

Banning and Bowdlerizing *Huckleberry Finn* in United States Public Schools

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INTRODUCTION

United States public schools have been the place where we see many of our most central public and political controversies playing out. We see in the news almost every day a new lockdown and controversial dress codes. With the pandemic, schools are in limbo with juggling public health safety and education. Most recently, we also see school districts in hot water with parents and school boards for introducing major changes to the curriculum. (See “Banned In the USA: Rising school book bans threaten free expression and students first Amendment Rights for example.”¹ Certain books are seemingly in a constant battle against bowdlerization, banishment, and backlash. While the list of books that face this is lengthy, my senior project focuses on Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1885). This novel has been banned in dozens of school districts for allegations of racially charged content and violent language. In response, districts and parents have consistently returned to this book in the conversation around bowdlerization in public schools. This project examines the reasons for its controversial status as a “banned book” in different parts of the country while offering a counterargument for why it should be taught and how to teach it productively.

While there are many reasons behind banning and bowdlerizing this novel, one of the main and consistent reasons for banning is due to the novel's violent language. *Huckleberry Finn* was published in 1885 during a time where the United States was still extremely racially and politically divided in the aftermath of the Civil War. While slavery was abolished by the time this was written, America was still in turmoil economically and politically. Black Southerners

¹ <https://pen.org/banned-in-the-usa/>

were still facing violence, inequality, and much more. During 1865 to 1896 the federal government had launched the “reconstruction era”. This era aimed to reconstruct the confederacy states while providing aid to former slaves and integrating them into society as free men and women. This political turmoil led to one of the biggest supreme court cases ten years after *Huckleberry Finn* was published. Plessy Vs Ferguson was a court case in which the ruling found that racial segregation laws did not violate the U.S Constitution if the facilities for each place were equal in quality. This launched the doctrine “separate but equal for almost 100 years thereafter. This historical context is extremely important because it shows just how nonchalant people felt with the language and racial nature of the book at this time. This kind of racial and political unrest appears in the novel’s language too. For example, the novel uses a racial epithet to describe Black people 219 times. Huck and Jim, the book’s main protagonist’s, are also held to different standards. They are separated by race and therefore not equal in society. For these reasons alone, many school districts have opted to ban this novel. Furthermore, while some have banned the text completely, others have chosen to bowdlerize this novel.

This project examines the context of the racially charged language that Mark Twain uses throughout the entirety of the book. One of my biggest goals in this project is to be able to explore the controversial subjects that are displayed in the book by thinking about Twain’s depiction of character and sociopolitical context. Although preserving the text’s originality is extremely important to me, I have chosen to omit the racial epithet used in the book from this project. Instead of writing the word out, I will be writing the first letter of the word and covering the rest with asterisks. For me, as a teacher, what is more important than authenticity is the safety of my readers. I want to make sure that everyone who reads this project feels like they are in a respectful learning space. Historically, this word is a “killing” word. It is used to discriminate,

harass, and kill Black people in this country. Although the word is not always used as so in *Huckleberry Finn*, it is still marked with this killing language. In conclusion, I want my reader to be able to understand how harmful this word is by choosing not to use it in this project.

Knowing that I was not alone in this decision to omit the word from my project made me feel even more secure. In Bridgette Fielder *Relative Races*, she makes it a statement to advise the reader that she will not be using this epithet even when quoting directly from a text. Fielder writes, “Throughout this book I have chosen to not to present the word “n*****” [here is the one time she writes it out] in my textual citations, but will represent this word as “n [___]” as I have here. I recognize the historical violence attached to this term and the importance of not eliding that violence in discussions of racism” (Fielder 247). This moment by Fielder made my decision validated in terms of not wanting to use it because of the racial and violent history this word presents. In addition to that Fielder makes a point to say that she “recognizes the historical violence” and that is a point that I also want my reader to understand personally. While this project discusses and touches on these sensitive and damaging ideas, I want to be sure that my reader knows that I am aware of the negativity that surrounds this type of language.

Standing by this decision is one that I am choosing to do for the entirety of this project. Fielder’s choice to not use this language in her text also comes when she says “However, I am tired of reading this word and I no longer see the illustrative value in repeating it, even in quotation, in my own work. I believe the force of racist violence is conveyed sufficiently in the quotations which this term appears even without the word’s quotation” (Fielder 247). This statement resonated and stuck with me because I could not agree more with Fielder’s claims about using this epithet for an illustrative matter. Omitting the epithet from my project should sufficiently show just how killing and violent this epithet is in general.

Chapter One: The History of Banning and Bowdlerizing *Huckleberry Finn*

It is important to understand is the difference between banning and bowdlerizing.

Banning is prohibiting the use, performance, or distribution of something, while bowdlerizing is when an official, who examines materials (such as publications or films) for the objectionable matter, changes it or “tones it down” for the sake of the audience. Bowdlerization is also the act of removing material that is considered improper or offensive from a text, especially with the result that the text becomes weaker or less effective. Knowing the difference between both is important because not every school district chooses to ban books.

The history of banning *Huckleberry Finn* began as early as 1885. Just one short year after publishing the book, Twain began to see and hear some backlash about this book. Concord, Massachusetts, was the first town that ever banned this book from schools and libraries. The reason this book was banned might seem extremely peculiar given the very different concerns about it today. According to PBS.org, “Librarians in Concord Massachusetts deemed it trash and suitable only for the slums” (1) but not because of the epithet. This majority white town was in uproar about the book because of its rambunctious characters like Huck and Jim and improper behaviors that Huck displayed through parts of the story. Librarians felt that children reading this book would be influenced in a negative way because of such behaviors from the characters. This reasoning for banning the book comes to no surprise. As mentioned before much of the turmoil during this time continued to keep Blacks separate from whites through the use racial segregation laws. In short, the use of language in this book was not a concern for the Whites that had a problem with book to begin with.

Huck's use of "improper English" or more specifically, "coarse language" was the cause of this book being taken off shelves in 1885. For example, in multiple chapters of the book Huck uses "ain't" rather than "is not." Due to "ain't" being deemed improper, this is where librarians began to question if Twain set Huck to be a moral and well-behaved character. In addition, Huck also used "no" for the word "any" (i.e., "That aint no use,"). Twain's use of dialect was perceived as being grammatically incorrect and thus Huck was deemed an uneducated character and a bad influence on the children that would be reading this book. It is interesting that these small contractions and dialect choices were bothersome to libraries, compared to the racist epithets that are shown a handful of times in each chapter.

If we fast forward to the present day, the book continues to cause much controversy but for a very different reason. In our contemporary moment, it is the amount of racial epithets and language in this novel that school districts and libraries feel the need to ban the book. In total, this novel has over 219 racial epithets and in some single chapters, epithets appear more than 20 times.

