



BIG RIVER

HALE CENTER THEATER OREM | PRODUCTION No. 182 | FEB. 20 THROUGH APRIL 12

   #hcto

{ MUSICAL }

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HALE CENTER THEATER OREM

Proudly Presents:

BIG RIVER

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: Music & Lyrics by Roger Miller; Book by William Hauptman;

Adapted from the novel by Mark Twain

Starring:

CONLON BONNER • ANDREW ROBERTSON

Supporting:

DANIEL FENTON ANDERSON • JULIA RICHARDSON CARTER • SPENCER THOMAS CARTER

HANNAH GASSAWAY • BRYAN MATTHEW HAGUE • MELANIE MCKAY CARTWRIGHT

KRIS PARIES • BEN PARKES • MACKENZIE SEILER • JACOB THEO SQUIRE

JASON SULLIVAN • LISA NICOLE THURMAN

Director

CHRISTOPHER CLARK

Music Director
JUSTIN BILLS

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MEAGAN M. DOWNEY

Scenic Painting
PENNY JONES

Choreographer
JENNIFER HILL-BARLOW

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MELINDA WILKS

Scenic Design
BOBBY SWENSON

Big River is presented through special arrangement with R&H Theatricals: www.rnh.com.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Man 1/Bass Guitar..... BEN PARKES (M-S)
(FIRST MAN, CROWD, MOURNER, SHERRIFF BELL, DOCTOR)

Man 2..... ANDREW ROBERTSON (M-S)
(HUCK FINN)

Man 3/Lead Guitar..... SPENCER THOMAS CARTER (U/S MAN 5) (MWF)
(JUDGE THATCHER, SECOND MAN, CROWD, MOURNER, HARVEY WILKES, SILAS PHELPS)

Man 3/Lead Guitar..... BRYAN MATTHEW HAGUE (U/S MAN 2) (TThS)
(JUDGE THATCHER, SECOND MAN, CROWD, MOURNER, HARVEY WILKES, SILAS PHELPS)

Man 4/Accordion..... DANIEL FENTON ANDERSON (M-S)
(PAP, LAFE, CROWD, COUNSELOR ROBINSON)

Man 5/Drums..... JACOB THEO SQUIRE (M-S)
(BEN, DUKE, SECOND HIRED HAND)

Man 6/Second Guitar..... KRIS PARIES (M-S)
(SIMON, ANDY, YOUNG FOOL, HOODED MAN, THRID HIRED HAND)

Man 7..... STEVE DUNFORD (M-S)
(PREACHER/KING/FIRST HIRED HAND)

Man 8/Clarinet..... JASON SULLIVAN (M-S)
(TOM, THIRD MAN, HANK, MOURNER, HOODED MAN)

Man 9..... CONLON BONNER (M-S)
(JIM)

Woman 1/Triangle..... HANNAH GASSAWAY (M-S)
(MISS WATSON, STRANGE WOMAN, TART 1, MOURNER)

Woman 2/Tambourine..... CECILY ELLIS-BILLS (M-S)
(WIDOW DOUGLAS, TART 2, SUSAN WILKES, SALLY PHELPS)

Woman 3..... JULIA RICHARDSON CARTER (U/S WOMAN 2) (MWF)
(JO, TART 3, JOANNA WILKES)

Woman 3..... DANICA DONALDSON (U/S WOMAN 4) (TThS)
(JO, TART 3, JOANNA WILKES)

Woman 4/Second Piano..... MELANIE MCKAY CARTWRIGHT (M-S)
(DICK, TART 4, MARY JANE)

Woman 5..... MACKENZIE SEILER (M-S)
(TOWNSWOMAN, SLAVE, ALICE)

Woman 6/Fiddle..... LISA NICOLE THURMAN (M-S)
(SCHOOLMISTRESS, CROWD, MOURNER, HOODED MAN)



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WHAT: Comprised of 4 private or semi-private lessons per month.

WHERE: Hale Center Studios (300 N 50 W in Orem)

ACTING

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Ryan Radebaugh, Chase Ramsey, Ben Henderson, Geoff Reynolds, and Page Petrucka

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COST: \$35/month

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WHERE: Hale Center Theater Orem

WHEN: "Stage Right" 4 - 5pm every Monday. "Stage Left" 4 - 5pm every Tuesday. Classes are ongoing. Students can join at any time.

Willy Wonka Jr.

