based around "The Road Not Taken" (see p. 34-36). As I stated earlier, I am going to teach this poem in conjunction to chapter thirty-one. We will read the chapter out loud as a class. Then, I will have the students discuss the poem's themes in small groups. The small group discussion will help the students gather their thoughts before the whole class discussion. As a class, we will discuss the poem's themes and how they relate to *Huckleberry Finn*. Their homework, which will count as a quiz grade, will be to write a response poem using either their own voice or Huckleberry Finn's voice. This will help them to relate the poem's themes to *Huckleberry Finn* and to their own lives.

Another ongoing activity will be grammar workshops. My mentor teacher usually has "grammar day" once a week. Since the students are used to this routine, I believe I

will continue it. I will often take up handouts, created sentences, and other products of the lesson up for class participation grades. However, the true assessment of these concepts will be the in-class essay over *Huckleberry Finn* and poems taught in conjunction. The reason for this is I believe the true test of whether students understand grammar or not is if they can use it in context and true writing situations. A created grammar test would merely be a repeat of activities completed in class. Also, I do not think I retained anything I took a grammar test on the entire time I was in school.

The traditional assessment that I created is an in-class essay (see p. 37). I decided to have them do an in-class essay instead of an out of class essay because they have to do a research paper either before or after this unit, and I did not want to overwhelm them. Also, the in-class essay can serve to assess *Huckleberry Finn* and the grammar workshops. The three essay choices draw on themes explored in the writer's notebook entries and in the response poem to "The Road Not Taken." I encourage the students to discuss *Huckleberry Finn* as well as "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" and "The Road Not Taken." The essay does not draw on *The House on Mango Street* essays or the essays on whether or not to teach *Huck Finn* because we read these works later in the unit, and they are assessed in the writer's notebook and/or the Oral Presentations project. Also, I thought three works was enough to write an adequate in class essay.

The final unit project is the Oral Presentation project (see p. 42-43). The students have the choice of several options to display creatively *Huck Finn* and/or works in conjunction. I give the students suggested options because some of them probably have not done many projects of this nature. On the sheet, I make it clear to them that I am open to other ideas, but they need to be cleared with me. The purpose of this activity is

to allow students to practice and sharpen their creative and oral presentation skills. It also gives students who may not perform well on more traditional forms of assessment a chance to shine. My hope is that my rubric at least assists with the subjectivity issue involved in multimedia/presentation projects.

Daily and Weekly Lesson Plans:

WEEK 1:

Monday (Day 1):

I will introduce the fifteen-twenty vocabulary words to them. My teacher typically gives them words frequently present on the SAT. I will put the words up on the overhead and tell them that by Thursday, they need to turn in a definition of each word, a listed synonym and antonym for each word, and one constructed sentence for each word. Since my students are juniors, I think they are old enough to do most of their vocabulary work independently.

When the students are finished copying the vocabulary words, I will hand out the opinionnaires for the *Huckleberry Finn* unit (see p. 26). I will ask each student to answer the questions independently on the handout. Then, with the opinionnaire on the overhead, I will go through the questions one at a time and ask the students what their responses were. For each question, I let a number of students give and explain their responses and give them plenty of time to discuss their answers with the whole class. I think the opportunity to discuss issues pertaining to *Huckleberry Finn* will help the students to engage in the text early on. If the discussion goes well, I anticipate that this activity will take most of the period. For the night's homework, I will give them the charts about dialect and slang (see p. 27)

Tuesday (Day 2):

We will discuss "dialect" and "slang" as a class. *Huckleberry Finn* is a difficult book for many students because of the complexity of language. My hope is that a better understanding of dialect and slang will help the students to not become as easily

frustrated with the text. Also, having them think about how their language use relates to their group identities will tie into the unit's larger theme. At the beginning of class, I will look at each student's chart for a homework grade. Then, I will put the chart on the overhead and talk about the differences between dialect and slang. Students will have the opportunity to ask questions if they are confused. Then, I will ask the students to give responses to the dialects and slang they use, when they use them, and who they use them with. Hopefully, this will stimulate good discussion on how language use relates to age, culture, region, etc.

This would probably be the best opportunity to discuss the racial issues behind *Huck Finn*. I will inform the students that the book does contain language derogatory towards African-Americans that was, unfortunately, common during the time period in which it was written. I will admit to them that the book is controversial because of this nature and tell them at the end of the novel's reading, they will have the opportunity to share their opinions as to whether it should be read in schools or not. I will tell them that Huck, the narrator, makes potentially racist remarks during some parts of the book; however, some of his perceptions change through life experiences. At the end of this discussion, I will tell students that if they want to talk to me individually about concerns they have related to the book, they can do so.

