**GEG S6 04 (M)**
**Exam Code: ENM6E**

# American Literature

## SEMESTER VI

# ENGLISH

## BLOCK- 1

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## COURSE INTRODUCTION

The Optional Course entitled "American Literature" is a compilation of representative American texts encompassing a variety of literary forms and genres such as select poetry, two great novels and a significant play. It traces the relevant socio-cultural, literary and political history of America while discussing the textual and thematic content of these works. The course contains a total of fifteen units covering both poetry, fiction and drama for a comprehensive study.

## BLOCK INTRODUCTION

The introductory Units 1 and 2 of the course takes up the 19th century poet Walt Whitman's poems titled "As I Ponder'd in Silence" and "To a Historian". Whitman is widely considered as a poet of democracy particularly owing to the seminal work *Leaves of Grass* that had permanently altered the course of American poetry. The prescribed poems in the unit were written in the context of American democracy and thus, symbolically represent the poet's significant role as a poet of humanity, both celebrating and communicating with man, nature and the universe. This is followed by Units 3 and 4 which takes up Emily Dickinson's poem "The Soul Selects Her Own Society" that reflects the essence of the human soul, transcends the immediate human condition and also reflects her transcendental belief on how the effervescent beauty of the soul is supreme.

Unit 5 and 6 takes up the poem "I too Sing America" that introduces the learner to one of the leading 20th century black poet and social activist, Langston Hughes who had tremendous contribution towards black literature and the arts as well as the social-cultural transformation in American society. The prescribed poem is a reflection of Hughes' literary aim and an assertion against racial discrimination, white prejudice and socio-political conditions in America of the 90s. Finally, towards the end of the block Units 7, 8 and 9 takes up the classic novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry* Finn that traces the interesting journey of the mischievous "Huck" Finn and the slave boy Jim, revealing their gradual bonding and friendship in the novel. It captures their adventure aboard a raft, sailing along the Mississippi and explores the complexities of race, racial prejudices, moral conflict, social hypocrisy, slavery, regional differences together with white and black culture in the context of the antebellum period.

After going through the units of the first block, the learner will be able to discuss the prescribed poems and the novel in a detailed manner. While going through a unit, you may also notice some text boxes, which have been included to help you learn some of the difficult terms and concepts. You will also come across about some relevant ideas and concepts in "LET US KNOW" along with the text. We have kept "CHECK YOUR PROGRESS" questions in each unit which have been designed to self-check your progress of study. It is important to note that the Self Learning Material (SLM) is not an end in itself and the learners are strongly advised to consult the references and other resources recommended for reading.

# UNIT 1 : WALT WHITMAN: "AS I PONDER'D IN SILENCE" AND "TO A HISTORIAN"- I

## UNIT STRUCTURE


1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 Walt Whitman : The Poet

1.3.1 His Life

1.3.2 His Works

1.4 Text of the Poems

1.4.1 Explanation of the Poems

1.5 Let us Sum up

1.6 Further Reading

1.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

1.8 Model Questions


## 1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss the life and works of the great American poet Walt Whitman
- describe his poetry with special reference to the two prescribed poems
- explain the poem in its relevant context of American Democracy

## 1.2 INTRODUCTION

Walt Whitman was one of the significant American poets. It is really difficult to describe his achievements within a small unit as he was remembered as the most memorable poet not only of America, but across the world. Whitman sufficiently wrote about himself, so that most of the readers could be familiar with the outlines of his personal history. To cast a quick glance at his life and career, Whitman was born on Long Island, worked as a painter and journalist, especially for Democrat Organs, travelled to New Orleans, served as a wound-dresser during the Civil

War, lived on in Washington for some years and then finally moved to Camden, New Jersey, where he spent the last nineteen years of his life. Whitman was extraordinarily susceptible to influences of every sort. In creating a unique idiom for American poetry, he used slang, opera, phrenology, all religions and philosophies, the oratorical manners of preachers and platform lectures, free association, the cut-and-paste assemblage of newspapers -in short anything. He was always a democrat (although during the Civil War he changed his party allegiance from Democrat to Republican). He was hailed by Ralph Waldo Emerson on the first appearance of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855 and also praised by W. M. Rossetti and Algernon Charles Swinburne.

## 1.3 WALT WHITMAN : THE POET

The following subsection will give you an insight into the life and literary contributions of one of the greatest 19th century American poets, Walt Whitman.

### 1.3.1 His Life

Born at West Hills, Huntington, Long Island, May 31, 1819, on Long Island, New York, Walt Whitman was a part-time carpenter and man of the people, whose innovative works expressed the country's democratic spirit. Whitman was largely self-taught; and left school at the age of eleven, to go to works, missing the sort of traditional education that made most American authors respectable imitators of the English.

Whitman was the second son in a family of nine children, and was christened Walter Whitman, Junior. His mother could barely read and write, but no woman ever had a more devoted son. Two years after her death, he was still mourning her inconsolably: "I occupy myself, still enveloped in thoughts of my dear mother, the most perfect and magnetic character, the rarest combination of practical, moral, and spiritual, and the least selfish,

of all and any I have ever known." His father was a country carpenter, a silent and indifferent worker. When the boy Whitman was four the family moved from Long Island to Brooklyn, which at that time was a village of eight thousand people.

In his teens, young Walt helped his father in one capacity or the other, ran errands for a firm of lawyers, and was apprenticed to a printer. His schooling was over at eleven. At thirteen he worked at the press of the long Island Star and began to write. Whitman's. *adolescence* was prolonged because he could not make up his mind on what he wanted to do or be. He was forced to earn a living, but he hated to be tied down to one place or position; he said he wanted to "just to live." Between the ages of sixteen and twenty, he was a journalist, a teacher at seven different country schools and a small-town editor.

As a son of a carpenter from Brooklyn, then in the rural country side, Whitman worked throughout his life as carpenter, clerk, newspaperman and editor. The first major poet of the American soil, Whitman never lived in poverty. During his early years he trained as a printer, then became a teacher, and finally a journalist and editor. He was less than successful; his stridently radical views made him unpopular with readers. After an 1848 sojourn in the South, which introduced him to some of the variety of his country, he returned to New York and began to write poetry.

In 1855 he self-published the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, which at the time consisted of only twelve poems. The volume was widely ignored, with one significant exception. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote him a congratulatory letter, in which he offered his "greetings... at the beginning of a great career." Whitman promptly published another edition of *Leaves of Grass*, expanding it by some twenty poems and appending the letter from Emerson, much to the latter's discomfort. 1860 saw another edition of a now much larger *Leaves*-containing some 156 poems-which was issued by a trade publisher.

At the outset of the Civil War, Whitman volunteered as a nurse in army hospitals; he also wrote dispatches as a correspondent for the *New York Times*. The war inspired a great deal of poetry, which was published in 1865 as *Drum Taps*. *Drum Taps* was then incorporated into an 1867 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, as was another volume of wartime poetry, *Sequel*, which included the poems written on Lincoln's assassination.

Whitman's wartime work led to a job with the Department of the Interior, but he was soon fired when his supervisor learned that he had written the racy poems of *Leaves of Grass*. The failure of ***Reconstruction*** led him to write the best known of his prose works, *Democratic Vista*s, which, as its title implies, argues for the maintenance of democratic ideals. This volume came out in 1871, as did yet another edition of *Leaves of Grass*, expanded to include more poems. The 1871 edition was reprinted in 1876 for the centennial. Several other prose works followed, then a further expanded version of *Leaves of Grass*, in 1881.

Whitman's health had been fragile since the mid-1870s, and by 1891 it was clear that he was dying. He therefore prepared his so-called "Deathbed" edition of *Leaves of Grass*, which contained two appendices of old-age poems as well as a review essay in which he tries to justify his life and work. The "Deathbed Edition" came out in 1892; Whitman died that year. His lifetime was witness to both the Civil War and the rise of the United States as a commercial and political power. He witnessed both the apex and the abolition of slavery. His poetry is thus centred on ideas of democracy, equality, and brotherhood. In response to America's new position in the world, Whitman also tried to develop poetry that was uniquely American, that both surpassed and broke the mould of its predecessors. *Leaves of Grass*, with its multiple editions and public controversies, set the pattern for the modern, public artist, and Whitman with his journalistic endeavours on the side, made the most of his role as celebrity and artist.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 1:** Where was the American poet Walt Whitman born and brought up?

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**Q 2:** What were some of the early occupations of Walt Whitman?

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**Q 3:** What were some of the major historical events that Whitman was witness to? How did it influence his poetry?

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### 1.3.2 His Works

In 1855, Whitman published at his own expense a volume of 12 poems, *Leaves of Grass*, which he had begun working on probably as early as 1847. It was criticised because of Whitman's exaltation of the body and sexual love and also because of its innovation in verse form i.e., the use of free verse in long rhythmical lines with a natural 'organic' structure.