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AUDITIONS: March 19

WHO: Ages 10-17

PERFORMANCE DATES: May 19-24

COST: \$200

For More Information Call the Box Office

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SCENE SYNOPSIS & MUSICAL NUMBERS

ACT I

SCENE I: MISS WATSON'S HOME, ST. PETERSBURG, MISSOURI

DO YA WANNA GO TO HEAVEN? - Miss Watson, Widow Douglas, Judge Thatcher, Tom Sawyer, & Company

SCENE 2: INJUN JOE'S CAVE

THE BOYS - Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn, Ben, Dick, Simon & Jo
WAITIN' FOR THE LIGHT TO SHINE - Huck Finn

SCENE 3: MISS WATSON'S HOME / JUDGE THATCHER'S CHAMBERS

SCENE 4: CABIN ON THE ILLINOIS SHORE

GUV'MENT - Pap

SCENE 5 & 6: JACKSON'S ISLAND

HAND FOR THE HOG - Tom Sawyer
I, HUCKLEBERRY, ME - Huck Finn
MUDDY WATERS - Huck Finn & Jim

SCENE 7: ON THE RIVER

THE CROSSING - Slaves
RIVER IN THE RAIN - Huck Finn & Jim

SCENE 8: RIVERBANK IN KENTUCKY

WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN IN THE SOUTH - Duke, King, Huck Finn

ACT II

SCENE I: ON THE RIVER BANK

SCENE 2: BRICKTOWN, ARKANSAS

THE ROYAL NONESUCH - Duke & Company

SCENE 3: IN THE COVE

WORLDS APART - Jim & Huck Finn

SCENE 4 & 5: HILLSBORO, ARKANSAS / WILKES' HOME

ARKANSAS - Young Fool
HOW BLEST WE ARE - Alice & Company
YOU OUGHTA BE HERE WITH ME - Mary Jane, Jobanna & Susan
HOW BLEST WE ARE (REPRISE) - Mourners
LEAVIN'S NOT THE ONLY WAY TO GO - Huck Finn, Mary Jane & Jim

SCENE 6: HILLSBORO, ARKANSAS / CEMETERY

SCENE 7: TWO MILES SOUTH OF HILLSBORO

WAITIN' FOR THE LIGHT TO SHINE (REPRISE) - Huck Finn, Alice & Company

SCENE 8: THE PHELPS' FARM, NEAR HILLSBORO

FREE AT LAST - Jim & Slaves

SCENE 9: THE WOODS

SCENE 10: THE PHELPS' HOME

RIVER IN THE RAIN (REPRISE) - Huck Finn & Jim
MUDDY WATERS (REPRISE) - Company

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DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I'm thrilled to be directing my favorite musical, Big River, and I'm thrilled that you get to see why I love it so much. In the lyrics of "Worlds Apart," Jim and Huck sing:

*I see the same stars through my window
That you see through yours
But we're worlds apart
Worlds apart
And I see the same skies through brown eyes
That you see through blue
But we're worlds apart, worlds apart
Just like the earth, just like the sun
Two worlds together are better than one
I see the sun rise in your eyes
That you see in mine
But we're worlds apart, worlds apart*

There's something about this song that reminds us that, no matter how we try to see the world

through someone's eyes, we never really can. We wish we could, but we can't. Because we can't, compassion, kindness and respect are even more important. We just don't know what someone else is seeing, feeling, or experiencing. All we can know is that they need our love, friendship, and understanding. This musical teaches this message so poignantly and in such an entertaining way. I have loved working on it.

Many thanks to everyone at the Hale Center Theater Orem for giving me this dream assignment. I hope we can open up a fun new world tonight, let you in for a few hours, and enjoy a beautiful story. That's the thrill of theatre: we're all worlds apart, but at least we can experience this world together.

-CHRISTOPHER CLARK
Director

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Who's Who

DANIEL FENTON ANDERSON

Man 4/Accordion (M-S)

Daniel is glad to be back at HCTO since his last appearance here as Senator Fipp in *Urinetown*. This Lindon resident is currently a student at UVU in theatre and is a proud part of the Grassroots Shakespeare Company (founding member). Favorite roles are: Owen in *The Foreigner*, Prospero in *The Tempest*, Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Giles Corey in *The Crucible*, and Mr. Twimble in *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. When not in school or on stage, Daniel loves sound design (KCACTF National Finalist for Sound Design), cooking, accordion and violin. Find Daniel online at www.danielfentonanderson.com.

JUSTIN BILLS

Music Director/Lead Piano (M-S)

Justin is the Director of Choirs at Salem Hills High School in Salem, Utah. He holds both Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in Music from Brigham Young University. Justin conducted choirs for the Saturday evening Priesthood Sessions of the 2011 October and 2013 April LDS General Conferences. He is a sought-after choral adjudicator, clinician, presenter, and musical director. Justin is also an actor and has performed in theaters throughout Utah and California. Some of Justin's theater credits include Percy Blakeney in *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and the title role in *Maury*

Yeston's Phantom during the 2009 season at HCTWV. Justin was also featured in the 2006 film, "*Esther and the King*" as part of the *Liken the Scriptures* film series. As a musical director, some of Justin's favorite credits include *In the Heights*, *Into the Woods*, *The Drowsy Chaperone*, *Jekyll and Hyde*, *Les Miserables*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and *In The Heights*. Justin is excited to be involved in this production with his wife, Cecily. They have a son named Clark, and a baby boy named Wyatt, due in May.

CONLON BONNER

Man 9 (M-S)

Conlon is thrilled to be back at HCTO. He most recently played Coalhouse Walker in *Ragtime* at HCTWV. His last appearance at HCTO was in *Hairspray* as Seaweed J. Stubbs. He is very excited to play the role of Jim, because his father played it multiple times before. Conlon hopes others will be inspired by the journey Jim experiences as he plays it.