For homework due Thursday (along with the vocabulary), I will ask the students to read Chapter one of *Huck Finn* and re-write a paragraph heavy in slang or dialect in their own words. They will need to put this assignment in their writer's notebook and site the passage that they re-create (see p. 39). I will also give the students their reading assignment due Monday: Chapters 1-9 (52 pages). To relieve their fears, I will let them

know that they will have Friday after the vocabulary test to work on this reading. They will have a brief "did you read it" quiz on Monday.

Wednesday (Day 3):

This will be grammar workshop day. I will have them do activities on comma splices. While I was observing, my teacher talked to them about comma splices. So, my lessons would merely be reinforcement. These activities can also emphasize independent and dependent clauses. At the end of the period, I will pick up the example sentences they complete for a class participation grade.

Thursday (Day 4):

At the beginning of the period, I will check vocabulary work for a homework grade. I will let them keep the sheets, though, to study for the quiz. I will go over the vocabulary definitions to make sure that my students have similar definitions. Then, I will ask for student volunteers to give their synonyms, antonyms, and sentences for the words. Hopefully, this will give the students plenty of opportunities to ask questions if they do not understand a particular word.

Then, I will take a brief look at the writer's notebook entries for a homework grade, letting them know that I will collect the notebook at the end of the unit for a larger grade. The students will have the opportunity to share their chosen and re-written passages.

Friday (Day 5):

Students will take the vocabulary quiz at the beginning of the period. I will also collect their homework assignments at that time. When they are finished with their quizzes, they will have the rest of the period to read their *Huck Finn* chapters.

WEEK 2

Monday (Day 6):

I will give the students new vocabulary words. The instructions for the assignment will be the same as week 1. Then, I will have the students take the *Huckleberry Finn* quiz. Periods 1 and 4 will have a different quiz from periods 5 and 6 because Dacula students have lunch during part of fifth. When the students have completed the quiz, they will have an opportunity to ask questions and make comments during a class discussion. Possible discussion topics:

- How Huck and Tom influence each other,
- Huck's Pap and whether he's a good parent,
- Huck's "murder plot", why Huck gave the money to Judge Thatcher,
- Jim's escape.

Tuesday (Day 7):

I will have the students read chapters 10 and 11 out loud in class. This is the part in which Huck disguises as "Sarah Mary Williams." I think students will find this section amusing, as I did the first time I read it. Since Chapter 11 in particular has a lot of dialogue, I think it will be a good section to read out loud. I will ask for volunteers to be the narrator and "act out" the characters, but I may switch roles around a little bit so more than just a few students can participate. If there is any time left after reading chapters 10 and 11, I will give the students the choice between continuing to read out loud and reading silently.

At the end of the period, I will give the students their *Huck Finn* reading assignment for Monday (Chapters 12-18, p. 70-118). For these chapters, they will do the

Literature Circles assignment (see p. 32). So, I will also tell them what their assigned groups are. (NOTE: On the information sheet I have students fill out just before I start student teaching, I will ask them to list names of people who they would want to/not want to work with. I will group them based on this and on the idea of varying dedication/ability levels within the group. I will especially try, though, not to put them with people who they do not want to work with.)

Wednesday (Day 8)

This will be another grammar workshop day. I will have the students do activities on subject/verb agreement and appropriate verb tenses (present, past, future, etc.). This is a requirement listed in the AKS for juniors. At the end of the period, I will pick up the handouts they did during class for a participation grade.

Thursday (Day 9)

I will look at the vocabulary work for a homework grade. We will go over the vocabulary homework as a class. Then, students will have the rest of the class period to work on their reading/literature circle project.

Friday (Day 10)

At the beginning of the period, the students will take the vocabulary quiz. They will have the rest of the period to work on their literature circle project.

WEEK 3:

Monday (Day 11)

I will give the students their new vocabulary words. Then, I will let the student break into their groups to discuss the literature circle project. The summarizers, passage pickers, artists/character sketchers, and discussion leaders will all have their turns in the

small group. After an appropriate amount of time has passed, I will bring the whole class together for a discussion. I think a balance between small and large group discussions is beneficial because based on my practicum observations, different classes thrive off of different forms of discussion.

I will ask the students for questions and comments they have about these chapters.

Issues I will ask them to elaborate on:

- The feud: why is it still going on when the events that started it happened years ago?
- What significance does the river have for Jim? For Huck?
- The theme of the river as freedom (possible interpretation)
- The growing relationship between Jim and Huck
 All students will turn in their assigned parts for a quiz grade.

