The Adventures Of Huckleberry Finn: Hypocrisy, Conformity, And Corruption

The adventures of Huckleberry Finn written by Mark Twain is one of the most notable and controversial books in English Literature. This novel was first published in 1885, twenty years after the civil war ended. The novel takes places forty to fifty years earlier than the publication date. The story follows a young white outcast boy named Huck Finn and a runaway slave named Jim who are in search of freedom and adventure. Mark Twain uses numerous quotes, events, and symbols to criticize hypocrisy, conformity, and corruption in “civilized” society.

Numerous quotes, events, and symbols have been used by Mark Twain to illustrate hypocrisy in the world of Huck Finn. Hypocrisy is when a person feigns to have values or principles that they do not actually believe in or uphold. In The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, the motif of hypocrisy is consistent throughout the novel. All through the story, Huck comes into contact with several different situations that involve hypocrisies. The theme of hypocrisy unfolds throughout the novel. One example that depicts the hypocrisy in “civilized” society is when Huck mentions “Next Sunday we all went to church, about three mile, everybody a-horseback. The men took their guns along, so did Buck, and kept them between their knees or stood them handy against the wall. The Shepherdsons done the same. It was pretty ornery preaching—all about brotherly love” (Twain 109). Even though the main idea of the two families having a feud is represented with the comical undertone the verse presented shows the rivalry as being hypocritical. It divides the situation of hypocrisy that Huck points out with the depiction of the sermon. Both Households are preaching brotherly love unto all the congregation. However, both families brought weapons into the church, with both wanting to protect their own against each other. This seemingly comical scene underlies a larger aspect of hypocrisy with the ideas of hate. In “civilized” society there must be rules and regulations. Yet, these rules and regulations disregard reason and justification since they seem to favor a singular group and obtain unfairness against other groups. An example that illustrates this is, “But it was a new Judge that had just come, and he didn’t know the old man; so he said courts mustn’t interfere and separate families if they could help it; said he druther not take a child away from his family” (Twain 21). Regardless of Pap being a dangerous abusive drunk, he was granted custody over his son. Although in the same situation, Jim is a fugitive slave who does not receive custody over his children under the same legal system. The same law does not apply to Jim despite him being the biological father of his children due to the color of his skin. Hypocrisy of Huck’s father, Pap is frequently shown. An example of this is when Pap starts his racist rants saying, “And what do you think? They said he was a p’fessor in a college, and could talk all kinds of languages, and knowed everything. And that ain’t the wust. They said he could vote when he was at home. Well, that let me out. Thinks, I what is the country a-coming to? It was ‘lection day, and I was just about to go and vote myself if I warn’t too drunk to get there;” (Twain 27). Pap demonstrates his belief of white superiority during his drunken rants which becomes contradicted by his horrible actions towards his own son and other people. Showing how Pap is a hypocrite, be believes he is racially superior but is shown to be morally inferior in an abundant amount of times. Hypocrisy is an important theme that develops throughout the course of the novel. As the novel goes on Huck is faced with more intense moments of hypocrisy that both test his morals and give him a better understanding of the society in the world around him. Despite Huck’s young age and considerably naïve view of the world, Huck still provides a very

clear insight to hypocrisy in his world.

Numerous quotes, events, and symbols have been used by Mark Twain to depict conformity in the world of Huck Finn. Conformity is the act of matching beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes to group norms. This tendency to conform occurs in small groups and/or in society as a whole. An example of conformity is when the mob is going to attack Sherburn after he had killed Boggs, but he instead calls them out for being cowards. He tells them that they're all just conforming to each other to appear tough and that they cannot function independently. "You didn't want to come. The average man don't like trouble and danger. But if only half a man—like Buck Harkness, there-shouts 'Lynch him! lynch him!' You're afraid to come back down—afraid you'll be found out to be what you are-cowards--" (Twain). The mob draw their power from the fact that they are a mass, casting away their individual cowardliness. Another situation that exemplifies conformity is when Miss Watson and the widow try to civilize Huck, forcing him to go to school to become educated, teaching him all about the bible. "Miss Watson she took me in the closet and prayed, but nothing come of it. She told me to pray every day, and whatever I asked for I would get it. But it warn't so. I tried it. Once I got a fish-line, but no hooks. It warn't any good to me without hooks. I tried for the hooks three or four times, but somehow I couldn't make it work. By and by, one day, I asked Miss Watson to try for me, but she said I was a fool. She never told me why, and I couldn't make it out no way." (Twain) Huck is being scolded for not conforming to society's views of religion. He constantly gets into trouble because his clothes are always dirty and according to the widow, this will send him to hell. Huck refuses to grasp societal norms and to conform to them. In another situation in which conformity is seen is where the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons have a fued and neither know what it is about. Huck questions Buck on why he wanted to kill the Shepherdsons. "'What did you want to kill him for?' 'Why, nothing only it's account to the feud.'" '" What was the trouble about Buck? -- land?' 'reckon maybe -- I don't know" (Twain). This demonstrates the dangers of blindly following a crowd. It advocates self-reliant reasoning and taking hold of your life.

Numerous quotes, occurrences, and symbols have been used by Mark Twain to epitomize corruption in the world of huckleberry Finn. Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. This has been shown when Tom had no problem tricking Tim into staying up just to have a bit of fun. "Then what on earth did you want to set him free for, seeing he was already free?' 'Well that is a question, I must say; and just like women! Why I wanted the adventure of it; and I waded neck—deep in blood to – goodness alive, AUNT POLLY!'" (Twain 99). Tom knew all along that Miss Watson had died and that Jim was now a free man, yet he neglected to tell anyone until after his escapade. He allowed Jim to continue to be held captive while he entertains himself by playing out his active imagination. Another instance of where conformity is presented is when the Duke and King, two con artists rob every innocent, gullible, victim they can find along the shores of the Mississippi River. "First they d.one a lecture on temperance; but they didn't make enough for them both to get drunk on. Then in another village they started a dancing-school; but they didn't know no more how to dance than a kangaroo does; so the first prance they made the general public jumped in and pranced them out of town. Another time they tried to go at yellocution; but they didn't yellocute long till the audience got up and give them a solid good cussing, and made them skip out." (Twain chapter 310). The antics of these two swindlers gradually escalate to larger ones. They even go as far as impersonating the brothers of Peter Wilks, a recently deceased man of large property and try to steal his daughter's inheritance. In another situation where this motif of corruption is depicted when the Duke and King sell Jim. "No! That old fool sold him, and never divided with me, and the money's gone." (Twain ch31). This comes to show how greedy this man is even after Jim has

put up with King. Twain focuses on those who possess greed and corruption desires to express his dissatisfaction of society.

In The adventures of Huckleberry Finn written by Mark Twain Huck and Jim encounter many rascals and morally lacking selfish, corrupt, hypocritical, and conformist individuals throughout the novel. Twain uses numerous quotes, events, and symbols to harshly criticize hypocrisy, conformity, and corruption in “civilized” society.