In the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855, Whitman declared, "The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem." Whitman seems to emphasise the individual at the expense of society throwing off all conventions. In celebrating "One's Self I Sing", he sang of "Life in passion, pulse and power" to conclude, that in essence he sang the modern man. His *Leaves of Grass* (1855), which he rewrote and revised throughout his life, contains "Song of Myself", the most brilliant original poem ever written by an American. The enthusiastic praise that Emerson and a few others showered on this daring volume, established Whitman's reputation as a poet, although the book was not a popular success.

A visionary book celebrating all creation, *Leaves of Grass* was inspired by Emerson's writings, especially his essay "The poet" which predicted a robust, open-hearted, universal kind of poet uncannily like Whitman himself. The poem's innovative, unrhymed, free verse form, open celebration of sexuality, vibrant democratic sensibility, and extreme Romantic assertion that the poet's self was one with the poem, the universe, and the reader permanently altered the course of American poetry. Whitman's greatness is visible in many of his poems, such as "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry", "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking", and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed", a moving elegy on the death of Abraham Lincoln. Another important work is his long essay "Democratic Vistas" (1817) written during the unrestrained materialism of industrialism's "Gilded Age".

In the Preface to *Leaves of Grass*, it is declared that "When Whitman talked about his own work -which was all too often -he was apt to be insufficiently *egotistical*, windy and wearisome. But there were times when his self- congratulations rose to heights of eloquence and he forgot himself entirely. The Preface to *Leaves of Grass* transcends the sense of self: the grandiose poet becomes the inspired prophet. Phrase after phrase reveals a powerful national consciousness, a paradox of pride and humility. "The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem...Here is not merely a nation but a teeming nation of nations."

Whitman was self-confident enough to nominate himself to be the *poet commensurate* with the country, to be the laureate of its spirit as well as its physical vastness. Further, he also envisioned the poets to come who would establish "with decision and science....the solid and beautiful forms of the future." Whitman saw *Leaves of Grass* as much a manifesto as a selection of aesthetically pleasing poetry. In his poem, "Song of Myself", Whitman declared thus: "I am large, I contain multitude."

On the other hand, in this Preface to *Leaves of Grass*, (First edition), Whitman says, "The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United Nations themselves are essentially the greatest poem. In the history of the earth hitherto the largest and most stirring appear tame and orderly to their ampler largeness and stir. The greatest poet hardly knows pettiness or triviality. If he breathes into anything that was before thought small it dilates with the grandeur and life of the universe. He is a seer.....he is individual.....he is complete in himself.....the others are as good as he, only he sees it and they do not. He is not one of the chorus.....he does not stop for any regulation..... he is the president of regulation."



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 4:** Name the visionary work of Walt Whitman. What was the inspiration behind this work?

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**Q 5:** Name some of the poems that established Whitman's greatness as a poet.

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**Q 6:** What was the significant essay written during the unrestrained materialism of industrialism's Gilded Age?

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**Q 7:** What did Whitman declare in his poem "Song of Myself"?

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## 1.4 TEXT OF THE POEMS

The Text of the two prescribed poems "As I Ponder'd in Silence" and "To a Historian"

## As I Ponder'd in Silence

As I ponder'd in silence,
Returning upon my poems, considering, lingering long,
A Phantom arose before me with distrustful aspect,
Terrible in beauty, age, and power,
The genius of poets of old lands,
As to me directing like flame its eyes,
With finger pointing to many immortal songs,
And menacing voice, What singest thou? it said,
Know'st thou not there is hut one theme for ever-enduring bards?
And that is the theme of War, the fortune of battles,
The making of perfect soldiers.
Be it so, then I answer'd,
I too haughty Shade also sing war, and a longer and greater one than any,
Waged in my book with varying fortune, with flight, advance and retreat, victory deferr'd and wavering,
(Yet methinks certain, or as good as certain, at the last,) the field the world,
For life and death, for the Body and for the eternal Soul,
Lo, I too am come, chanting the chant of battles,
I above all promote brave soldiers.

## To a Historian

You who celebrate bygones!
Who have explored the outward, the surfaces of the races- the life that has exhibited itself;
Who have treated of man as the creature of politics, aggregates, rulers and priests;
I, habitant of the Alleghanies, treating of him as he is in himself, in his own rights,
Pressing the pulse of the life that has seldom exhibited itself, (the great pride of man in himself;)

Chanter of Personality, outlining what is yet to be,
I project the history of the future.

### 1.4.1 Explanation of the Poems

**Explanation of the Poem "As I Ponder'd in Silence"**

As the poet sits pondering his past work and his career, an eerie spectre appears. He learns that this is the "the genius of poets of old lands," whom he describes as "terrible in beauty, age, and power." The genius observes the poet as he reflects on his past and asks him menacingly, "what singest thou?" There is only one theme for "ever-enduring bards," the phantom claims, and that theme is war. Only the words of poets who write about war can ever stand the test of time. The poet responds proudly that he does write about war, but a much grander and longer war than any other poet has ever attempted to address. This poet writes about the entire world, which is a battlefield encompassing struggles between life and death, body and soul. This is what sets him apart, and what will allow his words to endure.

The poem, "As I Ponder'd in Silence" by Walt Whitman, is a free-verse poem in which the writer, Walt Whitman, attempts to make a connection between his works and those of epics by listing the essential elements of an epic and claiming to the "Phantom" of epic poets that his works rival those of epics.

The poem opens to find Whitman reflecting over his previous poems ("Returning upon my poems…" ) as the Phantom of epic verses appears before him ("A Phantom arose before me…" ), questioning his verses with the beliefs that they are not worthy of being compared to the great epics of old with an older language of poetry; however, as the poem shifts to the second and final stanza, the language takes a turn to modern language in an attempt to link the modern and old language.

As Whitman speaks to the phantom, it gives him details of the components for an epic poem. The phantom's belief is that

epics are used in order to transcribe the fortunes of war; however, Whitman counters that belief with his own by stating: "For life and death-for the Body, and for the eternal soul." When he expresses the words, "Lo! I too am come, chanting the chant of battles,/ I, above all, promote brave soldiers." It states his belief that war is fought merely for life and death, nothing more, and, in addition to that, he claims that his poems are worthy of chanting the stories of brave soldiers and warriors like the epics of old; however, he is not going to portray them as perfect due to the fact that humanity is flawed.

In essence, the poem conveys the theme that humanity is flawed in the subjects of war, and, for this, the poet or the bard will continue to portray humans as they are, with all of their immaculate imperfections. "As I Ponder'd in Silence" is one of Whitman's introductory poems in 'Inscriptions', the first book in *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman proposes a thematic connection between the subsequent verses in his collection and ancient epic poetry. As the creator of modern-day epic poems, Whitman presents himself as an heir to that great tradition - a contemporary bard and successor to Homer and Virgil. This poem consists of two free-verse stanzas, made up of eleven and seven lines respectively.

This poem is the first in which Whitman writes from a first-person perspective. Although, Whitman meant the ambiguous speaker of the poem to represent himself, the character simultaneously fulfils a broader and a more symbolic function. This is the first instance of Whitman employing himself as a character who also serves as the "Democratic self." Whitman emphasises the poet's dual purpose through his interaction with the phantom character. The other-worldly phantom, whom Whitman explicitly describes as representing the genius of his predecessors, adds another dimension to the character of the poet. Whitman portrays himself as both- man and myth, poet and prophet.

To conclude his poem, Whitman places himself above all previous poets, claiming, "I above all promote brave soldiers." For Whitman, men and women can prove their worth outside a literal battlefield, although several of his poems are inspired by Civil War soldiers. For the purposes of this poem, though, a brave soldier is any person, male or female, black or white, facing the struggles of life. Undoubtedly, Whitman himself often felt like one of these brave soldiers of life.

**Explanation of the poem "To a Historian"**

Whitman is simply and directly dismissive of history and historians. To him, the historians see history as shaped by the past and its politics, wars and commerce, etc. Whitman saw himself as the supreme individual, the man who creates his own future from now.

The declaration comes early in the *Leaves of Grass* collection, as an act of liberation and freedom from the shackles of the established world order. Whitman is incredibly arrogant but also adamant on clinching his success and time shows that he was undoubtedly right, for he is now seen as America's greatest poet. The same theme is seen in his poem "To Thee Old Cause." And the poem views all history and war as concerned with the preservation of humanity itself and as the great and noble cause. Whitman asserts his epic collection of poems is one with that cause, taking on its burden from now onwards.