Tuesday (Day 12)

Today, we will read "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" by Langston Hughes as a class. I think this will be good for variety and to teach students how different genres of literature can connect. Possible discussion topics:

- How do the narrator's experiences with rivers relate to his identity?
- In what way is the passage of time and history important in the poem?
- How do Huck and Jim's perceptions of the river compare or contrast to those of the poem's speaker?

Writer's notebook assignment due the next day: Write about what significance you think the river(s) have to Jim, Huck, and the speaker of the Hughes poem. What significance, if any, do the rivers have to you?

If time permits, the students may start work on this assignment at the end of the period.

Wednesday (Day 13):

At the beginning of the period, I will check the writer's notebook assignments for a homework grade. Then, I will give students who wish to the opportunity to share their journal assignments.

Then, I will have students read chapters 19, 20, and possibly 21 out loud. This is another amusing, heavy dialogue part of the book in which the king and the duke appear. Their next reading assignment will be to read up to Chapter thirty by Tuesday. If the students are good about reading their assignments up to this point, I will let them create their own discussion questions instead of taking a quiz. In this case, I'll inform them that they also need to have five or six discussion questions ready. I will explain them that these questions should not simply be "yes" or "no" questions and that they should not focus on plot summary UNLESS an aspect of the plot was confusing to them. On the other hand, if I feel like the students are sometimes slack about their reading assignments, I'll give them a more traditional "did you read it" kind of quiz.

Thursday (Day 14)

At the beginning of the period, I will check the vocabulary for a homework grade.

Then, we will go over the definitions, synonyms, antonyms, and sentences.

This grammar workshop day, slightly shortened, will be about passive voice. I will have the students read some sentences/paragraphs with passive voice and some without, so they can see why many sentences sound better without passive voice. I will try to make the sentences and paragraphs about subjects of their interest. Then, I will

have the students change given sentences from passive voice to active voice. If they do not finish the sentences in class, they will need to complete them for homework.

Friday (Day 15)

I will ask the students if they have any other questions about passive/active voice. Then, if necessary, I will collect remaining sentences. The students will then take their vocabulary quizzes and have the rest of the period to read *Huck Finn*.

WEEK 4:

Monday (Day 16)

Place the new vocabulary words on the board for the students to copy. Let them know that this week, the vocabulary homework will be due on WEDNESDAY instead of THURSDAY. Then, give the students the option between reading out loud and reading silently. Hopefully, they will want to read chapter 28 out loud because it is amusing and has a lot of dialogue. If most students prefer to read silently, they will also have the option of working on vocabulary during this time period.

Tuesday (Day 17)

Assuming that I stick with the question creating activity, let students will break into self-selected small groups of 3-4 people to share and discuss their questions. After an appropriate amount of time has passed (depending on how productive they are in their small groups), I will bring the whole class together for discussion. The students, upon volunteering, will then have an opportunity to share one of their questions with the whole class (hopefully the one they think is best).

I will let the students have most of the control over the discussion. Some points I may ask them to emphasize:

- Hypocrisy of the King and the Duke
- Do they know anybody (no names!) who are like the king and the duke, who put up a façade for people?
- What is the difference between acting like different versions of you around different people and being a phony?

Each student will turn in his/her questions for a homework grade.

Homework for Friday: Read AT LEAST up to Chapters 30 and 31. At this point, I will warn the students that they will have an in-class essay on *Huck Finn* a week from Wednesday (see p. 37).

Wednesday (Day 18)

At the beginning of the period, check the vocabulary homework for a grade and go over it as a class. Instead of a traditional grammar workshop, we are going to talk about poetry writing in preparation for Thursday's activity (see p. 33).

Thursday (Day 19):

The students will do "The Road Not Taken" activity (see p. 34-35). The response poem will be due on Tuesday.

Friday (Day 20):

The students will take the Vocabulary Quiz at the beginning of the period. Then, we will discuss the discrepancy between chapters 32-end and earlier chapters of the book. Set topics:

- Tom Sawyer returns! Why is that significant?
- Research shows that Twain wrote the rest of the book, put the manuscript down for years, then wrote chapters 32-end.

WEEK 5:

Monday (Day 21):

There will be NO VOCABULARY this week because they will have a big essay test on *Huckleberry Finn*. Grammar Workshop: Persuasive writing (since their in-class essay will largely involve persuasion). They will also have a journal entry assignment due later in the week that will involve persuasive writing.

