

and nature are not enough. With this admission, one of the high hopes of *Huckleberry Finn* goes down to defeat, drowned at the river's edge. As Huck says after the King sells Jim, the journey really *has* come to nothing. Everything, indeed, is "all busted up and ruined."

### An Enduring, Impossible Dream

However, to end here would be another form of cheating. There is another dimension to the novel that transcends defeat. If the end of *Huckleberry Finn* suggests the way things are, the river portion of the novel provokes our sense of the way things ought to be. . . .

What the raft and the river come to mean is a marvelous condition of unreality—a shucking of our bondage to men, time, and codes of morality in exchange for a kind of freedom and companionship that can never be reached on shore. Long after Tom Sawyer's evasion has blurred into the background of our memory, the image of a black man and a white boy on a raft remains—a fantasy of brotherhood as appealing as it was perishable.

## In Defense of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Toni Morrison

*Toni Morrison is Robert F. Goheen Professor Emerita on the Council of the Humanities at Princeton University and an internationally recognized novelist who won the Pulitzer Prize in 1988 and the Nobel Prize in 1993.*

*In the following excerpt, consisting of about half of the original introduction, Toni Morrison expresses her own unease after multiple encounters with Twain's novel, beginning with independent childhood readings, followed by a reading in junior high school, and several readings as an adult. She came to see that Huck's internalized misery and fear were somehow assuaged by the presence of Jim. Even though the story closes with Jim as a minstrel figure, there are "undertows," she contends, one of which is the similarity between the ante- and postbellum South. The black man becomes the white boy's surrogate father—his "father for free"—as Morrison puts it. The three problems that the novel ends with are Huck Finn's outcast situation even at the end; the sadness in his and Jim's relationship; and Huck's engagement with racism during the evasion. The question remains: will Huck actually escape the evils of civilization by going West?*

Fear and alarm are what I remember most about my first encounter with Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Palpable alarm. . . . My second reading of it, under the supervision of an English teacher in junior high school, was no less uncomfortable—rather more. It provoked a feeling I

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