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April 10, 2011
Ms. Cook - Purple

Huck's Journey, My Journey

In his novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain presents a variety of themes demonstrated in lessons Huck learns along his journey down the river and through life. One theme commonly thought of with this book is racism, but racism itself is a very broad topic. I began thinking about the roots of racism and where it came from, leading me to decide that racism has a history much older than Huck, or anyone living in his time for that matter. This guided me to the idea that racism was not so much based on modern experiences but on tradition; racism was just the way it had been for so many years that it became automatic to many, something that need not be questioned. As this idea solidified in my head, I also realized that Huck has encounters with the same sort of undying traditions. First, Huck has no reason to hate black people or enslave them, but tradition justifies slavery to him, so he stands by idly. Also, when he meets the Grangerfords, Huck is told they are in a feud with the Shephardsons, but upon asking the reason, he discovers the families cannot remember—they fight solely because they have to, because that is just the way it has been for years and years. Similarly, when devising a plan to free Jim from the shed, Tom insists that the entire scene be recreated to feel like the prison scenes in all the classic books he reads. These ideas of Tom's are not his own, but they derive from books telling him over and over again so that it has become just the way it should be to him. In each of these situations, there exist two sides: taking no action because traditions should be accepted and respected, and defying tradition because morality is called into question. He could question slavery and realize the injustice of it, the feud could be stopped because of the immorality in killing many innocent family members, and Jim could be more quickly and safely set free without all the bothers of the supposedly necessary scenery. Through the pain and fear he sees, Huck learns that although traditions may be old and respected, they can trap people and blind them from more moral actions.

As I began thinking about moral choices that defy tradition, I found a strong parallel in my own life. I am going through the process of being Confirmed, and I have been figuring out what my own beliefs really are. Although I am a faithful Catholic, I highly disagree with the Church's views on the matter of homosexuality and gay marriage. Christianity, like many

religions, is one of the oldest traditions of the world, and like many traditions, it is often accepted without question because that is the way it has always been. However, I believe that the tradition of discriminating against homosexuals and not allowing gay marriage is immoral, not to mention ironic because the base of religion is morality. Faced with the decision between a tradition that I have been brought up to believe in like countless before me and the moral injustice I see, I have decided that morality is much more important to me than tradition. I feel that all humans have the right to be respected as equals, and I think this lesson I learned resembles that which Huck learns. He finds that Jim is as much a human being as he is and deserves equal treatment, leading him to free Jim and make the moral decision rather than follow tradition.

society

In thinking of other lessons Huck learns in Twain's novel, I always seemed to return to the idea of personal values. One lesson Huck learns is that true freedom is not based on skin tone or geographical lines, but on the ability to break free of society's expectations. Although Jim gains freedom by running from slavery and the expectations for his race, Huck also gains freedom by running from Miss Watson's expectations for him to become an educated, Christian gentleman. They both find happiness free from society and its requirements, and they reject the roles that society thrusts upon them. Likewise, another lesson I took from *Huck Finn* was that through his many masks and false identities, Huck learns that the first part of finding out who he is is finding out who he is not. Huck rejects the persona Miss Watson would like him to take on, thus beginning his journey through many towns, as well as many identities. Eventually, though, in temporarily becoming many different characters, Huck realizes his own values and character, leaving the story as himself for the first time. I thought both of these lessons are similar to those I learned as I entered high school and had to figure out who I was before I could keep moving through life. I was completely unsure of who I was at first, and slowly tried out many different social roles. Soon, I found that certain social circles had requirements and expectations that I did not feel myself in. I finally discovered who I really was like Huck with his own identity and found the freedom to be myself around my friends like Huck and Jim without the restrictions of the society they previously lived in. Although both of these lessons seemed prominent and had meaning to me, I believe the first theme I identified holds the most significance for me. Not only is defying Christian tradition a very current situation for me, but it is also the most personal. My values, human equality being one of them, are a large part of who I am, and the fact that I have homosexual friends and family make it even more important. Just as Huck's personal connection

good reflection

with Jim is what leads him to defy tradition in favor of morality, my relationships with those people does the same for me. In efforts to demonstrate the importance of realizing that traditions are not always moral, I created a drawing showing both Huck's and my struggle with tradition and morality. *good conclusion leading into next paragraph*

In my drawing, I tried to put meaning into the picture as a whole, as well as the components making it up. First and foremost, my piece is centered around the prominence of tradition with morality being thrown into the background. On Huck's side, I drew a number of books, all of which have the titles of real books about white supremacy because of the presence of this tradition in Huck's world, and peeking out from behind the stack of books is an African-American mother and her son, looking scared and unhappy. In the same way, on my side, I drew a large Bible with two men, one with a gay pride flag, standing behind it with similar looks on their faces. The size of the books represents the size of tradition in our world and the large role it plays in the lives of many. The contrastingly smaller people partially hidden by the books are representative of those subjected to immorality because of tradition, giving them a much smaller presence and importance. In addition to size showing importance, I also colored the books in very bright tones but only shaded the people in gray, depicting the lack of attention and value these injustices receive. Also, I made a point of coloring the skin of the African-Americans and the gay pride flag of the men because I feel that sometimes, these are the only things people see when they look at these people, rather than just other human beings like themselves. Moreover, I drew a bright red heart on the chest of each person because I believe that should be the one thing people notice about them—not their clothes, complexion, or even what they're holding, but only the heart they possess. Furthermore, I decided to draw a pressed, dried daisy lying on top of the books. Flowers, when dried and pressed can last for years and years, but they are not the same vibrant, living beauties they once were. I think this is a perfect analogy for some traditions, for though they may have been great in the day they were created for, they are only old and useless once they've been unnaturally preserved. The white of the daisy shows the purity the flower, and tradition, once had, but now it is dead, as is the honor of the tradition. Finally, I lightly shaded the background of the drawing yellow around the books, representing the positive light the traditions are seen in, and blue around the people, showing the sadness they live in because of the oppression of the traditions.

Creating this piece of art made me realize just how applicable *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is to every-day life. There are so many issues that Huck deals with than people throughout time have dealt with, and this made me wonder why this book was so controversial. Understanding that it was written in a time of slavery, I still would have thought that readers could find other parallels between their lives and Huck's and see the great wisdom written in this novel. Even so, the idea of tradition and morality could have been present, just in another context. It is unfortunate that this book has been banned in so many places because the lessons Huck learns, and therefore Twain helps his readers learn, are very valuable. Whether it is a lesson learned or a self-discovery made, *Huck Finn* will stick with readers in some way forever, just as it will for me.

I'm so
glad to hear
this! Wonderful
job!