Due to the explicit nature of this language, some districts opt to teach a bowdlerized version of the book, one that does not contain the racial epithets that the original book has. In 2011, New South publications published this book without any of the racial epithets or controversial behavior that Huck is charged with throughout the original version of the book. Rather than referring to Jim as the epithet, this version changes the text, using "slave" instead. This version has caused a bit of controversy on its own because some teachers feel as if it is an injustice to the authenticity of the novel. As writer and teacher, Toni Morrison, says in her 1996 essay "The Amazing, Troubling Book,": "It struck me as a pursuit, yet elementary kind of

ensorship designed to appease adults rather than educate the children. Amputate the problem, band aid the solution” (Morrison 153). This insight that Morrison offers on the bowdlerization of this novel reveals what some teachers and districts feel against teaching this version. This version masks rather than educates around a key historical moment in which America was known for using this type of language and showcasing the racism that once lived through the country. Morrison argues against both bowdlerization and censorship as a solution to this controversy. It gives the adults what they want, while not educating the children on why this language is so damaging and killing. Morrison also seems to suggest that there are other educational methods teachers can use to teach this text. I propose some of these practical methods for *the classroom* in my conclusion. For the analytical part of this project however, I felt as if keeping this language out was the best decision. I do not need to repeat it to teach my reader why this language is so bad and killing. As a teacher and a literary analyst, I worry that I would not be able to maintain a safe space. This project seeks to educate, rather than “appeasing” the adults. I would rather educate my students on a topic about which they might not know much.

This idea of appeasing the adults and not educating the children is an idea that has not only struck Morrison. Hughes Davis, a writer for the *Mark Twain Journal*, argues just that. Davis argues that the book should be kept in American schools and should be kept a part of the American literature curriculum. In “On Teaching *Huckleberry Finn*,” written in 2016, Hughes goes into detail about how he has taught this novel in his classes for over twenty years now. While he understands some of the reasoning for bowdlerizing the book, Hughes has never

actually run into a problem between the book and his students. Hughes argues that he would rather see the book banned from districts than see people diminish or pretend like this kind of language was never used or still is not used in U.S. history. Hughes' article on *Huckleberry Finn* offers a firsthand account on the teaching of this book because not only does he go into detail about the book, but he also goes into detail about how he teaches this book to his AP high school classes. Hughes would much rather focus on the themes of the book instead of the reason why it is controversial and banned. Hughes argues that the biggest lesson he teaches while spending time with this book is that America was once a place of racially charged differences, and while modern-day America may have its own racial injustice, exposing his students on how vulgar and demeaning these words were back then, his students can see the progress America has made toward racial justice and equity.

Hughes' opinion on the bowdlerization and banning of the novel is one that is constantly argued by many. There are a lot of news articles on the book being banned and why the book was and is banned. An article written by the *Los Angeles Times* goes into detail about a school district in Burbank, California, that recently banned and censored the novel in their middle and high school libraries and curriculum. On September 9, 2020, the Burbank Unified School District held a Board of Education meeting with high school and middle school teachers. In this meeting, an important topic of bowdlerization came up after a couple of parents expressed some uncomfortable notions with five specific novels. One of these novels was *Huckleberry Finn*. The plea for bowdlerization came from three Black parents stating that this novel causes an extreme sense of harm to the Black students in this district. In this article written by journalist Dorany

Pineda, she mentions how this this plea to ban the book came at a time when racial turmoil was at an all-time high, especially in a state like California. These parents felt that the exposure of this novel could create more bad than good and would rather protect their children from it.

As a teacher, I personally find it hard to teach something so laden with hateful language because of how this novel can make all students feel while reading it inside of the classroom. This is what the parents in Burbank felt while voicing their concerns over the book. Only three percent of the Burbank Unified School District is comprised of Black students and parents felt that in a school that lacks diversity, this kind of novel should not be read during classes. While Hughes argues that this form of exposure lets us see into America's past, we can also argue that this can be harmful to students and may cause a sense of discomfort or even pain while they are reading it. It is critically important to learn about the past so we can build a better future. It is often argued that allowing us to learn about the past is exactly what this book does, and this was also the main argument in these parents that did not want the book banned at the Burbank School District. In a time where racial tensions are at an all-time high, it is important for these parents' voices to be heard and considered in these heavy topics, all while educating them on the importance and learning outcomes this novel had to offer. The Burbank school district did end up joining the long list of schools that have now banned and bowdlerized the book. The problem was not in the book itself though, it was the lack of diversity and context that overshadowed decisions like this. Only a small population of the school were children of color/minorities. This is what really made parent's move forward with the banning and bowdlerization of this book. The outcome of this may have been different had the district been more racially diverse.

In some cases, districts feel as if banning and bowdlerizing do not serve any purpose for the book. Recently, banning novels has become such a hot topic but some school districts feel

that banning and even bowdlerizing may be a bit extreme for novels. This varies by region and location and district. Schools may also feel that banning a novel defeat the purpose of teaching. What is the point of teaching in schools if we must ban and bowdlerize primary sources such as literary novels? For these districts, the alternative solution to this is providing parents with a permission slip that allows them give or not give consent for their child to be able to read novels like *Huck Finn*. Those who choose to opt-out of the reading are then provided with an alternative lesson supposedly closely related to what the students who have consent are learning. While this may seem like a perfect alternative to the debate on banning and bowdlerizing, this alternative is just as silly, or in fact more absurd than banning and bowdlerizing books. Providing permission slips for children to be able to read books begins a whole set of problems that are much greater than banning and bowdlerizing novels.

First, permission slips create an issue with reliability and trust between students and their parents. These slips teach students that they must ask their parents' permission to be able to explore literature and controversial topics. This does not allow students the freedom of being able to go and learn about these topics on their own. Because of this, this also does not allow students to formulate and create their thoughts and opinions about these topics. Students may think that because they need permission from their parents these topics like sexuality and racism may not be a good thing to learn about, but it is these kinds of topics to which we should be discussing and exposing our students. In relation to the first problem, these permission slips create a false narrative about the given texts. In some of these permission slips districts will say "Some of the texts your child will read this year contain vulgar language, explicit scenes, and controversial topics." While all that may be true, what becomes a false narrative is that these

slips give parents the impression that they are “bad” books to read and that is where the controversy begins.

Another reason why we may find a major issue in permission slips is that those slips may begin to cause miscommunications between parents and students and teachers. Some permission slips that are provided to families are extremely vague and often try to mask the truth on why those slips were even given in the first place. They are often as little detailed as possible to minimize questions and concerns that families have about their child reading a given novel. Here is where we begin to run into issues. Parents begin to feel fear and worry for their child. What would they be reading? Is it so bad that we need to sign a slip for this? What is so bad about a book they are reading? These are just some of the questions that parents begin to wonder when handed a slip with as little detail as possible. They begin to feel some sort of threat and anxiety from just books. On the other side of all that there are families and parents who begin to worry about how a teacher will execute and teach these novels all while making sure all students feel that they are in a safe and comfortable environment while teaching these books. Students who are in a comfortable space are willing to learn and feel more open to sharing their ideas and thoughts. For example, when a teacher is teaching *Huck Finn*, how can a parent trust that a teacher is handling the use epithets in a controlled, respectful, and comfortable manner? How can a parent trust that their child is feeling safe and not harmed by the vulgarity of the language and explicit nature of the book? These are just a handful of issues that arise when permission slips are handed out and no communication is established between families, students, and teachers/staff in school districts.