Tuesday (Day 22):

I will allow the students to ask pressing questions about *Huckleberry Finn*, since they will have an in-class essay on the novel tomorrow. Then, I will go over my expectations for the in-class essay:

- They will be able to choose between three essay questions. They should only answer one.
- They will be held accountable for the information learned in grammar workshop (commas, verb tenses, persuasive writing, etc.) However, for overall grammar and style grading, I will take it into account that they had a limited time to write.
- Content WILL be important. They MUST have a clear thesis statement! (Ms. Cruse discussed thesis with them earlier in the semester). They will also need a conclusion statement that recaps the thesis but does not restate it verbatim. The conclusion should reflect information and reflection on the body of the essay.
- They will be allowed to use a dictionary while writing in order to ensure that words are spelled correctly. I WILL count off for misspelled words.
- They are allowed, and even encouraged, to discuss the poems "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" and "The Road Not Taken" if this adds to their argument

They may use their copies of *Huckleberry Finn*, "The Road Not Taken," and "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" while writing these essays.

If they have lost their copies of the poems, they will need to let me know at this point and I will provide them with copies. Unless they are absent on this day, it will be THEIR responsibility to have the necessary materials on the day of the test.

Wednesday (Day 23):

The students will take their in-class essay test.

Thursday (Day 24):

Let students break into groups of 3-4 of their choosing. Each group will read and discuss "But Was He a Racist?" by David Bradley and "Racism and *Huckleberry Finn*: Censorship, Dialogue, and Change" by Allen Carey-Webb. Both essays contain contrasting perspectives over whether *Huckleberry Finn* should be taught in schools or not. They will discuss these issues in their small groups.

Writer's Notebook Assignment Due Friday: write your own opinion on whether Huckleberry Finn should be taught in public schools or not (at least two notebook pages). Also: Did you enjoy reading Huckleberry Finn? Why or why not?

Depending on how productive they are in their small groups, I may let the students begin the journal entry towards the end of the period.

Friday (Day 25): I will check the writer's notebook entry for a homework grade at the beginning of the period. Then, let students watch a movie version of *Huckleberry Finn*.

WEEK 6:

Monday (Day 26):

Introduce the new vocabulary words. Then, let the students continue to watch *Huckleberry Finn*.

Tuesday (Day 27):

If necessary, let the students finish watching *Huckleberry Finn*. Then, do a grammar workshop on simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences (AKS requirement).

Wednesday (Day 28):

Have students break into groups of 3-4 for the *House on Mango Street* activity. The students will read two excerpts of this book, "Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut & Papaya Juice on Tuesdays" and "A House of My Own." They will discuss how the attitude portrayed by the speaker of "A House of My Own" contrasts the life of Rafaela of "Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut & Papaya Juice on Fridays."

Homework Due Monday: Write in your writer's notebook about how the women of these two excerpts are different. Do you think Huckleberry Finn would be a friend to either of these women? Why or why not?

If there is time at the end of the period, I will let them begin their homework. I will also warn them that on Monday, I will take up the writer's notebooks for a **TEST GRADE.** So, any entries they forgot to do or did not do a very good job on need to be finished and polished by this date.

Thursday (Day 29):

Check the vocabulary homework as a class. Then, I will give them the directions for the multimedia/oral presentation project (see p. 42-43). The students will pick their groups (unless they choose to work independently) and begin working. I will allow the

groups to sign up for who will present Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. If they cannot agree, I will put the names of one representative per group and draw names for who will go when.

Friday (Day 30):

The students will take the vocabulary quiz at the beginning of the period. Then, they will have the rest of the period to work on their projects.

Monday (Day 31):

Introduce the new vocabulary words at the beginning of the period and take up the writer's notebooks. Then, give the students the rest of the period to work on their projects.

Tuesday (Day 32):

Let the first groups present

Wednesday (Day 33):

Continue with presentations.

Thursday (Day 34):

Go over vocabulary homework at the beginning of the period. Then, we will continue with group presentations.

Friday (Day 35):

I will give the students their vocabulary quiz at the beginning of the period. Then, we will have a wrap-up discussion about our unit. I will give each student an anonymous survey about which works he/she liked and did not like.

Works Represented in Identity/Going Against the Grain Unit

- 1. Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain
- 2. "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" by Langston Hughes (copy provided)
- 3. "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost (see p. 34 of unit packet)
- 4. "But Was He a Racist?" An article by David Bradley in the "Connections" section of *Huckleberry Finn*

Bradley defends the teaching of the novel in his brief, but powerful account. He acknowledges the offensive language in *Huckleberry Finn*, but states that one should read the text carefully and understand the words in context. He expresses his hope that the derogatory language used in *Huck Finn* will one day only be American History. An argument he makes in favor of teaching the book is that it is better for a child to learn harsh, derogatory language in a book than on a playground.