Martin T. Buinicki in *Walt Whitman's Reconstruction: Poetry and Publishing Between Memory and History*, says, in his poem "To a Historian," published in the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass* but titled so only in 1867, Whitman chided his subject for treating "man as a creature of politics, aggregates, rulers and priests." It is no mystery why historical writing proved so troublesome for the poet who marked eternity through his self-celebrating book: historians, working in "aggregates" and seeing by epistemological necessity men and women as "dreams and dots," transformed

people into creatures of externalities and contexts-subject to the world, rather than heroic agents. The historian, a chronicler of "creatures," threatened Whitman's own blending of the nation and the individual or the 'Many in One'. When John William Draper published his *History of the American Civil War* in 1867 and promised to "handle [their] species in masses," the war lay behind him, there to analyse. Whitman's war, conversely, resided within him, there for communion. His 1867 title "To a Historian" expresses his aggressive statement against rival recorders or historians of the past.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 8:** Describe the essence of the poem "As I Ponder'd in Silence" in a few words.

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**Q 9:** Who does the poet speak against in the poem "To a Historian" and why?

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.....



## 1.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through the unit, you will gain an insight on the intense concept of democracy, which is best portrayed in Whitman's poetry. The learner will gain an insight into the life and works of the great American poet Walt Whitman. Both the text of the poems titled "As I Ponder'd in Silence' and "To a Historian" are provided together with the explanation of the texts for easy reference.



## 1.6 FURTHER READING

1) Buinicki, Martin T. (2011). *Walt Whitman's Reconstruction: Poetry and Publishing Between Memory and History.* Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.

2) Harmon, William. (ed.) (2003). *Classic Writings on Poetry*. Columbia University Press.

3) VanSpanckeren, Kathryn. (1994). *Outline of American Literature*, published by the United States Information Agency.



## 1.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1:** Born at West Hills, Huntington, Long island, May 31, 1819, on Long Island, New York, Walt Whitman worked as part-time carpenter and was a man of the people, whose brilliant, innovative work expressed the country's democratic spirit. Whitman was largely self-taught; he left school at the age of eleven, to go to work, missing the sort of traditional education that made most American authors respectable imitators of the English.

**Ans to Q No 2:** As a son of a carpenter from Brooklyn, then in the rural country side, Whitman worked throughout his life as carpenter, clerk, newspaperman and editor.

**Ans to Q No 3:** His lifetime was witness to both the Civil War and the rise of the America as a commercial and political power. He witnessed both the apex and the abolition of slavery. His poetry is thus centred on ideas of democracy, equality, and brotherhood.

**Ans to Q No 4:** A visionary book celebrating all creation, *Leaves of Grass* was inspired by Emerson's writings, especially his essay "The Poet" which predicted a robust, open-hearted, universal kind

of poet uncannily like Whitman himself.

**Ans to Q No 5:** Whitman's greatness is visible in many of his poems, such as "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry", "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed" among others.

**Ans to Q No 6:** The name of the significant essay is "Democratic Vistas" (1817) written during the unrestrained materialism of industrialism's "Gilded Age".

**Ans to Q No 7:** In his poem, "Song of Myself", Whitman declared thus: "I am large, I contain multitude."

**Ans to Q No 8:** In essence, the poem conveys the theme that humanity is flawed in the subjects of war, and, for this, Whitman will continue to portray humans as they are, with all of their immaculate imperfections

**Ans to Q No 9:** Whitman is simply and directly dismissive of history and historians. To him, the historians see history as shaped by the past and its politics, wars and commerce, etc. Whitman saw himself as the supreme individual, the man who creates his own future from now.



## 1.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

**Q 1:** Discuss the life and literary contributions of the poet Walt Whitman.

**Q 2:** Describe the poet Walt Whitman as a strong poetic voice in American Literature.

**Q 3:** Elaborate on Whitman's idea on democracy with reference to the prescribed poems.

**Q 4:** Explain the poem "As I Ponder'd in Silence" in your own words.

**Q 5:** Explain the poem "To a Historian" in your own words.

*** ***** ***

# UNIT 2 : WALT WHITMAN: "AS I PONDER'D IN SILENCE" AND "TO A HISTORIAN"- II

## UNIT STRUCTURE


2.1 Learning Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 Major Themes

2.4 Style and Techniques

2.5 Critical Reception

2.6 Let us Sum up

2.7 Further Reading

2.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.9 Model Questions


## 2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- discuss the major themes in the two poems
- analyse the style and language employed by the poet
- explain the critical reception of the poet
- appreciate the literary contributions of Walt Whitman
- further explore the poetry of Whitman

## 2.2 INTRODUCTION

The present unit is a continuation of the previous unit and takes up important aspects of the emergent themes, critical reception as well as style and language. Whitman was democratic in both life and poetry. He believed that democracy was the only way to integrate one's life with the everyday lives. In his poetry, Whitman widened the possibilities of poetic diction by including slang, colloquialisms, and regional dialects, rather than employing the stiff, erudite language so often found in nineteenth-century verse.

## 2.3 MAJOR THEMES

Some of the emergent themes in the text of the poems are as discussed below :

**Democracy as a Way of Life**

Whitman envisioned democracy not just as a political system but as a way of experiencing the world. In the early nineteenth century, people still harboured many doubts about whether the United States could survive as a country and about whether democracy could thrive as a political system. To allay those fears and to praise democracy, Whitman tried to be democratic in both life and poetry. He imagined democracy as a way of interpersonal interaction and as a way for individuals to integrate their beliefs into their everyday lives. "Song of Myself" notes that democracy must include all individuals equally, or else it would be destined to fail.

Like William Wordsworth, Whitman believed that everyday life and everyday people were suitable subjects for poetry. Although much of Whitman's work does not explicitly discuss politics yet most of it implicitly deals with democracy: it describes communities of people coming together, and it imagines many voices pouring into a unified whole. For Whitman, democracy was an idea that could and should permeate the world beyond politics, making itself felt in the ways we think, speak, work, fight, and even make art.

**The Cycle of Growth and Death :**

Whitman's poetry reflects the vitality and growth of the early United States. During the nineteenth century, America expanded at a tremendous rate, and its growth and potential seemed limitless. But sectionalism and the violence of the Civil War threatened to break apart and destroy the boundless possibilities of the United States. As a way of dealing with both the population growth and the massive deaths during the Civil War, Whitman focused on the life cycles of individuals: people were born, they aged and reproduced a new generation, and they left the world after their demise. Such poems as "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" imagine death as an integral part of life. The speaker of the poem "When Lilacs Last in the

Dooryard Bloom'd" realises that flowers die in the winter, but they re-bloom in the springtime, and he vows to mourn his fallen friends every year just as new buds appear. Describing the life cycle of nature helped Whitman contextualise the severe injuries and trauma he had witnessed during the Civil War- and linking death to life helped him give the deaths of so many soldiers a sense of meaning and purpose.

**The Beauty of the Individual :**

Throughout his poetry, Whitman praised the individual. He imagined a democratic nation as a unified whole composed of unique but equal individuals. "Song of Myself" opens in a triumphant paean to the individual: "I celebrate myself, and sing myself" (1). Elsewhere the speaker of that exuberant poem identifies himself as Walt Whitman and claims that, through him, the voices of many will speak. In this way, many individuals make up the individual democracy, a single entity composed of myriad parts. Every voice and every part will carry the same weight within the single democracy- and thus every voice and every individual is equally beautiful. Despite this pluralist view, Whitman still singled out specific individuals for praise in his poetry, particularly Abraham Lincoln. In 1865, Lincoln was assassinated, and Whitman began composing several elegies, including "O Captain! My Captain!" where Whitman says, "[a]lthough all individuals were beautiful and worthy of praise, some individuals merited their own because of their contributions to society and democracy."

**The Human Body :**

Whitman's poetry revels in its depictions of the human body and the body's capacity. The speaker of "Song of Myself" claims that "copulation is no more rank to me than death is" (521) to demonstrate the naturalness of taking pleasure in the body's physical possibilities. With physical contact comes spiritual communion: two touching bodies form one individual unit of togetherness. Several poems praise the bodies of both women and men, describing them at work, at play, and interacting. The speaker of "I Sing the Body Electric" (1855) boldly praises the perfection of the human form and worships the body because the body houses the soul. This free expression of sexuality horrified some of

Whitman's early readers, and Whitman was fired from his job at the Indian Bureau in 1865 because the secretary of the interior found *Leaves of Grass* offensive.

**The Self :**

Whitman's interest in the self makes him praise each of the individual. Whitman links the self to the conception of poetry throughout his work, envisioning the self as the birthplace of poetry. Most of his poems are spoken from the first person, using the pronoun 'I'. The speaker of Whitman's most famous poem, "Song of Myself," even assumes the name Walt Whitman but nevertheless the speaker remains a fictional creation employed by the poet himself. Although Whitman borrows from his own autobiography for some of the speaker's experiences, yet he also borrows many experiences from popular works of art, music, and literature. Repeatedly, the speaker of this poem exclaims that he contains everything and everyone, which is a way for Whitman to re-imagine the boundary between the self and the world. By imaging a person capable of carrying the entire world within him, Whitman can create an elaborate analogy about the ideal democracy, which would like the self, be capable of containing the whole world.