Even when the issues above begin to arise, some districts still feel the need to provide slips to parents regardless of if it’s problematic or not. Districts feel as if they need to watch out

and basically cover their own tracks if a parent begins to push back on a book that their child may be reading. What this tells us is that some districts would much rather care for the parents and their thoughts than the child and their education in school. These slips can create a disadvantage in learning to the children who opt out in reading these books. When a child's parent opts them out of this, the teacher then must create an alternative lesson for this child. Of course, these lessons must be much more toned down and appropriate for the child to avoid any problems between families and school districts. Because of this we see that some children do not get the same learning experience as another child would. They do not get to learn about important topics because their parent made that decision for them.

What became more problematic than the banning of the book by the Burbank School District was that the Appoquomimink School District in Delaware began to type up and propose permission slips for young adult novels that would be read during the school year. According to Rocco Stanio, writer for *SJL Magazine*, this district began doing so because in their previous school year, the district started to face serious backlash for teaching novels like *Huckleberry Finn* and Ellen Hopkins' *Identical* (2008). Just like *Huckleberry Finn*, *Identical* has faced its fair share of controversy because of the sexual nature of the book. They also began to consider these slips for students checking any and every library book out that had "young adult" labeled on the spine of the books. This again was done because of the backlash that was received previously. In this district, parents began to fight these novels because they did not want their child to be exposed to any form of sexual and racial topics on their own. At the Board of Education meeting, parents expressed their concern about this and felt as if they should be the ones talking and exposing their children to these topics. Some parents wanted these novels banned all together while some parents felt that if they are aware of what their child is reading

then they could consider them allowing these books to stay but again the district would need to seek permission from the parents prior to allowing the child check out and read a novel during a class.

We see here several issues and problematic behavior from the district. Their permission slips were titled “Parent Permission for Young Adult Required Material.” In this slip, the district provided as few details as possible. They introduced their slips by saying “The Appoquinmink School District believes that parents are first and foremost their children’s teachers” (Appoquinmink BOE, 2015). Then, the slips have the child’s name, teacher’s name, and what they would be reading in the class. At the bottom we see a little warning sign where parents are warned that the novel the child may be reading contains sexually explicit, vulgar language, drug use, and a lot more other things that we might see in a young adult novel. The district did not provide the parents with any more information other than that. The permission slip was vague, and this is where the district began running into some issues with parents. Parents began to question what exactly was being read. Parents also began to question why the district was being secretive in what the children were reading. One parent even suggested that if children need permission to buy video games with a mature rating due to sexual nature and other things, then they need the permission to do the same when it comes to reading these books. Comparing video games to books is a strange comparison but this is genuinely some reactions that parents had to the district about the materials and books that kids would be reading in the classroom and checking out in the library. The district ended up not pursuing the permission slip route with the parents. They instead banned every and all books that may have a form of sexual, violent, and/or controversial nature to it. According to the article’s author, “Superintendent Matthew Burrows released a statement that the district has rules, policies and procedures that would ensure

students' rights would be exercised as well as adequately address the needs of the stakeholders" (Stanio 3). In other words, students would still be accessing educational books and materials, but they had to be age appropriate. What this teaches us is that some districts just do not care about their students' education. They are more concerned with pleasing parents and making sure that they are not in the next news headline for teaching controversial books in classes and having them disposable to students in the library.

Overall, all this shows us is how problematic permission slips are to the students and the districts. Providing permission slips for field trips and more is one thing but providing permission slips for reading books is simply for keeping parents content and in control of what their child can and cannot read. It makes the students become reliant on others and forces them to not be able to make decisions for themselves. Moreover, it hinders their critical thinking skills. Books provide safe spaces for young adults to work out challenging ideas and problem-solving skills. Banning books reinforces group bias in some situations. For example, we also see that it gives parents an opportunity to teach children about select topics with their own biases and ideas mixed into it. Without an understanding of context or history, all this does is create and continue the viscous cycle that generations after generation have been trying to break. Permission slips do not help; they create problems that are bigger than the original problem it is trying to avoid.

Chapter Two: *Huckleberry Finn*'s Narrator

One of the first major issues we tend to see with *Huckleberry Finn* is that it is often misjudged. Parents, students, teachers or just about anyone can open this book to a random page and find the use of a particular racial epithet that Mark Twain writes over 219 times. It is easy to feel scared, intimidated, uncomfortable or hurt just by looking at that. Because of this, the book is misjudged, and many opt to banning the book at first glance. While that is a common reaction, the terms change once a person sits and reads the text in its entirety. We see that once they become familiar with the text, they can see that there is much more beneath the surface of the text's use of the epithets. We can see this with the main character of the book: Huckleberry Finn. Huck is famously known as the young, naïve narrator of the story. Huck's age and naivete is one of the first things to consider about this story.

Huck's childlike persona sets him up to be perceived as a naive narrator. When we first get to meet Huck, he begins by introducing himself as follows

“You don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*; but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth.”
(Twain 1).

What we can see by this introduction from Huck is that he sets this up by telling us that if we did not read *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, we do not know who he is. Yet Huck does not take the time to introduce himself to us, he just takes the time to tell us that all this was created by Mark Twain. We may encounter a sense of unreliability here from Huck because he admits that is these adventures are not created by him, only by Twain. In this opening passage from Huck, we also see that he tells us that Twain *mainly* told the truth; some things may have been “stretched” but it was for the most part truthful. This creates another sense of unreliability between Huck the narrator and us as readers because we cannot trust if this adventure is truthful or not. Afterall this

adventure is not created by Huck, a fictional character. It is created by Twain an author of a fictional text. Huck is also implying in this passage that sometimes we all tell lies.