5. "Racism and *Huckleberry Finn:* Censorship, Dialogue, and Change" by Allen Carey-Webb

This essay, written by a Caucasian teacher, presents arguments for either teaching *Huckleberry Finn* with great sensitivity towards minority students or pulling the book from the curriculum. She states that in spite of the book's anti-racist message, many African-American students take offense to the derogatory language and weak character portrayal of Jim, but are sometimes afraid to tell their teachers. Carey-Webb presents the perspective of famous writers who favor and oppose the novel.

- 6. The 1993 film version of Huckleberry Finn
- 7. "Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut and Papaya Juice on Tuesdays" by Sandra Cisneros, from *The House on Mango Street* (copy provided)
- 8. "A House of My Own" by Sandra Cisneros, from *The House on Mango Street* (copy provided)

OPINIONNAIRE

These questions pertain to issues present in our upcoming unit on Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. Circle the response that most closely reflects your opinion. Please answer each question honestly and be prepared to explain your responses.

answer each question honestl	y and be prepar	red to explain your res	ponses.	
1. Laws are designed to mak	e society fair fo	or all of its citizens.		
strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	
2. It is sometimes okay to disright reasons.	sobey set rules	and guidelines if you a	are doing so for the	
strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	
3. All people are equal and d	leserve to be tre	eated that way.		
strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	
4. I try not to notice people's physical characteristics. That way, I treat everyone the same.				
strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	
5. Age should not be a factor	in friendships			
strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	
6. Parental guardians should be role models for their children.				
strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	
7. A person should fight to defend his family's honor, even if his own interests are not directly involved.				
strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	
8. A person should go along with whatever his friends are for, even if he disagrees with them.				
strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree	

Dialect and Slang: What Do You Use?

Dialect is a language version with non-standard vocabulary, pronunciation, or grammar. It is specific to a region or group. **Slang** involves informal words, phrases, and uses that are particular to a group (profession, class, etc.) Both **dialect** and **slang** are particular to a given group. However, **dialect** involves a whole language variety with rules that differ from the standard; **slang** is just select words or phrases.

Dialect or slang you use (specify whether it is dialect or slang)	When you use it	Who yo

How does the dialect and slang you use relate to your identity (age, culture, etc.)?

Huckleberry Finn Quiz, Chapters 1-9

Name:	Ms. Robbins
1. The Widow Douglas wants to:	
a) civilize Huckc) teach Huck about religion	b) send Huck to boarding schoold) both a and c
2. Huck's father:	
	a poor, but kind fellow a colonel in the army
3. Huck gives is money to	for safekeeping
a) The Widow Douglasc) Judge Thatcher	b) Miss Watsond) Tom Sawyer
4. When Huck leaves his father's hu	t, he ends up hiding
a) with the Widow Douglasc) on an island	b) in Tom Sawyer's cellard) in a deserted log cabin
5. After hiding, Huck discovers that	Jim
a) kidnapped Tom Sawyerc) escaped	b) was freed d) knows about magic
TOTAL: /10	

Huckleberry Finn Quiz, Chapters 1-9

Name:	Ms. Robbin
1. Huck states that	took him in as his/her son
a) Widow Douglasc) Judge Thatcher	b) Miss Watsond) Tom's Aunt Polly
2. Jim uses to t	tell Huck's fortune
a) a glass ballc) a book about magi	b) a hair balld) his own observations of Huck
3. Huck's father wants his	son's money to spend on
a) a new businessc) Huck's education	b) gambling debtsd) liquor
4. When leaving his father	's hut, Huck tries to leave evidence that
a) the hut was burglac) Huck died	b) Huck was attacked d) all of the above
5. On the island where he g encounters	goes after leaving his father's hut, Huck
a) Tom Sawyerc) Judge Thatcher	b) Jim d) Miss Watson
TOTAL:/	10

Huckleberry Finn Literature Circles Chapters 12-18

I have given you assigned groups for this project of four (possibly five) per group. I will tell you in class who is in your group and which of the four-five roles you will participate in. If you and one of your group members would like to trade roles you may, but please let me know. For each assignment, you will need to have a paper copy to turn into me for a quiz grade. If you have a problem in your group, please let me know and I will act accordingly.

Role 1: Summarizer

Your job is to do a basic, but thorough summary of the chapters. It needs to be **AT LEAST** two paragraphs long. You do not have to include every single detail, but do not leave out important information. You will always go first in the group, but other group members should feel free to add information and clarify confusing parts.