Whitman was like Shelley and Emerson in viewing the poet's calling as among the highest and most ancient. He especially embraced the ancient epic as a national work by a legendary prophet, but he did the American thing by modernising and personalising the epic, singing, instead of the worn-out material suggested by the Muses, himself, by name and even by nickname. Emerson had already equated the country with the poem, saying in 1844, " Our logrolling, our stumps and their politics, our fisheries, our Negroes, and Indians, our boats, and our repudiations, the wrath of rogues, and the pusillanimity of honest men, the northern trade, the southern planting, the western clearing, Oregon, and Texas, are yet unsung. Yet America is a poem in our eyes; its ample geography dazzles the imagination, and it will not wait long for meters."

If the country is a poem, Whitman argued further that the poem is the poet. Thus, for Whitman, "a great poem is for ages and ages in common

and for all degrees and complexion and all departments and sects and for a woman as much as a man and a man as much as a woman. A great poem is no finish to a man or woman but rather a beginning."



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 1:** Briefly discuss Whitman's views on democracy.

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**Q 2:** Describe in brief Whitman's interest in the self.

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## 2.4 STYLE AND TECHNIQUES

Whitman's poetry with its innovative, unrhymed, free-verse form, open celebration of sexuality, vibrant democratic sensibility, and extreme Romantic assertion that the poet's self was one with the poem, the universe, and the reader permanently, had altered the course of American poetry. *Leaves of Grass* is as vast, energetic, and natural as the American critics had been calling for although they did not recognise it.

It was the American scholar, Emerson who had proclaimed the need for native ways of talking and thinking: "We have listed too long to the courtly muses of Europe….We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak with our own minds." This passage became Whitman's favourite thesis; he wrote various counterpoints upon the theme and made it his own. The picture of a vital present arrayed against a debilitated past is the central feature of Whitman's "Song of the Exposition" with the lines:

**"Come Muse, migrate from Greece and Ionia,**
**Cross out please those immensely overpaid accounts,**
**That matter of Troy and Achilles wrath, and Aeneas', Odysseus' wanderings,**
**Placard "Removed" and "To let" on the rocks of your snowy Parnassus,**

**For know a better, fresher, busier sphere, wide, untried domain awaits demands you."**

With such lines, Whitman not only fathered free verse but also liberated the spirit of modern poetry. He showed the way for others to express the powerful thrust and urgency of a half-idealistic, half-materialistic, sometimes corrupt but ever-expanding America. He championed a speech which was indigenous, American rather than English. In his notes for "An American Primer", a lecture he never completed, he spoke up for the use of the colloquial tone and a poetry which had "it's broad and low, close to the ground." He insisted saying thus:

"Ten thousand native idiomatic words are growing, or are already grown, out of which vast numbers could be used by American writers - words that would be welcome, being of the national blood….What is the fitness, what the strange charm of aboriginal names? Monongahela - it rolls with venison richness upon the palate... A perfect user of words uses things -they exude in power and beauty from him -miracles from his mouth…We need limber, lasting, fierce words. Do you suppose the liberties and braw of These States have to do only with delicate lady words? With gloved gentleman words?"

It was nevertheless, his use of words - and especially his polyglot phrases -which repelled many readers. He piled up the tremendous and the trivial in a sprawling accumulation of catalogues: "I expected him to make the songs of the nation," wrote Emerson ruefully of the later Whitman, "but he seems content to make the inventories." Whitman's basic philosophy is a cumulative one, but it can be caught in glimpses, epigrams and detached passages. The work *Leaves of Grass* is uneven, ungainly and also mountainous, towering and tremendous. From it the author rises a challenging and still controversial figure, rough hewn and enigmatic, a titan in his day who is no less powerful in our own.

Associating themes and melodies with great freedom and suggestiveness, he shaped his poems as symphonies. His free verse was liked by many poets and D. H. Lawrence, so complimented, "Whitman was ahead of all poets, pioneering into the wildness of empowered life. Beyond him, none." However, Whitman's style remains consistent

throughout. The poetic structures he employs are unconventional but reflect his democratic ideals. Lists are a way for him to bring together a wide variety of items without imposing a hierarchy on them. Perception, rather than analysis is the basis for this kind of poetry which uses few metaphors or other kinds of symbolic language.

Anecdotes are another favoured device. By transmitting a story, often one he has received from another individual, Whitman hopes to give his readers a sympathetic experience which will allow them to incorporate the anecdote into their own history. The kind of language Whitman uses sometimes supports and sometimes seems to contradict his philosophy. He often uses obscure, foreign, or invented words. This, however, is not meant to be intellectually elitist but is instead meant to signify Whitman's status as a unique individual. Democracy does not necessarily mean sameness. The difficulty of some of his language also mirrors the necessary imperfection of connections between individuals: no matter how hard we try, we can never completely understand each other. Whitman largely avoids rhyme schemes and other traditional poetic devices. He does, however, use meter in masterful and innovative ways, often to mimic natural speech. In these ways, he is able to demonstrate that he has mastered traditional poetry but is no longer subservient to it, just as democracy has ended the subservience of the individual.

Whitman filled his poetry with long lists. Often a sentence would be broken into many clauses, separated by commas, and each clause would describe some scene, person, or object. These lists create a sense of expansiveness in the poem, as they mirror the growth of the United States. Also, these lists layer images atop one another to reflect the diversity of American landscapes and people. In "Song of Myself," for example, the speaker lists several adjectives to describe Walt Whitman in section 24. The speaker uses multiple adjectives to demonstrate the complexity of the individual: true individuals cannot be described using just one or two words. In a democracy, all individuals possess equal weight, and no individual is more important than another.

Many of Whitman's poems rely on rhythm and repetition to create

a captivating, spellbinding quality of incantation. Often, Whitman begins several lines in a row with the same word or phrase, a literary device called anaphora. For example, the first four lines of "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" (1865) each begin with the word when. The long lines of such poems as "Song of Myself" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" force readers to inhale several bits of text without pausing for breath and this breathlessness contributes to the incantatory quality of the poems. Generally, the anaphora and the rhythm transform the poems into celebratory chants, and the joyous form and structure reflect the joyousness of the poetic content. Elsewhere, however, the repetition and rhythm contribute to an elegiac tone, as in "O Captain! My Captain!" This poem uses short lines and words, such as heart and father, to mournfully incant an elegy for the assassinated Abraham Lincoln.

Throughout Whitman's poetry, plant life symbolises both growth and multiplicity. Rapid, regular plant growth also stands for the regular expansion of the population of the United States. In "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" Whitman uses flowers, bushes, wheat, trees, and other plant life to signify the possibilities of regeneration and re-growth after death. As the speaker mourns the loss of Lincoln, he drops a lilac spray onto the coffin; the act of laying a flower on the coffin not only honours the person who has died but lends death a measure of dignity and respect.

The title *Leaves of Grass* highlights another of Whitman's themes: the beauty of the individual. Each leaf or blade of grass possesses its own distinct beauty, and together the blades form a beautiful unified whole, an idea Whitman explores in the sixth section of "Song of Myself." Multiple leaves of grass thus symbolise democracy, another instance of a beautiful whole composed of individual parts. In 1860, Whitman published an edition of *Leaves of Grass* that included a number of poems celebrating love between men. He titled this section "The Calamus Poems," after the phallic calamus plant. The visionary work *Leaves of Grass* is indeed relevant to our study as its thematic concerns are also reflected in these poems.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 3:** How did Whitman's poetry alter the course of American poetry?

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**Q 4:** What was D.H. Lawrence's compliment on Walt Whitman as a poet?

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**Q 5:** What is the significance of multiple leaves of grass?

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.....

## 2.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION

*Leaves of Grass* is as vast, energetic, and natural as the American continent; it was the epic generations of American critics had been calling for, although they did not recognise it. Movement ripples through "Song of Myself" like restless music:

**“My ties and ballasts leave me...**

**I skirt sierras, my palms cover continents**

**I am afoot with my vision.”**

The poems are innovative, unrhymed, free-verse form, open celebration of sexuality, vibrant democratic sensibility and extreme Romantic assertion that the poet's self was one with the poem, the universe. As a defender of Central American idealism. Whitman ushered in a new age as he sang in his symbolic role as a poet of humanity, communicating with man, nature and the universe. His use of rhythm as a fluid instrument of verse demonstrated a range of possibilities beyond that of conventional metre. Associating themes and melodies with great freedom and suggestiveness, he shaped his poems as symphonies. An ardent admirer of Whitman's free verse, D. H. Lawrence wrote that Whitman was- "Ahead of all poets, pioneering into the wildness of empowered life. Beyond him

none."