This unreliability causes much confusion at times. We see that Huck tells us that Twain does not tell the truth, so this begins to make Huck comparatively reliable and likable. On the other hand, we see that Twain is setting Huck up to be an unreliable character. We wonder if we should trust him. One thing for sure though is that Huck uses racially charged and killing language throughout the entirety of the book. Here is where the importance of Huck's unreliability as a narrator comes into play because we see that Twain works hard to show Huck's racism all through the beginning of the story. In these early parts of the text, I refer to Huck's racism as a consequence of his childlike naiveté. Later we will examine his development away from this model. In one example, Huck begins to tell a story about a Black man he knows by the name of Jim. Jim is enslaved and is clearly a person who is politically and economically "below" Huck. Huck introduces Jim and begins to speak about Jim as follows:

Afterward, Jim said the witches bewitched him and put him in a trance, and rode him all over the State, and then set him under the trees again, and hung his hat on a limb to show who did it. And next time Jim told it he said they rode him down to New Orleans; and, after that, every time he told it he spread it more and more, till by and by he said they rode him all over the world and tired him most to death, and his back was all over saddle-boils. Jim was monstrous proud about it, and he got so he would hardly notice the other n*****s. N*****s would come miles to hear Jim tell about it, and he was more looked up to than any n***** in that country. Strange n*****s would stand with their mouths open and look him all over, same as if he was a wonder. N*****s is always talking about witches in the dark by the kitchen fire; but whenever one was talking and letting on to know all about such things, Jim would happen in and say, "Hm! What you know 'about witches?" and that n***** was corked up and had to take a back seat. Jim always kept that five-center piece around his neck with a string and said it was a charm the devil give to him with his own hands and told him he could cure anybody with it and fetch witches whenever he wanted to just by saying something to it, but he never told what it was he said to it. N***** would come from all around there and give Jim anything they had, just for a sight of that five-center piece; but they wouldn't touch it, because the devil had had his hands on it. Jim was most ruined

for a servant because he got stuck up on account of having seen the devil and been rode by witches (Twain 2).

As we can see here, Huck uses epithets to talk about Jim and those who come to see him talk. He uses this word seven times in the span of this thought. Although it is important to note that he is using it conversationally, it is also important to point out that Twain depicts Huck here as being racist to the point of naivete or childlikeness. We see Huck's use of that language to talk about Jim and the other enslaved Black people is difficult to read but in it Huck seems to have no awareness of the harm he is inflicting through this speech. Twain does this to ask us to think about the limits of violence and speech. If language is not physically violent, can it cause harm? Huck's seemingly harmless story presents an introduction of Jim (another main character) with what I have called "degrading" and "killing" words rather than using their names. This passage may show Twain's desire to highlight this violence as a cautionary tale. In many times through the passage, Huck specifically addresses the people who would come see Jim as "n*****". In example he says "N*****s would come from all around there and give Jim anything they had, just for a sight of that five-center piece; but they wouldn't touch it, because the devil had had his hands on it" (Twain 2). Huck does not seem fully aware that speaking with that epithet is dangerous or malicious, much like a child. If we consider that he uses it in a casual manner, it may not appear violent, but it is. Huck is most definitely aware that this epithet is used to describe and speak about Black people and Black people only as he uses it several times while speaking about Jim.

Whether naïve or not, Huck's language is racist when he associates Black people and Black culture with witchcraft. Hucks says, "Jim always kept that five-center piece around his neck with a string, and said it was a charm the devil gives to him with his own hands and told him he could cure anybody with it and fetch witches whenever he wanted to just by saying something to it, but he never told what it was he said to it." Here we see Huck talking about how Jim has dealt with the devil and how he can fetch witches whenever he wants to just by saying something to it. This language repeats racist ideas because of the historical associations between witchcraft and black magic. In many Western societies and cultures, black magic and witchcraft are seen as a dark entity, something with negative energy. This again is racist but important because Twain uses it to set up Huck's "adventures" with and about Jim. Twain sets up this immature version of Huck so that we can observe his growth later. In this early version however, Huck uses the epithet to help him dramatize his adventure:

"Strange n*****s would stand with their mouths open and look him all over, same as if he was a wonder. N*****s is always talking about witches in the dark by the kitchen fire; but whenever one was talking and letting on to know all about such things, Jim would happen in and say, "Hm! What you know 'about witches?" and that n***** was corked up and had to take a back seat. Jim always kept that five-center piece around his neck with a string and said it was a charm the devil give to him with his own hands and told him he could cure anybody with it and fetch witches whenever he wanted to just by saying something to it, but he never told what it was he said to it."

Huck needs Jim's status (as indicated by the epithet) to make his story adventurous and magical.

It is important to note that although Huck's name is in the title, Twain specifically chooses to write this story about Jim. In this retelling by Huck, this story about Jim as told by

mirrors old folklore that would be used to scare children and maintain the lower-class status of black people. We also know the long effects of the negativity that surrounds this. Huck could have told this story about anyone in the book, but it is telling how this negative connotation is correlated with Jim, who is a Black person. Even with this correlation here, it is easy to assume that this is a harmless story about Jim. Twain's larger goal is to show how we can see Huck's common form of racism is a) a violent historical erasure of humanity and b) a reflection of his naive and immature character who will be forced to grow across the novel.

The deception of Huck being naively racist also takes a turn as we get deeper into the novel. We start to see a deep bond of friendship that Jim and Huck begin to create. In this moment, scholars like to assert that Huck turns into an anti-racist. In chapter 31, we see this definite switch in Huck. As Huck and Jim are on the raft, Huck begins to plan their escape out of this situation. From here, Huck sees this moment as *they* are finally free. With joy, he runs back to the raft to let Jim know about their freedom. Only when he gets back, he realizes that Jim is now gone and has been captured and taken to Silas Phelps farm and was sold by the King for only \$40. Huck is weeping and clearly distraught. It is in that moment when Huck says, "I was a trembling because I'd get to decide, forever, betwixt two things and I knew it, I studied a minute sort of holding my breath and then says to myself "alright then I'll go to hell" (31). We see that same immature and naive kid from chapter two make this crucial decision that determines his future forever. Huck is aware of the consequences he is going to face but decides on helping this person he has created a relationship with. The fear of "hell" outweighs the fear of him losing this

friend that he has made throughout the entirety of this adventure. For the first time in this book, here is where we see Huck humanize Jim. We see him give respect and have some empathy for the “hell” that Jim has had to live through his entire life. This is where, as I’ll demonstrate later, scholars see Huck go from being using outwardly racist language to being an outright anti-racist ally and advocate. And to be sure, we see Huck go against the church, his religion, and elders because he can finally see right from wrong. Huck is willing to put the idea that slaves are property to the grave and learns what equality and morality means.

Despite the racial epithets and the horrible treatment of Jim in most of the book, this section of the book can be an excellent learning experience as well as a great lesson to young adult students in this country. Teachers in schools around the country can use this book as tool to teach critical thinking, problem solving, narration, character development, and other literary elements that are crucial to a high school student’s development and professional career. Despite the discomfort from its epithets, this book has much to offer. We can see that it is rich in its content and having an uncomfortable feeling or thought while reading this can fuel the learning experience all much more if channeled productively. This is the moment when those in favor of teaching the book argue that banning it deprives our students of an important life lesson.