Your summary can be either handwritten or typed. If your handwriting is difficult to read, please type it. During the discussion, you may just tell about the events instead of reading straight from your paper.

Role 2: Passage Picker

Your job is to pick parts of the story that you want to read aloud to your group. You will need to either write out or type this passage out with a citation (chapter and page number) at the end. You will also need to include 2-3 sentences on why you picked this passage. In your group, you will read the passage and tell your group members why you picked it and why it is important to the rest of the story.

The part may be: an interesting part, a turning point in the story, important information about a character, good description, a good description, an example of good writing, or whatever else you think is relevant.

Role 3: Artist/Character Sketcher

If your group consists of five people, both roles will be assigned. If your group has four people, you can choose between these two assignments.

Artist: Your job is to draw or paint anything about the story you find interesting or significant. It can be a character, a setting, a conflict, an exciting part, a turning point event, etc. I will **NOT** grade you on your artistic ability, but your artwork needs to have detail and color.

Character Sketcher: Your job is to write up a brief, but thorough description of one of the characters in the story. The description can include, but is not limited to, the following: gender, approximate age, physical appearance, personality traits (both positive and negative), relationship to other characters, importance in the story, etc.

Your character sketch needs to be **AT LEAST** 1-2 paragraphs long. You may either write the paragraphs or type them. If your handwriting is difficult to read, please type them.

Role 4: Discussion Director

Your job is to create **AT LEAST** five questions about these chapters. The questions are going to start a good discussion with your small group. Ask questions that require more than a factual answer, but instead require depth of thought (perhaps compare/contrast questions, questions that require an opinion, something that readers may disagree on, questions that require a more close and interpretive reading of the text).

The questions should **NOT** simply be yes or no questions. If the initial answer is "yes" or "no", add a "why or why not?" Also, avoid simple plot summary questions **UNLESS** an aspect of the plot is confusing to you and perhaps others.

You will need to either write or type these questions to hand in to me. If your handwriting is difficult to read, please type them.

NAME	
ROLE	

Literature Circles Evaluation

Category	Excellent	Good	Fair
Effort	4	3	2
Creativity	4	3	2
Knowledge of			
subject matter	4	3	2
Participation in			
small group	4	3	2

TOTAL: _____/20

COMMENTS:

Writer's Notebook Assignments

- 1. Day Four: Read chapter 1 of *Huckleberry Finn* and find a paragraph that is heavy in dialect and/or slang. Re-write this paragraph in your own words. Make sure you site the original paragraph with the chapter and the page number.
- 2. Day Thirteen: Write about the significance you think the river(s) have for Huck, Jim, and the speaker of "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." What significance, if any, do the rivers depicted in these works have for you?
- 3. Day Twenty-Five: Write your own opinion on whether you think *Huckleberry Finn* should be taught in public schools or not. Make sure you back your claims with specific examples. You may also include whether you personally enjoyed reading the book or not.
- 4. Day Thirty: How are the women of the two *House on Mango Street* excerpts different from each other? Do you think Huckleberry Finn would be a friend to either of these women? Why or why not?

With the exception of entry #1, each entry should be at least two pages long. They will be worth twenty-five points apiece for a total of 100 points. The writer's notebook grade will count as a test grade.

Writer's Notebook Rubric

Name:	Ms. Robbins
Entry #1: Re-Write of Dialogue Paragraph	
Meets length requirement	
Covers topic thoroughly	
Shows an understanding of the subject matter	
Relates to the topic on a personal level; doesn't just give a plot summary of the assigned work	
Is clear and easy to follow	
/25 TOTAL	
Entry #2: Significance of the rivers	
Meets length requirement	
Covers topic thoroughly	
Shows an understanding of the subject matter	
Relates to the topic on a personal level; doesn't just give a plot summary of the assigned work	
Is clear and easy to follow	
/25 TOTAL	
Entry #3: Should Huckleberry Finn be taught?	?
Meets length requirement	
Covers topic thoroughly	
Shows an understanding of the subject matter	

Relates to the topic on a personal level; doesn't just give a plot summary of the assigned work
Is clear and easy to follow
/25 TOTAL
Entry #4: The women of The House on Mango Street
Meets length requirement
Covers topic thoroughly
Shows an understanding of the subject matter
Relates to the topic on a personal level; doesn't just give a plot summary of the assigned work
Is clear and easy to follow
/25 TOTAL
/100 GRAND TOTAL POINTS

Robert Frost is one of America's most famous and popular poets. "The Road Not Taken" was published in 1916 as part of the Mountain Interval Collection.



