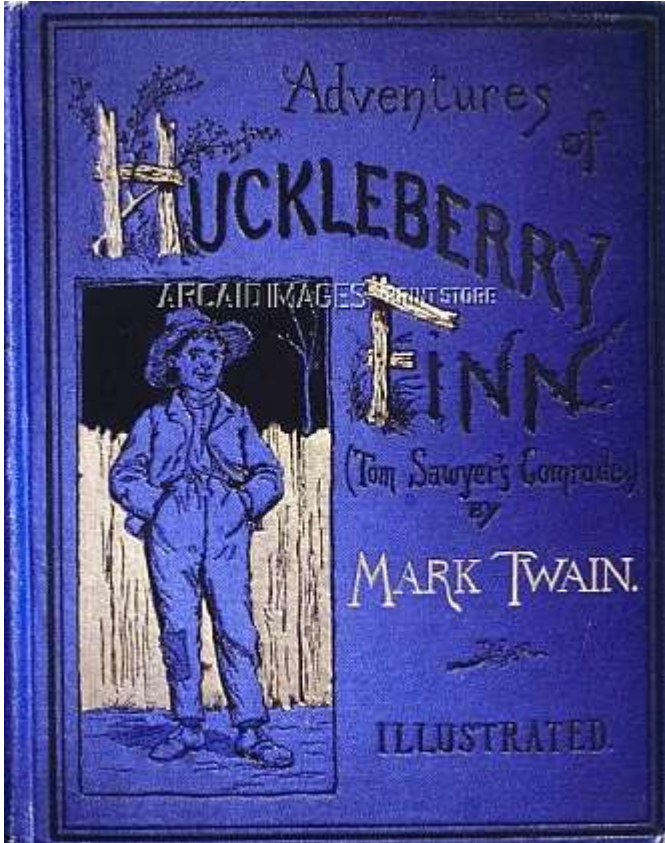


The best book that I read in ninth grade:



I don't remember when I first read Mark Twain's The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, but I remember not being too impressed with it. I suspect I had seen too many made-for-TV movies based on *Tom Sawyer* over the years so that the book held no surprises for me. I loved the originality of the adventures I found in both *The Great Brain* series and *The Mad Scientist's Club* series. Tom Sawyer's story felt really predictable to me.

Now The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn was a completely different matter. This book blew me away! While Tom Sawyer was full of mischief, Huckleberry Finn was full of conscience. In ninth grade, I had begun to struggle with concepts of "right versus wrong," and here was a main character going through the same struggle as me. Huckleberry was the first character I not only liked but also saw a lot of myself in—even though his story was over a hundred years in front of mine.

I wouldn't have even read this great novel but for Mrs. Wilkinson. She wasn't my English teacher in high school, but I was the aide for another Language Arts teacher, and I could hear Mrs. Wilkinson teach her class from where I aided and corrected papers. Mrs. Wilkinson had been preparing her class for reading Huckleberry Finn by doing a historical study of the time period, and I was enjoying eavesdropping on those lectures. When no one was looking, I secretly borrowed a copy of the book from the storage room, and I—for the most part—kept up with the reading her class was doing as well as my own class. Huckleberry Finn was a much better book than the one assigned in my own English class, and Mrs. Wilkinson's talks about the book kept me completely interested in reading it. Her class ended up having to write a big essay about the novel, but because I was only eavesdropping on her talks, I didn't have to; I only had to enjoy the book. A few years later, I later told Mrs. Wilkinson how I'd eavesdropped on her class, and how Huckleberry Finn was a book that amazed me. We formed a friendship that day, and she and I still stay in touch over Facebook.

You'll find Mark Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn on many scholarly lists entitled "The Best Books Ever Written." You'll also find this novel on many of the "Most Commonly Banned Books" lists because of the language the book chooses to use. I find it very interesting that it's on both lists.

This is the story of a boy who is capable of learning right from wrong. This is the story of a slave who is searching for his family. It's the story of a nation that still believed racism was right, and it's the story of how conscience can always win out no matter what laws are written down. To this day, this is one of the best stories I've ever read and related to.