JULIA RICHARDSON CARTER

Woman 3/u/s Woman 2 (MWF)

Julia is thrilled to be returning to HCTO. She was last seen in *All Shook Up* way back in 2008! Her favorite roles include: Irene Molloy in *Hello Dolly!* (HCTWV), Belle in *A Christmas Carol* (HCTWV), Cornelia Crater in *The Ballad of Cat Ballou* (Jackson Hole Playhouse) and Singora Nacarrelli in *The Light in the Piazza* (BYU). She also toured the last two years with BYU Young

Ambassadors to South Africa and China. "Much love to my hubby Spencer for going on this adventure with me, to our production team for believing in us, and to our family and friends for being the coolest!"

SPENCER THOMAS CARTER

Man 3/Lead Guitar/ u/s Man 5 (MWF)

Spencer is incredibly excited to make his HCTO debut with this amazing cast and crew. He has been acting on stage since he was 12 years old and in *Oliver!* at Music Circus in Sacramento, CA. His favorite past roles include: Matt in *The Fantasticks*, Frankie in *Forever Plaid*, and Perchick in *Fiddler on the Roof*. He also recently toured to Brazil as the lead vocalist for the BYU Synthesis Jazz Band. He'd like to thank his family for their support and is stoked to be doing his first show with his beautiful wife, Julia.

CHRISTOPHER CLARK

Director

Christopher is the chair of the Theatre Department at Utah Valley University and has studied with Royal Shakespeare Company, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre (London,) Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Second City Chicago, and Theatre Biomechanics (Austria). He has directed for the Utah Shakespeare Festival, HCTWV, Utah Valley University, Sundance Summer Theatre and Brigham Young University. He recently won the 2013 National Outstanding Director Award from the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. Chris has a BA and PhD from Brigham Young University,



DANIEL FENTON ANDERSON



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and an MFA from the University of Exeter (UK.) Previous shows at HCTO include: *In the Heights*, *The 39 Steps*, *Xanadu*, and *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*.

DANICA DONALDSON *Woman 3/ u/s Woman 4 (TT&S)*

Danica is a Music Dance Theater major at BYU where she will graduate in April. She was last seen at HCTO in 2007 as a Silly Girl in *Beauty and the Beast*. She is excited to return to work with the wonderful cast and crew of *Big River*. Other favorite roles include: Audrey in *Little Shop of Horrors*, Laurie Williams in *Oklahoma!*, Ruth in *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, Cinderella in *Into the Woods* and Vilate Kimball in the Nauvoo Pageant. She also toured with the BYU Young Ambassadors in 2011 to the

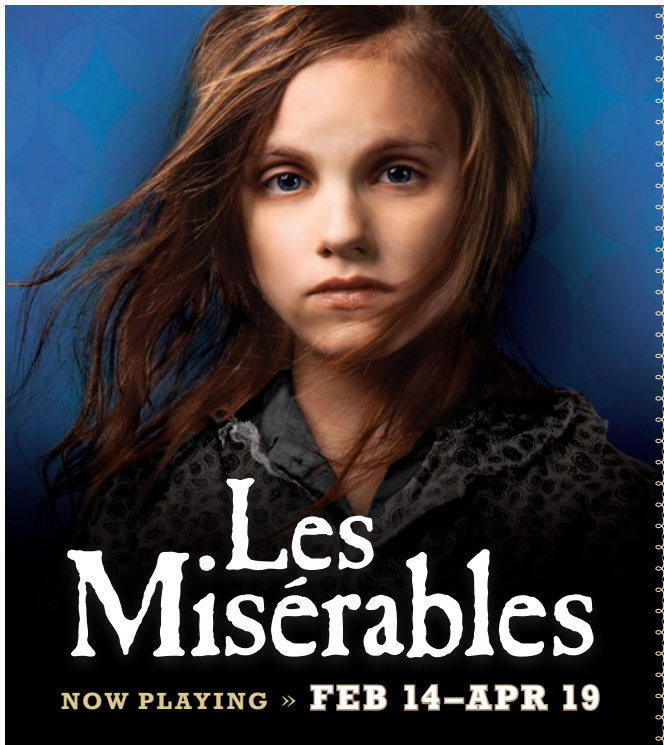
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STEVE DUNFORD

southern states and Cuba. A big shout out to her amazing family who always makes the long trip from Arizona to wherever she happens to be performing.

STEVE DUNFORD

Man 7 (M-S)

Steve is very excited to be making his HCTO debut with *Big River*, a musical he's loved for as long as he can recall. You may have seen Steve around the valley in such roles as *Shrek*, *Jekyll and Hyde*, Charlie (*The Foreigner*), Norman (*The Boys Next Door*), and many others. On stage is where Steve has always felt most at home. He resides in Salem with his beautiful, supportive wife and their 3 amazing, trouble-making kids.