THE ROAD NOT TAKEN By Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, And sorry I could not travel both And be one traveler, long as I stood And looked down one as far as I could To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair, And having perhaps the better claim, Because it was grassy and wanted wear; Though as for that the passing there Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.
(from Robert Frost: Collected Poems, Prose, &Plays
Copyright: 1970, The Library of America)

During Class:

- 1. Break into four assigned small groups and discuss what you believe the theme of the poem to be.
- 2. Each group should choose one representative to give a brief synopsis of the discussion.

Please choose one of the following to do for homework:

- 1. Keeping the poem's themes in mind, write a response to this poem using the voice of Huck from *Huckleberry Finn*.
- 2. Write a poem about a time in which you made an important decision or formed an opinion independently.

This assignment will count as a quiz grade and will be due at the end of the week.

Poetry Assignment Rubric

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Needs Improvement
Understanding of themes discussed in class	4	3	2	1
Development of speaker's voice	4	3	2	1
Effective use of tone	4	3	2	1
Has a clear message; answers the "so what?" question	4	3	2	1
Shows the reader; doesn't just tell	4	3	2	1
Diction	4	3	2	1
Effective language (literal and figurative)	4	3	2	1
Line/sentence structure	4	3	2	1
Form	4	3	2	1
Correct spelling	4	3	2	1

TOTAL: _____/40

Additional Comments:

Writing/Grammar Workshop: Tips for Writing Poetry

- -- A poem, like any other piece of writing, should answer the question of "so what?" The reader should be able to find a reason why the author wrote the work and why they should read it. Teach us something that we can learn from or relate to in your work.
- -- SHOW, DON'T TELL! If a dog is barking, don't just tell the reader that the dog is barking. Bring the dog out so we can hear him bark!
- -- The **tone** of the poem should aid in giving the reader a sense of who the speaker is and his/her situation.
- -- Figurative language is often a nice touch in poetry (simile, metaphor, personification, etc.)
- -- **Diction**: when it comes to words in poetry, less is more! It is often best to use as few words as possible to invoke meaning in a poem; you have a small amount of space to do so!
- --Not every line in a poem has to be a complete sentence. If you look at Frost's "The Road Not Taken," you will notice that most of the lines are only part of a complete thought, or sentence. Most sentences spread across several lines.
- -- Avoid using an excessive number of **end-stops**, or lines that end with a period.
- -- The **form** of a poem is often easier to follow if there is at least some consistency. For instance, each stanza in "The Road Not Taken" has five lines and an a, b, a, a, b rhyme scheme. A less rigidly constructed form can be effective, though, especially if it adds to the poem's theme. For instance, a poem about a chaotic event may be more interesting if the lines are constructed in dramatically different ways.
- -- While **end rhyme** is sometimes effective, you do not HAVE to have an end rhyme scheme in your poems. In fact, **internal rhym**e, words that sound alike in the same line, often works well.
- -- **Alliteration** (words in the same line with like consonant sounds) and **assonance** (words in the same line with like vowel sounds) can also add to a poem's appeal. However, alliteration and assonance, along with rhyming, should not be overly forced or excessive.

In-Class Essay Test

Please choose one of the following three essay questions to respond to. You will have the entire class period to complete this essay. You may use your copies of *Huckleberry Finn*, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," and "The Road Not Taken" to assist you. You may also use your dictionary to assist you with spelling. Make sure your essay has a clear **THESIS**, persuasive arguments, and textual evidence to support your claims. Since this is a literary analysis paper, use the present tense when referring to incidents in the novel and poems. Remember: you **WILL** be held accountable for lessons learned during our grammar workshops.

Please write your response on separate pieces of paper.

- 1. Explain the significance of rivers in one or more works we have read. Why are rivers important to the lives of the characters? What symbolic significance does a river have? How is a river important to the plot and/or theme of the given works?
- 2. "What is right is not always popular. What is popular is not always right." Explain how this quote bears significance in one or more of the works we have read. Use **SPECIFIC** examples of characters and text.
- 3. Explain how the theme of coming of age and self-discovery is present in one or more of the works we have read. Give **SPECIFIC** examples of characters or speakers who grow and change during the course of the literary work.