In those moments we can see how Huck turns his underlying racist thoughts into a moments of heroism and rebellion against the social norms during this period. In the scene, we see Jim, Huck, The Duke, and The King all floating down the river on a raft causing mischief and scams through the neighboring village. At this point of the story, there are already people

looking for Jim, particularly Jim's enslavers. As Huck realizes that they are now free, he runs back to Jim to tell him what is happening, but to Huck's surprise, Jim is gone. Twain begins to set up the scene as follows:

Set her loose Jim! Were all right now! But there warn't no answer, and nobody come out of the wigwam. Jim was gone! I set up a shout—and then another—and then another one; and run this way and that in the woods, whooping and screeching; but it warn't no use—old Jim was gone. Then I set down and cried; I couldn't help it (Twain 3).

The text and Twain can allow us to see and feel Huck's emotional state during this moment. We can see pure excitement from Huck when he is running to Jim and says "Set her Loose Jim!" (Twain 31). The use of this exclamation point lets us know that Huck is excited to continue this journey. By Huck saying "set her loose" we can picture this young boy running towards the boat screaming to get ready and go. His "we're all right now!" (Twain 31) shows us the excitement Huck is still experiencing as well as his sincere eagerness. This sense of relief and excitement over comes Huck so much so that he is not expecting for Jim to be gone. Huck is fully expecting for him and his friend to be free and on continue their way in this journey. The mood and emotional state make a shift change as soon as Huck realizes that Jim is gone. We see this when Huck says "But there warn't no answer, and nobody come out of the wigwam. Jim was gone!" (Twain 31). The comma and break between the no answer and no one coming out, show how Huck has come to the realization of what is about to happen. When Huck exclaims that Jim is gone, we see that Huck has a genuine and shocking reaction to Jim being gone. Again, we can see Huck's development because he is genuinely shocked and surprised that Jim was gone.

By setting up the scene like this and using this specific dialect and reaction, Twain begins to internalize the conflicts and the emotion that Huck is feeling towards Jim. As readers we can capture how Huck is feeling. We can see how genuinely excited he was to how genuinely

devasted he was about Jim being gone. At this point, Huck is not fully aware of what has happened to Jim, but he has a feeling. As this scene ends, we see how Huck breaks down and cries because this person to whom he has grown close is now gone and Huck has no idea what and where Jim could be. The shouting and the screeching that Huck does repeatedly begins to show us how Twain is internalizing this emotion within Huck. Huck may come off as someone who does not really mind, and Twain makes us aware especially when he calls Jim by the racial epithet but based on the emotion, we get right from this little scene we can start to see that this emotion and feeling really does get to Huck and he tends to internalize it a lot more than what we see within the text.

Twain also reminds us in this scene how young and naive Huck really has been throughout the story. The dialect we see Huck use is not “proper” English. Huck still uses words such as “Warn’t” and “Aint.” We also see how young and naive Huck still is in this moment by the way he runs over to the raft to let Jim know that they are now free. We get a glimpse here of how Huck is fully expecting his friend who was enslaved to still be there and not captured/runaway due to the circumstances and the nature of the situation. When Huck specifically says “Were all right now,” we see how his naiveness affects his ability to think of the real-world situation that Huck and Jim are facing by being together and in the south. Fast forward to when Huck's yelling and screaming tactics do not seem to be working, he breaks down and starts to cry. In a moment where we see his emotions come to light, we also see his naiveness in thinking that Jim is gone forever. These traits and abilities that Huck showcases in these scenes ultimately set up his decision when it comes to finding Jim.

Huck’s feeling about Jim’s whereabouts becomes his main proctor as he is now beginning to feel the conflict on Jim and his next steps are going to be in rescuing Jim. Huck

encounters a boy who saw the ordeal happen and tells Huck that Jim has been captured and sold for nearly \$40 and is residing at Phelps Plantation. This moment is where we see Huck make the decision that Jim capturing meant this adventure was over. The perspective that Huck puts it in makes it seem as if Jim was back to being Jim, and a slave, maybe it could be best that Huck throws in the towel and joins his family again. Huck decides to write a letter to Tom Sawyer and make Miss Watson aware of Jim's whereabouts. He writes this letter out and almost instantly feels this sense of relief, his problems have drifted away, and he can go back to living his normal life. While this sense of relief overcomes his emotion, Huck still feels some guilt, some form of remorse for doing this and giving Jim up. In what seems like an epiphany for Huck, Twain writes:

It was a close place. I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was a-trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself: It was a difficult situation. I picked up the letter, and held it in my hand. I was trembling, because I knew had to make a choice between two things, and the outcome of my decision would last forever. I thought about it a minute while I held my breath. And then I said to myself: "All right, then, I'll GO to hell." And I tore the letter up. It was awful thoughts and awful words, but they was said. And I let them stay said; and never thought no more about reforming. I shoved the whole thing out of my head, and said I would take up wickedness again, which was in my line, being brung up to it, and the other warn't. And for a starter I would go to work and steal Jim out of slavery again; and if I could think up anything worse, I would do that, too; because as long as I was in, and in for good, I might as well go the whole hog (Twain 31).

This moment offsets the Huck we see before he writes this letter. All we really see is Huck's emotional state and feelings that Jim is now gone. While it may seem that Huck is much more mature and less naive at this moment, we still see some of his immature nature and naiveness peek through the lines. Huck is still using "improper" English by using words such as "warn't" and "Aint." Moments like these that Twain creates set up the readers into thinking if Huck can execute a plan which is going to save and free someone who is enslaved. We also get a sense of

Huck's naiveness through this scene because he thinks of this plan and even mentions that he will go all the way since he already is in this situation. Given the context and the time period that Twain writes this novel this idea of Huck going to save Jim is child-like but imaginative. Knowing that he could end up in the worst-case scenario (“hell”), Huck still chooses to go through with this and do the right thing morally.

The internalization of Huck’s conflict is present in this scene with the use of narration and metaphor. In particular, Twain uses a lot of “I” for Huck. This is clearly a book written in first-person narration, through Huck's lens, but Twain specifically writes “I’ll go to hell” and “If I could think of anything worse, I would do that too” (Twain, 31). These thoughts and feelings we see Huck’s struggle with shows that this conflict is mainly for Huck. It is Huck who fears the consequences of this plan and the unknown future it may hold for him and Jim. The constant use of “I” also shows the struggle Huck has in writing the letter and going through with telling Miss Watson Jim's whereabouts. Leading up to when Huck decides to tear up the letter, Huck still internalizes his feelings by being regretful for what he said and what he did. He realizes that he said it and he still may feel as so but saving his friend is far more important than the way he feels about this

In literal terms and metaphorical terms, Twain internalizes this conflict for Huck by showing us the dramatic moment in which Huck rips up this letter for Miss Watson and chooses to go help and save Jim. Twain writes about how Huck takes the letter, holds it up, and tears it up. It is a heroic moment when we see Huck choose to make the better, moral decision, even though he knows it will hurt him. This can also be seen as a metaphorical action, almost like an end to the dilemma and the battle that Huck has been facing internally. This feeling has been torn up and ripped up inside of him and he chooses to go against society and do what is right.