CECILY ELLIS-BILLS

Woman 2/Tambourine (M-S)

Cecily and baby Wyatt are excited to be making their debut at HCTO and to perform on stage with her husband Justin for the first time in five years. Cecily has performed across the country in both musicals and opera. Some of her favorite roles include: Cunegonde in *Candide*, Mother in *Ragtime*, Jo in *Little Women*, Louise in *Gypsy*, and Magnolia in *Show Boat*. By day, she is adjunct voice faculty for the University of Utah's Musical Theater program, UVU Music Department, and mommy to the cutest 2 year old in the world.

HANNAH GASSAWAY

Woman 1/Triangle (M-S)

Hannah recently moved to the Utah area and is excited to be joining the HCTO family for the first time. Hannah graduated from Southern Oregon University in June

of 2012 with her Bachelors of Fine Arts in Theatre Performance. Previous credits include: Ensemble in *My Fair Lady*, Ghost of Belarius' Wife in *Cymbeline* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival) Margaret Johnson in *The Light in the Piazza*, Olga in *Three Sisters* (Southern Oregon University), Louise in *Gypsy* and Ensemble in *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (Camelot Theatre Company). The only misfortune in Hannah's life is that she has Anatidaephobia, which is the fear that somewhere a duck is watching you.

BRYAN MATTHEW HAGUE

Man 3/Lead Guitar/u/s Man 2 (TTBS)

This will be Bryan's first show at HCTO. He is well known for his wide range, both vocally and in his comedic talent. He has been seen on many stages across the valley including HCTWV, Desert Star Playhouse

and the Egyptian Theatre among others. Favorite roles include: Robbie Hart in *The Wedding Singer* and Ben Whitledge in *No Time For Sergeants*. Bryan is also no stranger to being a pit musician as he just wrapped up playing guitar for *Next To Normal* at UVU. He is currently a student at Utah Valley University in the Commercial Music program. Bryan teaches private guitar lessons in Spanish Fork and likes to spend every spare moment with his lovely wife.

JENNIFER HILL-BARLOW

Choreographer

Jenny is thrilled to have the opportunity to choreograph this show. Jenny holds an MFA in choreography and a BFA in Ballet Performance from the University of Utah. She danced professionally with Ballet West, Cincinnati Ballet, Tuacahn, Radio City

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MELANIE MCKAY CARTWRIGHT

Christmas Spectacular starring the world famous Rockettes, and the Gaungzhou Ballet in China. She has choreographed for HCTWV, Utah Ballet, Ballet West Academy, Texas A and M, BYU and the U of U. Favorite shows include: *In The Heights*, *Xanadu*, *9 to 5*, and *Guys and Dolls*. She is the recipient of the Best of State Choreographer medal 2010-2013. Jenny is the owner and Artistic Director of the Barlow Arts Conservatory.

MELANIE MCKAY CARTWRIGHT
Woman 4/Second Piano (M-S)

Melanie McKay Cartwright is absolutely thrilled to be back at HCTO! Since her last performance as Kathy Seldon in *Singin' in the Rain*, Melanie graduated from BYU in Music Dance Theater, married the love of her life, and gave birth the cutest little

girl on the planet. Other roles include: Laurie (*Oklahoma!*), Amneris (*AIDA*), Mary Musgrove (*Persuasion*), and Dorine (*Tartuffe*). Many thanks to Chris, Jenny, Justin, Meagan, and the whole production team! "For my Leetle!"

KRIS PARIES

Man 6/Second Guitar (M-S)

Hailing from the Deep South, this is Kris' first hootenanny at HCTO, but not the first time he's been mentioned in the same sentence as Roger Miller. He's previously been seen hootin' and a hollerin' in productions of *Wait Until Dark*, *Peter Pan*, *The Last Five Years*, *As You Like It*, and *The Cinematics*, among others. He's pleased as punch to be in this production and reckons it's a real barn-burner.

BEN PARKES

Man 1/Bass Guitar (M-S)

Ben has been performing for years, often in front of people. Tonight is no exception. He has logged performances at BYU-Idaho, The Playmill Theatre, and the Walt Disney World® Resort. Favorite roles include: The Baker and Jack in *Into the Woods*, Dromio in *Comedy of Errors*, Oliver Surface in *School for Scandal*, and Salvatore in *Hole in the Sky*. Ben has also performed improv with Comic Frenzy in Rexburg and Comedy Sportz in Provo, and has played the bass for over twenty years. This performance is dedicated to Elliott, Oliver, and especially the always astonishing Luana.

ANDREW ROBERTSON

Man 2 (M-S)

Andrew is a Junior in UVU's theater program and is very excited to be doing

another show at HCTO. His recent credits include: Gideon in a Sundance Summer Theater's *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, Henry in UVU's *Next to Normal*, and Officer Barrel in HCTO's *Urinetown*.