In Class Essay Evaluation

AREA	4	3	2
Thesis	Stated clearly and	Thesis is clear, but either	There is a thesis, but the
	directly in the	too broad or not	ideas included are not
	introductory paragraph	inclusive enough	very explicit
Relevancy	At least two-three well	Sufficient number of	Examples are either
	developed examples that	examples, but somewhat	lacking in number or
	support the thesis	lacking in development	development; some
	statement	or relationship to the	writing may seem like
		thesis	extraneous information
Knowledge of Content	Shows excellent	Shows knowledge of	Shows a fair amount of
	knowledge of the texts	texts, but lacking in	knowledge, some of
	we have studied	depth and interpretation	which is superficial
Voice/Readability	Evidence of creative	Serves its purpose, but	Fairly easy to read, but
	thought; transitions are	may be lacking in flow	sentence structure is
	clear	or originality	sometimes distracting
Quotes	Quotes are clearly	Sufficient number of	A fair amount of
	relevant to the thesis and	quotes, but lacking in	quoting, but not
	documented correctly	explanation or correct	sufficiently documented
		documentation	or related to the thesis
Grammar (commas,	0-4 errors	5-7 errors	8-10 errors
agreement, active			
voice)			
Spelling	0-3 errors	4-6 errors	7-9 errors
Conclusion	Recaps the thesis well;	Recaps the thesis and	Has some evidence of
	reflects evidence from	reflects body paragraphs,	original argument, but
	the body of the paper	but lacking in clarity and	lacks reflection or gives
		depth	extraneous information

TOTAL: _____/32 = _____/100 ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

SEE BACK FOR

ORAL PRESENTATIONS

For this project, you will have the option of choosing your own groups of 3-4 people. You also have the option of working independently. If you choose this option, please let me know because it will make the grading process slightly different.

You and your group members will need to choose one of the following options to present to the class. If you have another idea, that's fine, but you will need to clear it with me first.

Right before your group presents, you will need to turn in a **TYPED** paragraph describing specifically your role in the group. Keep in mind that the amount of contribution you give **WILL** affect your final grade.

This project counts as a **TEST** grade, so be creative and do a good job!

- 1. Choose a section of *Huckleberry Finn* to act out as a skit. You will need to record the section, page numbers, characters involved, and setting. You may choose to record this information in the form of a flyer or program advertising your skit. If you do this project, you will most likely need actors, a scriptwriter, and a costume designer. You may either choose to tape record the performance and show it via VCR or directly act it out in front of the class.
- 2. Choose a poem and a song that relate to *Huckleberry Finn*. Remember that the song and the poem need to be **SCHOOL APPROPRIATE!** If you are at all unsure that your selection fits these criteria, please show it to me before you present. For your presentation, you will need to provide us with copies of the poem and the song and, if possible, let us listen to the song. You need to **EXPLAIN** to us why these selections relate to *Huckleberry Finn*. You will also need to provide me with a **TYPED** paragraph for each selection explaining the relationship. Any activities you create in conjunction will increase the involvement of your classmates and enhance your grade.
- 3. Choose a chapter of *Huckleberry Finn* to lead a discussion on. You may divide the responsibilities however you wish. Some options you may want to consider:
- Have different group members discuss different page sections
- Have one person summarize, one person create discussion questions, 1 person make a handout, etc.
- Divide the class into small groups and have one of your group members at each section to lead the small group discussion. (You can choose to all discuss the same topic and divide the class evenly or have each person discuss a different topic and let the class members go to the section of their interest).
- Have some group members focus on oral discussion and have others focus on visual representations (posters, artwork, etc.)
- 4. Write a short story, personal narrative, or one act/one scene play with themes that correlate to those we've discussed in *Huckleberry Finn*, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "The Road Not Taken," and *The House on Mango Street* excerpts. The short story or one

act play can be done in groups; the personal narrative is designed for people who choose to work independently. If you choose one of these options, you do need to present it to the class in some way, shape, or form. Some suggestions:

- For the play, you can either act it out (if you have a group) or assign your classmates reading parts.
- For the short story and personal narrative, you can either read it to us or have the class as a whole read it out loud. For the second option, you will need to decide how to divide the reading (take volunteers, assign people, etc.)
- If you would rather not read the short story or personal narrative out loud, you need to at least EXPLAIN to the class what you did and why you did it.

You will be graded on your creativity, your knowledge of the subject matter, presentation quality, and the amount of class involvement/participation you encourage. If you have a problem in your group, please let me know so I can rectify the problem. Good luck!

ORAL PRESENTATION RUBRIC

Category	Excellent	Good	Fair
Amount of effort			
and participation	4	3	2
Creativity			
	4	3	2
Knowledge and			
reflection of works	4	3	2
studied			
Encourages engagement/			
participation by class-	4	3	2
mates			
Articulation of ideas	4	3	2
Presentation quality			
(voice projection, eye	4	3	2
contact, etc.)			
Level of preparation	4	3	2

TOTAL:/28 =	/100
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COMMENTS:

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