Chapter Three: *Huckleberry Finn* as an Archive

This scene is read by many important scholars as a scene where Huck comes to his senses and chooses to do the right thing, but it means something different. Sacvan Bercovitch, writer of the article “What’s Funny about *Huckleberry Finn*,” claims this scene to be as follows: “He tells us he is shivered with fear, and we think he is brave and independent; he says trembling “I’ll go to hell” and we think “he is saved!”” (Bercovitch 16). In other words, Bercovitch is explaining how we read and interpret this scene. Twain makes this scene to lead us to believe that because Huck is choosing the right moral decision, that he is saved and is a changed person. On the surface, this scene does seem to represent exactly that. We see a child who has now been saved from his racist ideologies and communities, a child who is able to think for himself, a child who is able to see the good in a horrible situation. But why are we so fixated on Huck’s saving rather than Jim’s saving? Why is Huck’s “lightbulb moment” seen as a moment of heroism and bravery?

It is simple.

Most contemporary readers are too privileged to see that, in this moment, Twain is depicting how white privilege operates in the novel. He does this by making Huck the hero and the savior who comes in to get Jim out of this horrible situation; it is Huck’s character who is allowed to experience a full sense of growth, development and moral superiority. Huck is the person who is going to do right, even if it meant going to “hell.”

How could this novel not be taught in schools?

This idea that Huck gets to maintain his naivete and his heroism in the novel is what is so damaging to Black students and anyone else who encounters this novel. It is not the novel’s use

of racial epithets that makes it dangerous; instead, it is the idea that a logic of white superiority maintains Huck as the novel's most important moral hero.

Sure, the scene touches on Jim and why he is so important to Huck, but we see how this decision that Huck has made to save his friend affects Huck solely. In other words, it still centers Huck. Huck exclaims, "I'll go to hell!" This big power move that Twain writes highlights Huck's focus on his actions and how it will reflect on him. The affirmation of "I'll go" does not seem to show a care on how this will affect Jim or where Jim will be. There is no regard of consequence that Jim might have because of a decision that Huck made. There is no sense of worry for Jim in the very real context of slave catchers etc., his lines show his concern for how he is willing to be penalized for his own bravery.

Huck's feeling of going to save Jim begins to get challenged as we go on through the chapter. As Huck begins to set out to find Jim, we see him going around exclaiming that Jim is his "n*****", his property. Specifically, when he has been sold, Huck reacts by saying, "Sold him? I says and begun to cry; "why he was MY n***** and that was MY money. Where is he? I want my n*****. Well, you can't GET your n***** that's all so dry up your blubbering" (31). This scene is a perfect example on how Huck uses his privilege to his advantage. Twain leads us to think that by Huck affirming that Jim is "his property, his person, and his n*****" that automatically means that Jim belongs to Huck, that Huck is entitled to have Jim back all because he affirms that Jim is his. Huck is so adamant about this that we can see his possessiveness to Jim and the ownership that Huck has over Jim. This is where we see the violence of Huck's seemingly harmless language revealed for its power to dehumanize other people. In a moment where we are led to believe that Huck has truly changed and truly thought to have nonracist ideologies, Huck uses more language that is worrisome. Although Huck is compelled to save Jim

and give him his freedom back, we see how Huck still holds all the power in this relationship. To Bercovitch's point, we as readers are positioned to be moved by the affirmation of Huck going to hell to save Jim. If we fully accept that positioning, we must admit that Huck does not get saved because of this decision. Huck gets saved because he is white and because he can get away with things like making Jim his entitlement. We as readers feel sorry and moved by Huck's decision because he is just a kid, and moreover because he is white. The one person who truly needed to be saved in this novel does not get saved, all because he is Black.

As teachers we tend to think of ways to teach controversial novels to a group of diverse students from all classes, abilities, and backgrounds especially students who are part of different minority groups. Although we may believe that teaching this novel as Huck being the hero is best, it could be damaging to students because it reproduces the logic of racial superiority and inferiority. It is important that this book be taught as an archive or representation of white privilege and power. Jacques Derrida, the author of "Archive Fever," writes on the archive being a place where power is enacted, institutionalized and a place where laws are kept. Derrida makes this a point when he writes, "A science of an archive must include the theory of this institutionalization, that is to say, at once the law which begins by inscribing itself there and of the right which authorizes it" (Derrida, 10). This fits perfectly into *Huckleberry Finn* as an archive because we see the "law" of privilege and power 'institutionalize" itself within the book. The deconstruction of the analysis of Huck's privilege and power begins when Huck expresses himself as naively racist. This means that Huck, although he may be aware of what he is saying, does not understand that he is being racist towards Jim and the other Black people in the novel. We also see that the "law" inscribe itself throughout the novel because Huck continuously uses racial epithets and constantly talks down to/at Jim, even when he speaks to him casually. Up

until the end, there is never a moment where Huck is speaking about and to Jim in a derogatory form. As Derrida explains, there is where we see the law of white privilege and power inscribe and institutionalize itself within the novel.

Even in the moment where we are supposed to see Huck go through a “metamorphosis” and be a changed person, we continue to see how Twain sets up the novel to be an archive where the law of white privilege is institutionalized. Twain institutionalized this law because he may perceive the fact that Huck is accepted “going to hell” (31) is going to be the worst consequence he will receive. Twain gives Huck this moment of being a white savior for Jim, all while still asserting the fact that Huck’s actions come from a place of ignorance. The moment where Huck is crying over the fact that Jim was sold and that his money was taken also institutionalizes Huck’s white privilege because Huck does not seem to care what is happening to Jim, he seems to care more about the fact that Jim was sold and that his money was taken. Huck asserts this when he says “Why that was MY n*****” and “That was MY money.” It takes a certain kind of privilege to be able to say that, and Huck has that privilege. Huck does not have to be worried for his safety and does not have to be worried about the fact that he is being taken by enslaver and taken to a place where he’s never been.

Lastly, Twain institutionalizes this novel’s white privilege by making this novel about Huck as the main character and Jim being Huck’s sidekick. This entire story is told solely from Huck’s perspective with only glimpses of Jim’s thoughts and feelings coming through in some of their adventures. Huck takes the narrative away from Jim especially in the opening moment where Huck first introduces Jim. Throughout the entirety of the novel this is all told from Huck’s perspective and narrative. Even in the moment where we see Jim being rescued, all Twain gives us is the feelings, and internal conflicts that Huck has throughout these moments.