MACKENZIE SEILER

Woman 5 (M-S)

Mackenzie was last seen at HCTO as Harriet in *The Civil War*. "Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world." -Harriet Tubman

JACOB THEO SQUIRE

Man 5/Drums (M-S)

Jacob is very excited to be in his first production at HCTO! Jacob is currently studying theatre education at Utah Valley University where he recently played Doctor Fine/Madden in their production of *Next To Normal*. He hopes one day to be able to open a performing arts school to help students learn about and grow in the arts. He is thankful for the support of all his family and friends in pursuing his passions in life! In the past, he has had the privileged to play roles such as Judd in *Oklahoma*, Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast*, and Adam in *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*. Jacob hopes you enjoy the show and thanks you all for helping to keep the arts alive!

JASON SULLIVAN

Man 8/Clarinet (M-S)

A recent graduate of the Theatre program at Utah Valley University, some of Jason's past credits include: The Man in the Echo Theatre's *The Turn of the Screw*, Orlando in HCTO's *As You Like It*, and Hutter in



JACOB THEO SQUIRE

Nosferatu at UVU. Jason is grateful for the inviting, loving people at HCTO, and for this great opportunity.

LISA NICOLE THURMAN

Woman 6/Fiddle (M-S)

Lisa grew up in Happy Valley, Oregon. She will soon be graduating from UVU with a Bachelors in Theater (if she ever gets her stinkin' math done). She loves the violin (she teaches!) and performing and feels very fortunate to combine the two in this show. Her favorite theater roles have been: Bianca in *Kiss Me Kate*, Lucinda in *Into the Woods*, Dotty in *Noises Off!*, and Audrey in *Little Shop of Horrors*. "Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter." -Mark Twain.

Utah Valley

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Women's Issue



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STUDENT STUDY

GUIDE

BIG RIVER PLOT SUMMARY

Huckleberry Finn lives with his strict foster mother, the Widow Douglas, and her sister, Miss Watson, in St. Petersburg, Missouri. Huck does not like the women's attempts to "civilize" him and is relieved when his alcoholic father, Pap, takes him back. Huck enjoys living with his father until Pap tries to stab him while drunk. To escape, Huck flees to a little island on the Mississippi River.

On the island, Huck encounters Miss Watson's slave, Jim, who has run away to avoid being sold and is now suspected of being Huck's "murderer." Jim tells Huck that he wants to go south to the Ohio River and then escape to a Free State. Although Jim tells Huck that he could end up "hangin' from a cottonwood tree" for helping him escape, Huck volunteers to go along. Down the river, Jim and Huck are joined on their raft by two confidence men who call themselves King and Duke. In Arkansas, King and Duke discover that a rich man named Peter Wilkes has just died and left his fortune to his two brothers.

"You feel mighty free and easy comfortable on a raft."

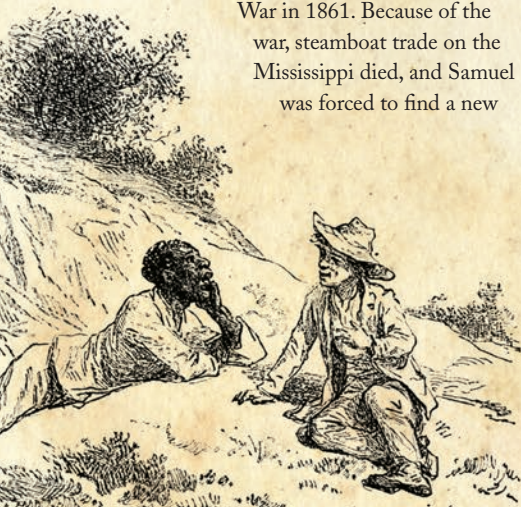
– Huckleberry Finn

King and Duke decide to impersonate the brothers to steal their inheritance. After they take Peter's gold, Huck steals it back, hiding it in Peter's coffin. Huck soon finds out that King has sold Jim to a farmer. At first, Huck is unsure about what to do—obey the law and tell Miss Watson where Jim is, or rescue his friend and keep running. After some thought, Huck decides once again to take a chance and "steal Jim out of slavery." During Jim's rescue, Huck is reunited with his old friend Tom. However, Tom is accidentally shot. Huck fetches a doctor, while Jim selflessly stays with Tom. Huck and Tom's ruse to rescue Jim is exposed. Tom admits that Miss Watson died two months before and, in her will, ordered that Jim be freed. After saying goodbye to Jim, Huck then leaves for the Western Territories.

MARK TWAIN

The musical *Big River* is based on Mark Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Twain was one of America's most influential authors, and many critics and historians consider *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to be one of his most autobiographical works. Mark Twain was born as Samuel Langhorne Clemens on November 30, 1835, in Florida, Missouri. In 1847 after the death of his father, twelve-year-old Clemens began learning the printing trade to earn money for his family.

At age seventeen, he left his home in Hannibal, Missouri, and worked as a printer in the Eastern and Midwestern United States. When he turned twenty-one, Clemens decided to seek his fortunes in South America. However, on his way to New Orleans to catch a ship to South America, he struck up a conversation with a Mississippi River steamboat pilot and got a job as an apprentice pilot. Clemens worked as a steamboat pilot until the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. Because of the war, steamboat trade on the Mississippi died, and Samuel was forced to find a new



occupation. From the Mississippi, Clemens went to Nevada, where he was hired as a newspaper reporter. He wrote everything from news reports to funny editorials to travel pieces. In 1863 he

“A person who won't read has no advantage over one who can't read.”