Whitman's voice electrifies even modern readers with his proclamation of the unity and vital force of all creation. He was enormously innovative. From him sprung autobiography as a form of poetry, the American Everyman as bard, the reader as creator, together with the still-contemporary discovery of "experimental", or organic, form. No such American poet has been so vehemently acclaimed and so violently condemned as Walt Whitman. He was magnificent, a researcher for truth and a flamboyant egoist who never ceased to advertise himself and a seer who preached an ideal of unselfish brotherhood.

Part of Whitman's paradox is disclosed in the two lines which introduce his monumental Leaves of Grass:

**"One's self I sing, a simple separate person,**
**Yet utter the word democratic, the word o En-Masse."**

Standing at the head of his work, these two lines symbolise the poet: one man speaking for all men, "the divine average," the individual as representative of the universe. In another poem, referring to the integration of the poet and his work, Whitman said:

**"Camerado! This is no book:**
**Who touches this, touches a man."**

Though a poet of democracy Whitman celebrates the brotherhood of man, Whitman seems to emphasise the individual at the expense of society throwing off all conventions. In celebrating "One's-Self I Sing", he sang -"Life in passion, pulse and power to conclude, The Modern man I sing". As a defender of Central American idealism, he ushered in a new age as he sang in his symbolic role as a poet of humanity, communicating with man, nature and the universe. Whitman's poetry is democratic in both its subject matter and its language. As the great lists that make up a large part of Whitman's poetry show, anything-and anyone-is fair game for a poem. Whitman is concerned with cataloguing the new America he sees growing around him. Just as America is far different politically and practically from its European counterparts, so too must American poetry distinguish itself from previous models. Thus we see Whitman breaking

new ground in both subject matter and diction.

In a way, though, Whitman is not so unique. His preference for the quotidian links him with both Dante, who was the first to write poetry in a vernacular language, and with Wordsworth, who famously stated that poetry should aim to speak in the "language of ordinary men." Unlike Wordsworth, however, Whitman does not romanticise the proletariat or the peasant. Instead, he takes as his model himself. The stated mission of his poetry was, in his words, to make "an attempt to put a Person, a human being (myself, in the latter half of the 19th century, in America) freely, fully, and truly on record." A truly democratic poetry, for Whitman, is one that, using a common language, is able to cross the gap between the self and another individual, to effect a sympathetic exchange of experiences.

This leads to a distinct blurring of the boundaries between the self and the world and between public and private. Whitman prefers spaces and situations like journeys, the out-of-doors, cities that allow for ambiguity in these respects. Thus we see poems like "Song of the Open Road" and "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," where the poet claims to be able to enter into the heads of others. Exploration becomes not just a trope but a mode of existence. For Whitman, spiritual communion depends on physical contact, or at least proximity. The body is the vessel that enables the soul to experience the world. Therefore, the body is something to be worshipped and given a certain primacy. He also has great respect for the reproductive and generative powers of the body, which mirror the intellect's creation of poetry.

The Civil War diminished Whitman's faith in democratic sympathy. While the cause of the war nominally furthered brotherhood and equality, the war itself was a quagmire of killing. Reconstruction, which began to fail almost immediately after it was begun, further disappointed Whitman. His later poetry, which displays a marked insecurity about the place of poetry and the place of emotion in general (see in particular "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd"), is darker and more isolated.

In his long essay "Democratic Vistas" (1817), Whitman justly

criticises America for its "mighty many-threaded wealth and industry" that mask an underlying "dry and flat Sahara" of soul. He calls for a new kind of literature to revive the American population. Yet, Whitman's main claim of immortality lies in "Song of Myself". Here, he places Romantic self at the centre of the consciousness of the poem:

**"I celebrate myself, and sing myself,**
**And what I assume you shall assume,**
**For every atom belonging to me**
**As good belongs to you".**

There was no aspect of life that Whitman did not celebrate. His taste in literature was equally catholic; he revered the great poets of the past and relished contemporary slang -"slang is the start of fancy, imagination and humour, breathing into the nostrils of language the breath of life." Even as a young journalist, Whitman left extraordinary records which today are valuable as pictures of the period more than a hundred years ago.



## 2.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through the unit, you will gain an insight on the intense concept of democracy, which is best portrayed in Whitman's poetry. The learner will gain an insight into the life and works of the great American poet Walt Whitman. Both the text of the poems titled "As I Ponder'd in Silence' and "To a Historian" are provided together with the glossary of meaning and explanation for easy reference. Along with the discussion on the major themes emerging from both the poems, and the wider text of Leaves of Grass from which they are taken the learner will be able to grasp these in their relevant context. An elaborate explanation on he style and language employed by the poet together with the critical reception will give you a comprehensive idea on the Whitman's literary credibility. It is expected that the unit will enable the learner to appreciate the Whitman's literary contributions and further explore his poetry.



## 2.7 FURTHER READING

1) Buinicki, Martin T. (2011). *Walt Whitman's Reconstruction: Poetry and Publishing Between Memory and History*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.

2) Harmon, William. (ed.) (2003). *Classic Writings on Poetry*. Columbia University Press.

3) VanSpanckeren, Kathryn. (1994). *Outline of American Literature*, published by the United States Information Agency.



## 2.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1:** Attempt on your own. (Hint 2.3).

**Ans to Q No 2:** Whitman's interest in the self makes him praise each individual. Whitman links the self to the conception of poetry throughout his work, envisioning the self as the birthplace of poetry. Most of his poems are spoken from the first person, using the pronoun 'I'. The speaker of Whitman's most famous poem, "Song of Myself," even assumes the name Walt Whitman, but nevertheless the speaker remains a fictional creation employed by the poet himself.

**Ans to Q No 3:** Whitman's poetry with its innovative, unrhymed, free-verse form, open celebration of sexuality, vibrant democratic sensibility, and extreme Romantic assertion that the poet's self was one with the poem, the universe, and the reader permanently, had altered the course of American poetry. *Leaves of Grass* is as vast, energetic, and natural as the American critics had been calling for, although they did not recognise it.

**Ans to Q No 4:** D. H. Lawrence, so complimented, "Whitman was ahead of all poets, pioneering into the wildness of empowered life. Beyond him, none."

**Ans to Q No 5:** Each leaf or blade of grass possesses its own distinct beauty, and together the blades form a beautiful unified whole, an idea Whitman explores in the sixth section of "Song of Myself." Multiple leaves of grass thus symbolise democracy, another instance of a beautiful whole composed of individual parts.



## 2.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

**Q 1:** Write a brief note on the following:

a) Whitman's concept of poetry.

b) Whitman's concept of history and historian.

**Q 2:** Explain the following extracts with reference to context:

a) "As I ponder'd in silence,
Returning upon my poems, considering, lingering long,
A Phantom arose before me with distrustful aspect,
Terrible in beauty, age, and power,
The genius of poets of old lands,
As to me directing like flame its eyes,"

b) "For life and death, for the Body and for the eternal Soul,
Lo, I too am come, chanting the chant of battles,
I above all promote brave soldiers."

c) "Chanter of Personality, outlining what is yet to be,
I project the history of the future."

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# UNIT 3 : EMILY DICKINSON: "THE SOUL SELECTS HER OWN SOCIETY"- I

## UNIT STRUCTURE


3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 Emily Dickinson: The Poet

- 3.3.1 Her Life
- 3.3.2 Her Works

3.4 Text of the Poem

- 3.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

3.5 Let us Sum up

3.6 Further Reading

3.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

3.8 Model Questions


## 3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- gain a life sketch of the self-styled American poet Emily Dickinson
- discuss the literary contribution of the poet
- explain the content of the poem "The Soul Selects Her Own Society"

## 3.2 INTRODUCTION

The unit unravels one of the widely anthologised poems of Emily Dickinson for students of English literature titled "The Soul Selects Her Own Society." It is the soulful and reflective quality in Emily Dickinson's poetry that enriches the reader's sensibilities and makes her one of the most memorable American poets after Walt Whitman. Emily Dickinson had written around eighteen hundred poems in her lifetime for the simple joy of writing, without any intended purpose of publication. Her sister Lavinia had only discovered a stack of her poems in a drawer after her demise which

today we read in the form of a collected anthology. Poetry to Emily was salvation to the soul and almost an expression of her very being. Her poetry reflects the essence of her spiritual, as well as, her intellectual make up.