Ultimately, examining the novel through a white privilege lens shows us how it is important to teach this novel as an archive for white privilege. Teaching it as such, we can start having these difficult conversations with our students that examine how power is institutionalized or preserved in how we speak and what words we use. In this evolving world and society, it is important to start talking to our students about what forms of racism and white privilege looks like. What is even more important is showing our students how this was a problem in the 1800's after the Civil War and how this is still a problem even 140 years later. Although readers may be drawn to how Huck becomes this hero character by the end of the story, it is more important to show them that Huck's heroism is only possible because of Jim's assumed inferior status. While these problems may have gotten "better," there are still millions and millions of Black families, children, students and people facing this kind of discrimination everywhere. There are still millions of white people using their white privilege to their advantage, even if it is not done purposefully, it is still something that damages lives and separates everyone due to their race. These conversations can teach our students to rise above that and overcoming these racist ideologies that are still present to this day. These conversations start within ourselves and spread to those all around us one way or another. Simply being the "hero," as typical readings of Huck suggest, of banned book controversies do not help us solve the problem of racism and education.

Conclusion

Huckleberry Finn is one novel that I would make sure to add into my curriculum and studies for my students in grades 11th and 12th. As this project shows, I do not agree with the banning and bowdlerizing of the novel because banning and bowdlerizing this novel takes away from the important lessons that this book has to offer. There are many moments where students can learn from Huck's romanticization as hero. With the help of detailed lessons and projects, my students would practice learning to read about Huck's strategies as a narrator. If we read him as not simply heroic but instead as an unreliable narrator who reproduces the bias of his social privilege, then we see how he uses his power in the text. One critical thing in those lessons is showing my students how Huck moves from different stages of a naïve narrator to a more anti racist character through his adventures with Jim.

First and foremost, I would allow my students to read a bowdlerized version of the book if they felt more comfortable doing so. Again, while I do not agree with that version of the book my main goal with teaching the novel would make sure that my students learned something rather than not. Many times, what we see as educators is students can shut down because they are uncomfortable in a certain position they were put in. If this language does make them feel uncomfortable or unsafe or anxiety ridden in any way possible, I would make the New South editions accessible to students who felt better reading it. In relation to that I would dedicate a lesson to the bowdlerizing and banning of this book. This may seem like a silly choice because it can cause a divide and split within the classroom. One side may be reading it authentically, while

the other is not. While that can create challenges as we go, I still feel as if it is important to allow the choice to be available to students who do not feel comfortable with the original text. In my opinion I would rather deal with a split classroom than with students opting out of reading it because they are uncomfortable. With a split classroom, all students are still reading the book that was assigned and are still able to learn the lessons I would have planned for them. Allowing access to the bowdlerized version can also avoid students not reading because they might feel uncomfortable with the original text. Some students may be too afraid or shy to advocate for themselves about how they are feeling. This can lead to task avoidance in the readings, assignments and lectures. If avoiding that with a bowdlerized version is possible, I would much rather provide students with that choice, rather than them not achieving the learning objectives with the original text.

Before setting up lessons and work that go with this novel, the most important thing I would establish with this novel is the killing and racist language Twain uses over 219 times. This conversation is one that is so important to have with my students because most of the time many students are not aware or are uneducated as to why it might be important to know the history of this language. This context can provide a much-needed understanding of the book's value.

I would steer clear of bowdlerizing and banning the book and would much rather educate children on how damaging this language was and still is to this day. Although we are having these conversations as a class learning the harmful meanings of this language, it is important to me to say that I would not allow my students to use this language in the classroom. In my

opinion, reading and learning about this epithet does not give us a pass to be able to say it. We can still have education and meaningful lessons even if we are omitting the word.

These lessons and conversations on racial epithets in the classroom are still extremely relevant and present. Teachers are faced with these dilemmas constantly and most of the time do not know how to handle such language. Just recently, *The New York Times Magazine* published an article titled “Can I Utter a Racial Slur in My Classroom?” This article was published by world renowned philosopher and professor Kwame Anthony Appiah. In this column, a teacher asks about the stance of using racial epithets such as the n-word for the purpose of education, to get a” point across.” Appiah answers as follows, “The trouble is that no individual can simply override social and semantic norms and decide what the utterance of a word will signify” (Appiah 11). In other words, we as educators cannot decide that these words and epithets signify and define different meanings for the purpose of education. Socially, this epithet is one that is damaging and killing and off limits to say. As an educator I simply cannot make the decision that it does not mean that anymore simply for the purpose of teaching and educating my students. In addition to this, Appiah validates my reasoning to supply my students with a bowdlerized version of the novel if they choose to read that instead. I cannot make that decision or diminish the feeling of being uncomfortable for my students. Students are aware of the social stigma surrounding this word and therefore may feel like opting to read a bowdlerized version will make them feel more comfortable with such dangerous language. Again, I simply cannot decide that this word will not make students uncomfortable and not want to read a book with such language.

Appiah mentions this in his article when he says “Now, some will say that Black Americans have been so traumatized by the odious uses of the word that the very sound of it causes distress” (Appiah 10). Therefore, as an educator what I can do is support and understand the reason why a student may feel uncomfortable with this language. Just like I have done with my project, by choosing to opt out of saying, reading, and including these words in our conversations, my goal is to have students understand why this language is so damaging and killing to Black people everywhere. I hope to be able to achieve this by omitting the epithet.

When I was in high school one of the books in my curriculum was Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Just like *Huckleberry Finn*, *To Kill a Mockingbird* has faced its own set of controversy due to the language and plot of the story. This book was not banned for me as my teacher assigned it in its authentic format. This book was one that I read and stuck with me through a majority of the high school career. Prior to reading this, my English teacher dedicated a whole lesson to the banning of the book and the many controversies that this book has to offer. Having a lesson like that broadened my perspective about reading this book. This is also where I started becoming interested in banned literature and why. By dedicating and educating my students in this topic, I hope they would have an open mind while understanding why this piece of literature could potentially be harmful or uncomfortable to others. To have this have this done successfully, I would have my students research places and reasons on why this book has been banned many times. With a mini project such as a PowerPoint, students will be able to present to each other ideas they found on this topic.

Concluding these foundation lessons, I would also dedicate a lesson in the style of a lecture on Mark Twain as an author and novelist. Mark Twain is one of the greatest novelists in American literature despite the controversy that surrounds his work. Having my students understand the background and history of Mark Twain is a critical aspect in learning this novel in its true authenticity. It is also critical to understand the time period that Twain wrote this novel. America was just putting in the works to abolish slavery and make everyone “equal.” Yet, epithets and language like in the book were still being used left and right and during this time it was considered “acceptable” for white people to use epithets that are in the book. I would also try to make my students understand that while this does not excuse Twain for using this language, there are reasons why he used it so many times during his time period. As class we would investigate and research this question and try to come up with reason as to why Twain used the kind of language, he did in the book. We would do this in a form of group work and assignments. Students will get into small groups and research reasons on why Twain wrote the novel with this language. We would then reconvene as a group and share our findings.