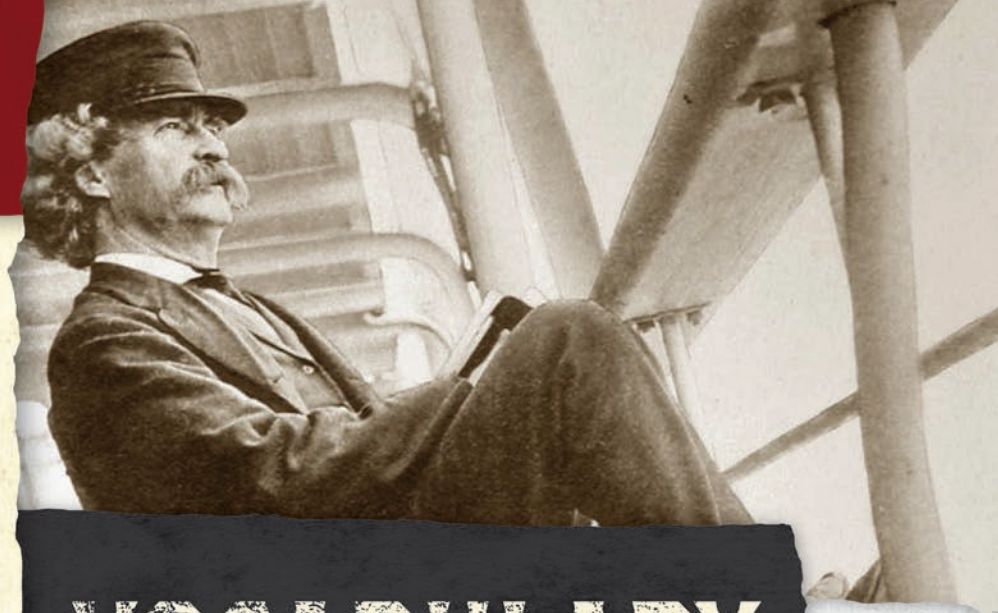
— Mark Twain

penned his first article under the pseudonym Mark Twain, the pen name he would use for the rest of his life. (“Mark Twain,” a nautical term used by riverboat pilots, means that water is two fathoms deep, or just deep enough to be safe.) In 1867 Twain left the West for New York City. While still working as a reporter, he published his first book of

fiction, *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County and Other Sketches*. After a five-month trip to Europe and the Middle East, Twain wrote the autobiographical novel *The Innocents Abroad*, his first big literary success.

Twain married Olivia Langdon in 1870, and in 1871, moved her and their infant daughter to Hartford, Connecticut. From 1863 to 1894, Twain wrote many books, including *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *The Prince and the Pauper* (1882). He started writing *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in 1876 but did not finish it until 1884. Twain's books and articles brought him international fame, and he continued to write until his death in 1910. His experiences as a Mississippi River steamboat pilot inspired many of his tales, especially *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Through his keen sense of humor and his special understanding of the American spirit, Twain became one of the most beloved and respected writers in our nation's history.

All illustrations shown were included in the first edition of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.



VOCABULARY

ABOVE:
Mark Twain on
a ship, 1895.

Confidence Man: One who cheats by getting a victim's confidence before tricking or stealing from him

Impersonate: To pretend to be someone or something in order to cheat or trick

Ruse: A trick or plan for fooling someone

Smallpox: A very contagious disease causing a high fever and sores on the skin

Dialect: The form of a language that is used only in a certain place or among a certain group

Vernacular: The everyday speech, including slang, of ordinary people in a certain country or place

Abolitionist: A person who, before the Civil War, wanted to put an end to slavery in the U.S.

Abusive: Mistreating harshly

Conscience: A sense of right and wrong; a feeling that keeps one from doing bad things

Emancipation: The act or process of setting free from control or slavery

Symbol: An object, mark, sign, etc. that stands for another object, or for an idea or quality, etc.

