CLASSICS LIBRARY · STORY MAP

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer

Mark Twain · *1876 · original English text*

A St. Petersburg boy turns a fence into a fortune, a Sunday-school into a triumph, and a graveyard dare into a secret that can hang an innocent man. Twain's humor is real, and so are the cave, the murder, and the conscience that finally makes Tom speak. The book is play, and it is a schooling in courage.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

When a game becomes a crime, and a secret could save a life, will a boy tell the truth—and what kind of heroism is that?

"in order to make a man or a boy covet a thing, it is only necessary to make the thing difficult to attain."
The narrator · Chapter II

Tom knows how to make work look like play, and how to stand in the pulpit of a Sunday-school with tickets he has not earned. The same boy, having sworn with Huck to say nothing of the murder, at last testifies for Muff Potter. The cave, Injun Joe, and the treasure come after a harder victory: a promise broken for justice's sake.

KEY CHARACTERS

Tom Sawyer
Aunt Polly's nephew; a genius of play, and, when it costs him, of courage

Huckleberry Finn
The outcast boy, Tom's partner in the oath, the treasure, and a freedom Tom only plays at

Aunt Polly
Tom's guardian, loving, easily fooled, and not a fool about what she loves

Becky Thatcher
The judge's daughter, Tom's partner in the cave, and the object of his schoolroom chivalry

Injun Joe
The murderer in the graveyard, and the terror of the cave

Muff Potter
A weak, kind drunkard, nearly hanged for another man's crime

Joe Harper
The third pirate on Jackson's Island

Sid Sawyer
Tom's well-behaved half-brother, a born telltale

PLAY, WORK, AND A HARDER COURAGE

> *"Work consists of whatever a body is obliged to do, and that Play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do."*
> **The narrator** · Chapter II

> *"There comes a time in every rightly-constructed boy's life when he has a raging desire to go somewhere and dig for hidden treasure."*
> **The narrator** · Chapter XXV

Grades 5–8
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01
The Fence
CHAPTERS I—V
Aunt Polly's boy, and a great law of human action.

- Tom plays hooky, fights, and comes home to Aunt Polly, who loves him and cannot quite rule him
- Set to whitewash a fence, he so manages the other boys that they pay him for the privilege
- The narrator names the law: to make a boy covet a thing, make it difficult to attain; work is what a body is obliged to do
- Sunday-school and church show Tom's other genius: the show of piety, and a pinch-bug in the aisle

> *"Work consists of whatever a body is obliged to do, and that Play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do."*
> **The narrator** · Chapter II

02
The Graveyard
CHAPTERS VIII—XI
A midnight dare, a murder, and an oath in blood.

- Tom and Huck go to the graveyard with a dead cat, and see Injun Joe kill Dr. Robinson
- Muff Potter, drunk, is left to take the blame; the boys swear they will never tell
- The town hunts a murderer; Tom's conscience begins its work, especially by night
- At the funeral of the doctor, and in the streets, the secret is a weight he cannot joke away

03
Pirates and a Funeral
CHAPTERS XIII—XVII
A flight to an island, and the strange pleasure of being mourned.

- Tom, Huck, and Joe Harper run off to Jackson's Island as pirates
- They learn they are thought drowned, and come back to their own funeral
- The triumph is comic and a little cruel; Aunt Polly's grief was real
- Becky Thatcher and the schoolroom, including the episode of the torn book, belong to this happier weather

04
The Trial
CHAPTERS XXIII—XXIV
A boy stands up in court, and becomes a village hero at a price.

- Muff Potter's trial goes badly; the town is ready to hang him
- Tom, after a hard night, takes the stand and tells what he saw in the graveyard
- Injun Joe escapes from the courthouse; Muff is freed
- Tom is a glittering hero, and he does not sleep the better for it, knowing Joe is at large

05
The Cave and the Treasure
CHAPTERS XXV—XXXV
A search for gold, a labyrinth, and a death in the dark.

- Tom and Huck hunt treasure; there comes a time, the narrator says, when a rightly-constructed boy desires to dig for it
- At a picnic Tom and Becky are lost in McDougal's cave; Injun Joe is using it as a haunt
- Tom finds a way out; the cave is locked; Joe is found dead at the door
- The treasure is taken from the cave, and Huck, adopted into respectability, has a last rebellion that Tom half understands

> *"There comes a time in every rightly-constructed boy's life when he has a raging desire to go somewhere and dig for hidden treasure."*
> **The narrator** · Chapter XXV

Courage | Conscience | Truth-telling | Play and Work | Friendship | Justice

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 5–8

1. The whitewashing chapter is funny, and it is a moral of vanity: we covet what looks difficult or forbidden. Tom uses the law; he does not yet suffer it.
2. The graveyard oath is the book's real test. Tom's testimony at the trial is the costly act; the treasure is a reward the plot allows itself after.
3. Twain's Indians and village talk include language and a villain's name that a present-day reader must handle with care. The map will not repeat slurs; the book's crime is still a crime.
4. Huck's discomfort with being "sivilized" at the end is the seed of the later, harder book. Tom is still playing; Huck is not only playing.
5. Aunt Polly's grief when the boys are thought dead is not a joke, even if Tom enjoys the funeral. Watch that discrepancy.
6. In the hosted text, "obliged" in the work-and-play sentence is italicized. The words are the same without the marks.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #74, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/the-adventures-of-tom-sawyer/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.