In relation to the foundations of this book, one of the many amazing aspects of teaching is dealing with parents and families of students. Understandably some parents may have some concern about their child reading such a book with violent language. Others may feel uncomfortable with me as a teacher for allowing students to read this book in its full authenticity. Dealing and handling these situations is what I feel will be the most challenging part of teaching a novel like this one. The best solution I feel like I can offer to parents is discussing and

educating them on why we would even begin to read literature like this. It is also important for parents to understand that we would be reading this novel in a safe space where students can voice their opinions on the book or if they feel uncomfortable with reading a book like this. I would also let parents know that I would be teaching this novel with an unbiased opinion and that for a majority of the novel we would be learning it for its style and archive in American literature. I would execute this in a form of a letter explaining what we would be doing in class and the lessons followed by activities. I would also leave room for parents to call and discuss with me should they feel the need to discuss their concerns/questions more thoroughly. Again, there is never an easy way to go about this since as educators we cannot please everyone, but one of the biggest things we can do is educate on things that people may not be educated on.

Once I establish the foundation and basis of teaching this novel, I would teach three major aspects of this novel. This would be narration, Huck as a character, and the book as an archive on white privilege. In the aspect of narration, I would teach it the same way that I analyzed Huck as a narrator. We would begin by learning Huck as a naïve narrator. Some leading questions would be: what makes Huck a naïve character? Is there a reason that Twain wants us to see Huck as a naïve narrator and not a sophisticated narrator? As class we would also explore if Huck being a child makes him a naïve character or is Huck just a product of his environment? With these leading questions I would ask my students to answer them in comprehension format with textual evidence. Understanding Huck as a narrator is one of the first steps in being able to understand this book.

With narration I would also teach and have my students analyze Huck as a character. Huck is truly a complex character although he may be perceived as naïve. He goes through so many changes throughout this book, and we see that he is influenced by his surroundings and own internal conflicts. One important aspect of this novel that I would teach to my students is why Huck faces so many internal conflicts throughout this story. We see it throughout his adventures with Jim as well as in chapter 31 when Huck must make that decision to go save Jim or forget about him and go back to his home. In addition to analyzing Huck as a character we would also analyze Jim as a character. This is important because we see two very different come together through adventures and form a beautiful friendship and in essence changes Huck as a person. Some leading questions would be: why do Huck and Jim become friends in the first place? Or why is Huck able to see past race and form a beautiful friendship with someone he was taught to believe was “not good”?

In concluding teaching this novel I would then teach it as an archive on white privilege. This stance on the book is one that is not seen by many because we are taught to believe that Huck is now a changed person when he ultimately decides to save Jim rather than go back home to his old life. While on the surface it does seem as so, when we take a deeper look into this novel, we can see that Huck benefits in making these decisions. In his willingness to be the hero, Huck’s white privilege is still the center of the book. Twain exposes this archive of privilege. This lesson is one of the most important ones I would like to get across to my students because it helps us see this book from a different lens. I would do this by having my students analyze

chapter 31 in relation to the rest of the novel. Students will pull out moments in where we can see how Huck is using his narration to uphold his white privilege and where we can recognize that although he means well by saving Jim, this moment can be seen has Huck maintaining his heroic status.

Another strategy I would use is that I would spend about a month to a month and a half on this novel with my students. While that seems like a long time for one specific novel, *Huckleberry Finn* is dense and full of moments where we can stop and unpack Huck as a narrator, character, and this novel as an archive on white privilege. Concluding this novel study, I would have my students work on a paper answering the question “Using examples from the text, what are some ways we can see Huck exercise his white privilege?” Although these kind of thinking questions and lessons may cause outrage especially in conservative parents, it is important for me as an educator to make sure that my students understand the novel from this perspective. This concluding assignment would tie in everything we learned throughout the study. Students can analyze Huck’s change in narration, or maybe Huck and Jim as characters who change over time. My goal for assigning something like this would be for students to see the novel as a whole and analyze moments where Huck can be seen expressing his white privilege intentionally or not.

Ultimately my goal in teaching a novel like this is to allow students to read and familiarize themselves with the kind of literature that has caused so much controversy. I would love for my students to be able to relate this to the present day with topics such as racial injustice

and the stigma surrounding epithets that were used in this novel. I would also like for my students to formulate their opinions and perspective about banned literature and one main question I would want my students to answer is “Should this novel be banned or kept? why or why not?” This will give students a chance to express their feelings on banned literature and the controversy surrounding it. My hopes is to be able to teach the novel in the way that I expressed and analyzed throughout this project.

In conclusion, my goal as a teacher, and in teaching a novel like *Huckleberry Finn*, is to allow my students to learn about these heavy and dense topics in a safe and comfortable environment. As Toni Morrison “The Amazing Troubling Book” she quotes “A serious comprehensive discussion of the term by and intelligent teacher certainly would have benefited my eighth-grade class and would have spared all of us” (Morrison, 153). In this quote, Morrison describes how an intelligent and well-rounded teacher would have benefited her class while in discussion of *Huckleberry Finn* and the language it uses. This quote is something that truly captures my philosophy as a teacher. In a classroom full of students, my goal is to be able to have intelligent and well-rounded discussions with my students about the nature of this novel as well as well as this novel as whole. As I have discussed and analyzed in this project, banning and bowdlerizing literature creates controversy and problems within schools. It also deprives students in learning about form, style, and many other important aspects that literature has to offer. Educating and having conversations with students is the first step in being able to teach literature that may be controversial at glance. Once we do this, as educators we can teach students the tools

to unpack difficult situations and dilemmas. We can overcome our ignorance so long as we are continuing these thoughtful conversations in our classrooms.

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Appendix

-Pictured below is the permission slip draft the Appoquinimink School District planned to release to parents in regards to their children's reading controversial literature

Parent Permission for Young Adult Required Material

It is the Appoquinimink School District's belief that parents remain the first and foremost teacher of their son or daughter. It is up to the parent to determine the readiness of their child to read books or view movies that contain mature subject matter.

The below listed teacher is planning to teach from a book that contains mature or explicit subject matter. The following information is provided for your consideration. Should you not agree to your son/daughter being exposed to this material, an alternate assignment will be provided for your child to complete independently of the class. When appropriate, he/she will participate in class activities and discussions about the content as it applies to curriculum standards.

Class: _____ Teacher: _____

Title: _____

Author: _____ ISBN: _____

Summary Description of the Material:

The purpose of using the above identified material is:

Areas of potential concern: (V=Excessive Violence, L = Offensive Language, AC = Adult Content, S = Sexual Content, Other – Please identify)

Student Name: _____

I **GIVE** permission for my son/daughter to read/view the material identified above.

Parent Signature: _____ Date: _____

I **DO NOT** give permission for my son/daughter to read/view the material identified above.

Parent Signature: _____ Date: _____

- Pictured here is a display that librarians put together in a childrens library located in California. The caption was “Come read a banned book!” This display was set up on April 12, 2022. *Huckleberry Finn*, *All American Boys*, *To Kill a Mockingbird* are just some of the books on this shelf. Being that this display was set up so recently, we can see how timeless and relevant this issue of “Banning” books is. We should continue to encourage our kids to read all literature, not fear it.