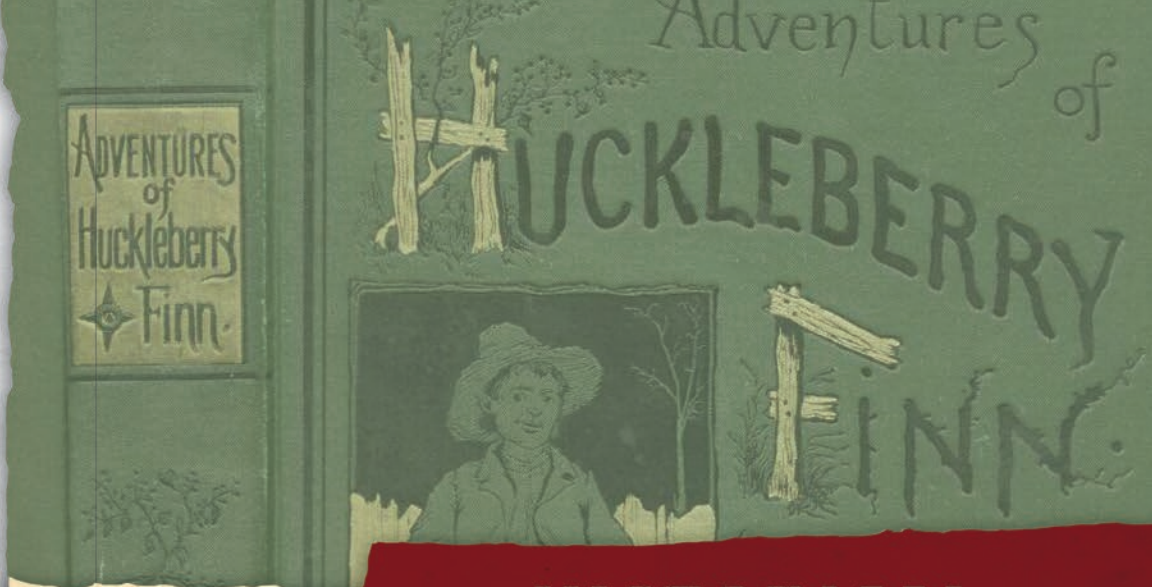
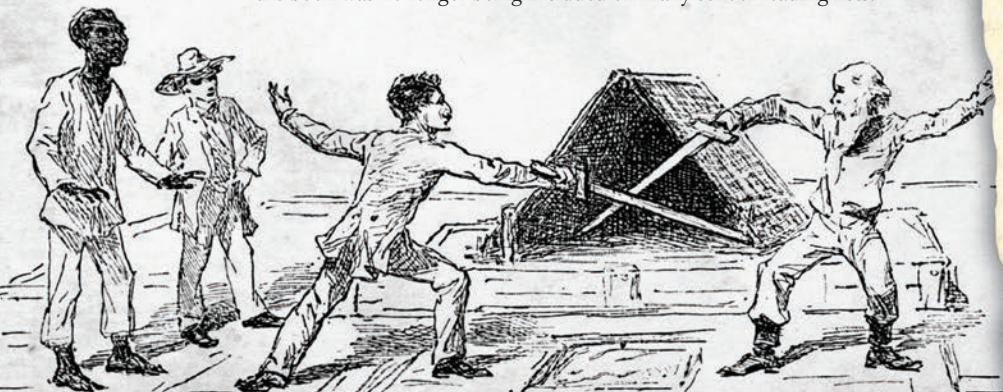


SLAVERY AND PRE-CIVIL WAR AMERICA

Big River is a theatrical interpretation of the novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain. This novel is often called “The Great American Novel” and was one of the first major pieces of American literature to be written in the vernacular of the time—Mark Twain used regionally specific words and speaking patterns to make his characters come to life. This includes the use of the racial slur “nigger.” Although this word is considered offensive today, it was common and acceptable in the 1840s and is used in *Big River* to be true to the spirit of the novel.

While *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is still popular today, it is among the most consistently banned and challenged books in the United States, and has been since it was first published in 1885. It is considered by some people to be “coarse” and “vulgar” because Huck, while a sympathetic protagonist also behaves badly—he steals, he speaks poorly, he runs away from home and generally rebels against any authority figure (his father, his aunts, “civilized” society). Well known authors of the day disagreed with Mark Twain’s characterization of Huck. Louisa May Alcott, author of *Little Women*, said, “If Mr. Clemens cannot think of something better to tell our pure-minded lads and lasses he had best stop writing for them.”

Behavior of the characters is not the only thing that people have disagreed with when it comes to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Most modern scholars focus on the racism present in the novel, though in different ways. Some say that the portrayal of Jim is too racist and stereotypical, some say that it doesn’t attack racism enough. School districts often cite the use of the word “nigger” as the reason the book is banned, as well as its negative portrayal of African Americans. In 2011, a new edition of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* distributed by NewSouth Books removed all 219 uses of the word “nigger,” replacing them with the word “slave.” The publishers were approached by an English professor at Auburn University in Alabama about making the change because he felt uncomfortable reading the book aloud in his classes and was worried that language was the reason the book was no longer being included on many school reading lists.



ABOVE:
Cover of the first edition of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Huck and Jim face many obstacles on their journey. Some, like rainstorms and floods, are physical. Others are personal, like Huck’s confused sense of right and wrong. Still others are political or social in nature. Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee and Arkansas, where the story takes place, were slave states until the end of the Civil War (1861-1865). Like many Southern whites in the late 1840s, Mark Twain’s father owned slaves and Twain grew up around them.

Blacks like Jim were almost always enslaved and had very few rights. As they were considered property, slaves couldn’t own anything, including land. They couldn’t vote and had few legal protections. They could be tried for crimes, but rarely could accuse others of crimes against them. They couldn’t marry, and slave children could be separated from their parents at any time. Whites frowned on teaching slaves to read and write, although some educated themselves in secret.