Emily Dickinson both as a poet and a person was very much an introvert, shy and sensitive, discreet and self-conscious, private and reserved person by nature. Although, she belonged to a well reputed family who enjoyed a good social status and socialised well within their community, yet she consistently chose to remain aloof from everyone to the point of self-chosen seclusion. Thus, a veil of mystery had always hung between her and those who knew her or lived around her. She was not one to open her soul easily to others and had created a world of her own, living a lonely but a content life. She wanted to create her own space, live on her own terms, reside in the lap of nature, being in touch with her spiritual side and ever preoccupied with her interests. Although, her choice of living or rather her way of life appeared out-of-the-way for many in the society of her time, she was someone who carved out an alternate way of life for herself. This was exceptional, considering the times that she lived in. Emily Dickinson made her mark as a self-styled person, who was fiercely individualistic and unbothered about fitting into the ideals and conventions of the Victorian society.

What stirs one's interest and curiosity in Dickinson as a poet is that her poetry exudes her persona and intellect. It is almost as though her poetry is a reflection and a definition of her being, through the weight of her words. Most of her poems dwell on themes of the soul and spirituality, nature and divinity, life and death, beauty and immortality.

## 3.3 EMILY DICKINSON: THE POET

Emily Dickinson was a talented young lady who chose to spend a quiet life on her own which is why we know her as a private poet. Emily loved to dress in white and cut a trim, lady-like figure in her neat hair-dos and long white dresses. Imagine her long skirts swishing through the fringes of the green woods; that was the reclusive Emily who spent a great deal of time enjoying the serenity of nature. She was a nature-

loving person with a deep interest in Botany and a penchant for collecting leaves as specimens and in fact, had her own herbarium. She nurtured a great love of plants and cultivated a variety of flowers such as pansies, hyacinths, marigolds, sweet-peas, peonies, lilies that filled her garden-beds. Emily enjoyed baking, gardening and even cleaning cobwebs! Let us then read along and take a glance at her interesting life and literary contribution before exploring the textual meaning of the prescribed poem.

### 3.3.1 Her Life

Emily Elizabeth Dickinson (December 10, 1830-May 15, 1886) whom we know better as Emily Dickinson was one of the leading American women poets who grew up in a reputed family in the small hometown of Amherst, Massachusetts. She was the daughter of Emily Norcross Dickinson and Edward Dickinson, a well known figure in their community. Emily's father was a State Legislator by profession who was active in the political sphere and had served a term as a Congressman. He was also the trustee and treasurer of the Amherst College which was also founded by his father i.e., Emily's grandfather. Among her siblings, she was close to her younger sister Lavinia with whom she shared a common wavelength of thought and her elder brother William Austin who was educated at Harvard. They resided in a great mansion located at the North Pleasant Street which was brought by their father.

Emily received most of her early education at home and first entered the Amherst Academy in the year 1840 along with her sister Lavinia, to graduate from there after a period of seven years. Although she was an intelligent student, yet she was often given to frail health and emotional suffering. Following her graduation she went on to study for a year at the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, a few miles away from her hometown. Partly owing to her longing for home and the flowering of her intellectual free-thinking, she left the Seminary to head home after a year. But it was not long, before she began to distance herself from the

circles of her immediate family and friends.

Gradually, Emily turned into a recluse withdrawing into her own world within the confines of her room. She turned detached and aloof, preferring to be on her own, or rather, being left alone. Emily spent most of her time reading extensively, writing poetry and jotting letters to her close friends, particularly to Benjamin F. Newton. Benjamin Newton worked in her father's office whom she knew and with whom she shared her thoughts and creative ideas with. Although there is no telling if they were in love or not, yet they were most certainly inspiring friends to each other. She suffered a great loss when he passed away in the year 1853. With time, she decided to take the opportunity of making two trips to Philadelphia and Boston. It was during these trips that she came to be acquainted with the Reverend Charles Wadsworth and Thomas Wentworth Higginson with whom she shared correspondences through her letters.

In the year 1874, Emily lost her father, a year after which her mother suffered paralysis and these sad events of her life had completely distanced her from others. Although she suffered a great setback after her father's demise, yet she took good care of her mother for a long seven years until her demise. She chose to remain a spinster, which according to speculation was owing to the demise of her potential suitors. But, Emily lived a fulfilling life along with her sister who remained a spinster as well and passed away a few years after her in 1899. Emily breathed her last in the year 1886 at the young age of fifty-five, following a prolonged period of illness which had begun in the summer of 1884 when she had lost consciousness while baking. In keeping with her wishes, her coffin was not driven in a hearse, in accordance with the Christian funeral custom and was instead carried across a field of buttercup flowers. She was laid to rest in a white coffin at the West Cemetery where her ancestors along with her parents were buried. Even on the burial day, flowers like the lily, violets and heliotropes adorned her coffin

in memory of her who loved nature and tended her flower gardens as though they were a part of her soul.

### 3.3.2 Her Works

Emily Dickinson is held as a great American poet who left behind the treasures of her poetry and letters that took a long time to be acknowledged for all its worth. If anyone had faith in the creative and literary potential of Emily Dickinson in her formative years as a poet, it was most certainly Benjamin F. Newton. Through their correspondences he saw in Emily the making of a poet and it was he, who had introduced her to the works of William Wordsworth and Ralph Waldo Emerson which had struck a chord with her. She was well-versed in the Biblical scriptures and was an avid reader of various other literary works.

The period from 1858-1865 saw some of her most creative years as a poet and her poetry developed from the earlier emotional to a more intensely matured expression of herself. Some of her well-known poems are: "I Robbed the Woods", "Frequently the Woods Are Pink", "Some Rainbow -Coming from the Fair", "Cocoon Above! Cocoon Below!", "Whose Are the Little Beds, I Asked", "Two Butterflies Went Out at Noon", "The Soul Selects Her Own Society", "I Tend My Flowers For Thee", "This is My Letter to the World", "I Started Early-Took My Dog", "To Hear An Oriole Sing", "I Measure Every Grief I Meet", "The Spider Holds a Silver Ball", "God Gave a Loaf to Every Bird", "Grief is a Mouse", "By My Window Have I For Scenery" and "The Earth Has Many Keys." One of the unique features of her volume of poems is that the introductory or first line in each poem also serves as the main title.

Emily was an excellent correspondent and regularly wrote letters to her friends and mentors. More than anyone else, Emily had penned over three hundred letters to Sue Gilbert, who was her brother Austin's wife and one of her closest friends. Most of her letters were burnt after her demise by her sister in keeping

with her promise and the remaining fraction of it saw late editions. Emily shared a steady correspondence with Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who was a prominent literary figure of the time and someone whom she consulted for advice with regard to her poetry. In the year 1862, Emily wrote a letter to Higginson enclosing four of her poems to request his opinion on her poems, to simply know if they "breathed." The enclosed poems were; "Safe in Their Alabaster Chambers", "I'll Tell You How the Sun Rose", "The Nearest Dream Recedes-Unrealized" and "We Play At Paste."

Although, initially she had an eagerness to have her poetry in print, she had met with Higginson's discouragement. In his opinion, her poetry was different, difficult to classify and was unsuitable to the contemporary literary tastes. Higginson was cast in the traditional nineteenth century literary mould and it is no wonder that he failed to grasp and estimate the potential of the newness in her poetry. She never hankered after fame and in fact she was critical of such glory as she wrote, "Fame is a Fickle Food, upon a Shifting Plate" (poem1659). Perhaps, for the same reason she dropped the thought of ever publishing her poems and instead continued to write for the pleasure of poetry. She often jotted verses in her letters and even sent poems along with flower bunch to her friends. But all the while her poetical caliber went unnoticed. Only a dozen poems amongst her huge poetry collection had seen publication in her lifetime. It was only after her demise that Emily's sister Lavinia had discovered a box of her poems.

Although her first anthology was jointly published by Higginson himself and Mabel Loomis Todd in 1890, yet it was an altered version in which the original poems were heavily edited. Only the 1955 publication titled *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* published by Thomas H. Johnson had retained her original poetry from which we have referred to the prescribed poem and the other soul poems in this unit. Emily Dickinson may never have received the honour befitting a poet in her lifetime, but today, she

is considered as one of the major women poets of America. Thus, what had remained undiscovered and unappreciated in her lifetime continues to be celebrated as an excellent literary treasure that speaks volumes of an enlightened mind.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 1:** How many poems did Emily Dickinson write in her lifetime? Who had discovered the stack of her poems after her demise?

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**Q 2:** Why was there a veil of mystery that hung between her and those who knew her or lived around her?

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**Q 3:** What were some of the interests of the poet Emily Dickinson?

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**Q 4:** Where did Emily Dickinson receive her education?

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**Q 5:** Which were some of the most creative years for Emily Dickinson as a poet and why?

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**Q 6:** To whom did Emily Dickinson write over three hundred letters?

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## 3.4 TEXT OF THE POEM

The poem is taken from the anthology of the collected poems titled *Emily Dickinson: The Complete Poems* (1975). It was written in the year 1862 and is considered one of the most significant poems among

the handful of Soul poems penned by the poet.

**The Soul Selects Her Own Society**

The Soul selects her own Society
Then- shuts the Door
To her divine Majority-
Present no more-
Unmoved-she notes the Chariots- pausing-
At her low Gate-
Unmoved- an Emperor be kneeling
Upon her Mat-
I've known her- from an ample nation-
Choose One-
Then- Close the Valves of her attention
Like Stone.

### 3.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

A reading of the poem "The Soul Selects Her Own Society" will certainly give you an idea of the poet's reflection on the human soul that transcends the immediate human condition. Although, the poem (like most of her other poems) may appear short in length and rather simple in your first reading, yet only a deeper understanding of the poetry of Emily Dickinson will enable you to extract the depth and significance of the poem. The stuff of the soul is difficult to understand but it is believed that all human beings have a latent soul which when realised exudes a certain radiance or an energy that matches with select souls. Let us quickly read through the introductory lines of the poem to interpret it in a better way:

**Lines 1-4**

**"The Soul selects her own Society**
**Then- shuts the Door**
**To her divine Majority-**
**Present no more-"**

The striking introductory line which also serves as the title of the poem "The Soul Selects Her Own Society" almost reads like an assertion. It was written in the year 1862 when Emily Dickinson was at her creative best. Having gained an insight into the significant aspects of her life, we know that Emily Dickinson was a sensitive soul who chose to live a silent and meaningful life in her own way. She withdrew herself from the society to lead an extremely secluded life. Major chunks of poetry written in these years of seclusion reflect the thoughts that occupied her mind. Emily was a soulful person and spiritually inclined to believe in the essence of the soul. As in the self-expression found in this poem, the soul has a transformational quality on one's being. The soul is extremely selective and has a way of finding its true soul mates. What sets it apart from the ordinary circumstances in life is its transcendental quality, which is above the general perception of human beings. Thus, to be in tune to one's soulful side, one has to be 'spiritually' rather than rationally inclined.

**Lines 5-8**

**"Unmoved-she notes the Chariots- pausing-**
**At her low Gate-**
**Unmoved- an Emperor be kneeling**
**Upon her Mat-"**

Usually, it is difficult to pin-point the exact implication of Dickinson's usage of pronouns but here in the poem, the pronoun 'she' refers to the poet herself. The poet declares that instead of being taken by surprise, she remains indifferent and "unmoved" by approaching chariots as well the kneeling Emperor. Perhaps, the imagery of the chariots stands for the arrival of the rich company of friends and potential suitors such as the Emperor. And in the tug and pull between soul-mates and fellow-beings and the former seems to win her over. Thus, bearing this individualistic approach of her own, the poet exercises much discretion instead of giving up easily into the company of friends

and society. Whether situated outdoors at her "Gate" or indoors just near her "Mat", she remained unaffected by the attention showered on her. Here, the mat refers to the prayer mat on which one kneels to pray.

**Line 9-10**

**"I've known her- from an ample nation-**
**Choose One-**
**Then- Close the Valves of her attention**
**Like Stone."**

Just as God has His chosen few, who receive His loving grace, the Soul has its discretion reserved for a select few. And for the same reason, the Soul is personified with a quality of its own. Also, it appears like the poet is conversing with her own soul which is why we note the split in the use of 'I' and 'her.' The Soul can be self-content and secured on her own. The poet also mentions this aspect in her poem "The Soul unto Itself" where she writes that the Soul is capable of being an "Imperial friend" unto herself. But it may also have a privileged space carved out for a chosen one after which the state of the Soul like an independent Kingdom shuts out on the rest of the world, like that of a stone. Here, the image of 'stone' suggests a porous selective quality as well as its compact form and composition which make it difficult to break down. Thus, it implies a certain rigidity and exclusivity of the Soul.

We will do well to note that Emily Dickinson was deeply influenced by philosophy of transcendentalism. In a nutshell, the American transcendental movement was both a religious and a philosophical movement which began in the early 19th century. The transcendentalists held the belief that the independent soul was the true essence of forming an ideal social structure. According to them, the realisation of the 'over-soul' a part of which was inherent in all human beings could lead to the union of all people as one. Some of the leading figures of the movement were Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller and Emily Dickinson herself. The word

'transcendental' itself means crossing the limits of human knowledge into the spiritual or the transcendental world i.e., the world beyond our immediate knowledge. The spiritual beliefs of the transcendentalists led them closer to the realm of nature. Thus, we find such a soulful and a spiritualistic essence in Dickinson's poem and her poetry clearly reflects a strong sense of the self.



## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q 7:** What is necessary in order to tune into one's soulful side?

.....

.....

**Q 8:** What is the reaction of the poet to the approaching Chariots and the "kneeling Emperor"?

.....

.....

**Q 9:** Complete the following lines of the poem:

"Then- Close the Valves of her attention

Like ……."

**Q 10:** What was the American transcendental movement? Name some of the leading figures of the movement.

.....

.....



## LET US KNOW

The American poet and essayist Adrienne Rich in her essay "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson" wrote that "[N]o one since the 17th century had reflected more variously or more probingly upon death and dying." Have you tried reading some of her poems that reflect on the subject that we all fear i.e. death? If you read a few of them, you may note the ease with which she meditates on the grave aspect of human death to move towards the immortality of

the human spirit. One may find these poems very comforting and healing when suffering from a personal loss or even while reflecting on the inevitable and the beyond.



## 3.5 LET US SUM UP

After having gone through the unit, you have gained a detailed perspective on the enigmatic life and literary treasures of the nineteenth century American poet, Emily Dickinson. A thorough reading of the text of the poem "The Soul Selects Her Own Society" along with the provided explanation will enable you to interpret its probable meaning and appreciate the message conveyed in the poem.



## 3.6 FURTHER READING

1) Gilbert Susan M. and Susan Gubar. (2000). *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press

2) Johnson, Thomas H. (1975). *Emily Dickinson: The Complete Poems London*: Faber and Faber.

3) Tandon. Neeru and Anjana Trevedi. (2008). *Thematic Patterns of Emily Dickinson's Poetry*. New Delhi: Atlantic



## 3.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1:** Emily Dickinson had written around eighteen hundred poems in her lifetime. Her younger sister Lavinia had discovered a stack of her poems in a drawer after her demise.

**Ans to Q No 2:** Emily Dickinson both as a poet and a person was very much an introvert, shy and sensitive, discreet and self-conscious, private and reserved by nature. Although she belonged to a well reputed family who enjoyed a good social status and socialised well within their community, yet she consistently chose to remain aloof from everyone to the point of self-chosen seclusion.

**Ans to Q No 3:** Emily was a nature-loving person with a deep interest in Botany and a penchant for collecting leaves as specimens and in fact, had her own herbarium. She nurtured a great love of plants and cultivated a variety of flowers that filled her garden-beds. She also enjoyed baking, gardening and even cleaning cobwebs.

**Ans to Q No 4:** Emily received most of her early education at home and first entered the Amherst Academy in the year 1840 along with her sister Lavinia, to graduate from there after a period of seven years. Following her graduation she went on to study for a year at the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, a few miles away from her hometown.

**Ans to Q No 5:** The period from 1858-1865 saw some of her most creative years as a poet and her poetry developed from the earlier emotional to a more intensely matured expression of herself.

**Ans to Q No 6:** Emily had penned over three hundred letters to Austin's wife, Sue Gilbert who was also one of her closest friends.

**Ans to Q No 7:** It is necessary to tune into one's soulful side for which one has to be 'spiritually' rather than rationally inclined.

**Ans to Q No 8:** The poet declares that instead of being taken by surprise, she remains indifferent and "unmoved" by approaching chariots as well the kneeling Emperor.

**Ans to Q No 9:** “Then- Close the Valves of her attention, Like Stone”

**Ans to Q No 10:** The American transcendental movement was both a religious and a philosophical movement which began in the early 19th century. Some of the leading figures of the movement were Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller and even Emily Dickinson.