Most Southerners hated abolitionists, who were mostly from the North. Any white person who helped slaves to escape, like Huck, faced years of imprisonment, if caught. Although as a white person, Huck enjoys many more freedoms than Jim, he too faces limitations. As a boy, a legal minor, Huck is at the mercy of his guardians, Miss Watson and Widow Douglas, and his abusive, alcoholic father Pap. In the 19th century, white children were not protected by law from harsh beatings by parents.

White parents sometimes “sold” their children to farmers and tradesmen looking for cheap labor. Laws requiring children to attend school until a certain age didn’t exist, and many poor children left school before they were twelve. In addition, parents controlled their children’s money. Because he has few protections, Huck, like Jim, is forced to run away and fend for himself.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY

Can censorship be useful? Is censorship appropriate? What, if anything, should be censored? Have your students do a five minute free write on your ideas on censorship. Then, in pairs, share their thoughts.

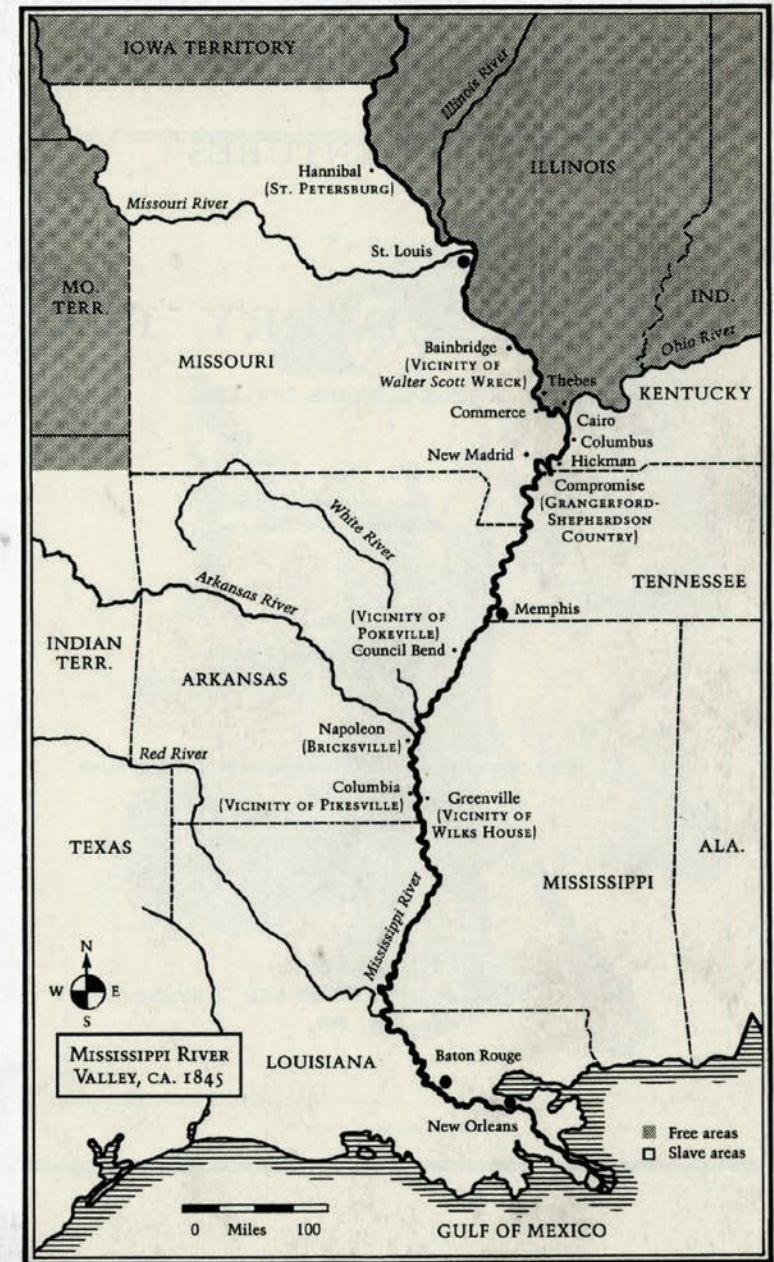
- Do you and your partner agree? Disagree?
- If you were a professor or teacher, would you consider censoring a book because of language? Because of content?
- What about the use of language in an adaptation of a novel, whether that be a play, musical, or movie?



Divide the class into two sides, for and against censoring *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Have each team research the subject and come up with an argument for their side. Then, stage a debate on the subject. Make sure each side is using facts, not just opinions, to argue their point.

“ Whenever I hear anyone arguing for slavery, I feel a strong impulse to see it tried on him personally. ”

– Abraham Lincoln



**MAP OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER VALLEY,
CIRCA 1845**

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{MUSICAL}

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 Costume Assistant..... AMANDA FITT
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 Assistant Hair and Make-up Design..... MELINDA WILKS
 Production Stage Manager..... MEAGAN M. DOWNEY
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