## 3.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

**Q 1:** Discuss the qualities of Emily Dickinson’s poetry.

**Q 2:** Trace the development of Emily Dickinson's poetry from her formative to her more matured years as a poet.

**Q 3:** Explain the following lines with reference to the context:

(a) "The Soul selects her own Society
Then- shuts the Door
To her divine Majority-
Present no more"

(b) "Unmoved-she notes the Chariots- pausing-
At her low Gate-
Unmoved- an Emperor be kneeling, Upon her Mat"

*** ***** ***

# UNIT 4 : EMILY DICKINSON: "THE SOUL SELECTS HER OWN SOCIETY"- II

## UNIT STRUCTURE


4.1 Learning Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 Major Themes

4.4 Other Soul Poems

4.5 Style and Techniques

4.6 Critical Reception

4.7 Let us Sum up

4.8 Further Reading

4.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.10 Model Questions


## 4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- highlight the major themes in relation to the poem
- read through the other Soul poems by Emily Dickinson
- analyse the use of style and language in Dickinson's poetry
- discuss the critical reception of the poet
- appreciate the collection of the Emily Dickinson's poetry

## 4.2 INTRODUCTION

The unit takes up the second part of the discussion on Emily Dickinson's poem "The Soul Selects Her Own Society" highlighting the major aspects of themes, styles and language along with the critical reception of her poetry. Also, it presents some of the selected texts of Dickinson's set of poems which are also referred to as soul poems so that the learner can appreciate the soulful poetry of this incredible American poet that strikes a chord with readers across the world. Let us then take up some of the thematic concerns that are evident in the text of the prescribed poem in the following subsection.

## 4.3 MAJOR THEMES

After a detailed study of the text and explanation of the poem, some of the major themes that clearly emerge from the poem are as discussed below:

**The Superiority of the Soul :**

Through the text of the poem, it is evident that the poet considers the superiority of the immortal soul over and above mortal human existence. Emily Dickinson comes across as a very sensitive poet whose poetry reflects an intensely individual introspection on life and beyond. Dickinson had profound faith in God and her deep reverence for the Divine found a special place in her poetry but she was also in touch with her spiritual side. Some of her inner spiritual convictions and thoughts, particularly, find a clear expression through her 'soul' poems. And somehow, one finds that Dickinson subtly hinted at the magical hand of God behind all that she portrayed and wove in the tapestry of her poems whether, it is Nature around her, the changing seasons, her travelling imagination or the very essence of her being. This analysis is contained in her own words where she captures the secret role of God on the human soul saying: "He fumbles at your Soul/ As Players at the Keys" (poem 315).

In one of her poems - poem 244 of the cited anthology, she also wrote thus: "It is easy to work when the soul is at play- / But when the soul is in pain / The hearing him put his playthings up / Makes work difficult-then-" Thus, one can easily sense her preoccupation with the nature and aspect of human soul. There are several instances when the soul undergoes moments of trials and tribulation, but Dickinson believed that the soul could be triumphant solely through purgation.

**Transcendental Experience :**

The transcendental belief in the spiritual and soulful essence of human beings had greatly influenced the philosophy of 19th century America and it also owed much of its debt to the quintessence of the entire Indian religion and philosophy. Dickinson was inclined towards various metaphysical speculations on life and death, mortality and immortality, the

soul and the being, the real and the transcendent. *The Oxford English Dictionary* describes the word 'metaphysical' as the philosophy which is concerned with abstract ideas such as the nature of existence, truth and knowledge. Thus, such aspects which are beyond the human grasp do tend to challenge the human limits of perception and understanding. In the prescribed poem, we find that the poet is certain about paving her own spiritual journey and discovery of a select society in which the spiritual essence is the sole criteria.

Although Dickinson quitted or gave up attending Church together with the regular religious rituals, sometime during the 1850s, yet she never lost her faith in God. Instead of confining herself to the tenets of religion, she took to free-thinking and much of the transcendental way of thinking. An expression of this can be found in the following lines of the poem (the title of which is the same as the following introductory line: "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church, / I keep it staying at Home- / With a Bobolink for a Chorister- / And an Orchard, for a Dome." This itself reflects her alternate perspective of experiencing God where instead of searching for God within the orthodox confines of the Church, she experience God's divine presence out in the world and everywhere around her. Moreover, her poems also reflect how she could experience the Divine through the very essence of the soul, an assertion of which one can find in the prescribed poem.



**LET US KNOW**

In certain poems in which Dickinson portrayed herself as dressed in 'white' can be regarded as a figurative reflection of her soulful essence. With reference to such self-representations it was said thus: "Dickinson's white blaze is the sign of her soul's triumph. White is the halo she imagines around herself, and white, finally, the hue of all her costumes." Even in real-life, Dickinson wore white dresses and elegant coiffures or hairstyles.

## 4.4 OTHER SOUL POEMS

The six other poems on the theme of soul by Emily Dickinson are: "The Soul's Superior Instants", "The Soul has Bandaged Moments", "The Soul unto Itself", "The Soul that Hath a Guest", "The Soul's Distinct Connection" and "The Soul Should Always Stand Ajar". These poems have been taken from the anthology edited by Thomas H. Johnson and titled as *Emily Dickinson: The Complete Poems*.

The 'respective years' in which the poems were written along with the 'serial numbers', in the order of sequence, as published in *The Complete Poems* are quoted along with the underlined 'title heads'. You will find just a brief idea hinting at the meaning of the selected 'soul poems' at the tail end of the text below.

**(306) (c.1862)**

**The Soul's Superior Instants**

The Soul's Superior instants
Occur to Her alone-
When Friend-and Earth's occasion
Have infinite withdrawn

Or she Herself- ascended
To too remote a Height
For lower Recognition
Than Her Omnipotent

This Mortal Abolition
Is seldom -but as fair
To Autocratic Air-
Eternity's disclosure
To favorites- a few-
Of the Colossal substance
Of immortality

**(512) (c.1890)**

**The Soul has Bandaged Moments**

The Soul has Bandaged moments
When too Appalled to Stir
She felt some ghastly Fright come up
And stop to look at her

Salute her-with ling fingers-
Caress her freezing hair-
Sip, Goblin, from the very lips
The lover-hovered-o'er-
Unworthy, that a thought so mean
Accost a Theme-so-fair-
As apparition-Subject

The Soul has moments of Escape-
When busting all the doors-
She dances like a Bomb, abroad,
And swings upon her Hours.

The one who could repeat the Summer Day-
Were greater than itself-though He
Minutest of Mankind should be-

And He-could reproduce the Sun-
At period of going down-
The lingering-and the Stain-I mean
And staples, in the song.
When Orient have been outgrown-
And Occident-become Unknown-
His Name-remain (pg.144)

As do the Bee-delirious borne-
Long Dungeoned from his Rose
Touch Liberty-then know no more,
But Noon, and Paradise-

The Soul's retaken moments-
When, Felon led along,
With Shackles on the plumed feet,

The Horror welcomes her, again
These, are not brayed of Tongue.
(pg. 250)

**(683) (c. 1863)**

**The Soul Unto Itself**

The Soul unto itself
Is an imperial friend-
Or the most agonizing Spy-
And Enemy- Could send-

Secure against its own-
No treason it can fear-
Itself-its Sovereign-of itself
The Soul Should Stand in
Awe- (pg. 338)

**(674) (c. 1863)**

**The Soul that Hath a Guest**

The Soul that hath a Guest
Doth Seldom go abroad-
Diviner Crowd at Home-
Obliterate the need-

And Courtesy forbid
A Host's departure when
Upon Himself be visiting
The Emperor of Men (pg. 335)

**(974) (c. 1864)**

**The Soul's Distinct Connection**

The Soul's distinct connection
With immortality
Is best disclosed by Danger
Or quick Calamity-

As Lightning on a Landscape

**(1055) (c. 1865)**

**The Soul Should Always Stand Ajar**

The Soul should always stand ajar
That if Heaven inquire
He will not be obliged to wait
Or Shy of troubling her

Depart, before the Host have slid

Exhibits Sheets of Place
Not yet suspected-but for Flash-
And Click- and Suddenness (pg. 455-456)

The Bolt unto the Door
To search for the accomplished Guest
Her Visitor, no more- (pg. 481)

The first poem, "The Soul's Superior Instants" records certain moments when the soul realises its true worth and the omnipotence of Almighty God. The second poem, "The Soul has Bandaged Moments" expresses how the soul has its "Bandaged moments" when preyed on by Fright and the "moments of Escape" when the soul experiences a rush of freedom. The third poem, "The Soul unto Itself" hints at how the soul is her own "Imperial friend" shielded, secured and self-sufficient in her own Sovereignty. The fourth poem, "The Soul that Hath a Guest" perhaps hints at how the soul tends to be preoccupied as a host in the presence of a spiritual Guest. The fifth poem, "The Soul's Distinct Connection" draws the common thread between the Soul and Immortality and the last poem "The Soul Should Always Stand Ajar" symbolically notes the accountability of the Soul to the Heavens after departure into the other world.

## 4.5 STYLE AND TECHNIQUES

The striking quality in Emily Dickinson's poetry is the grace with which she weighs her words because in so little she says so much. A feminine note is ever present in her poetry which is hard to miss. The range of her poetry expresses her inner thoughts and encompasses her wisdom. Emily found solace in nature and poured just about everything under the sun that inspired her into her poetry; be it the early mornings, the fleeting sunsets, the green wilderness, the murmuring trees, the changing seasons, the flowering gardens, the visiting birds and little creatures among other things. There is an earthy feeling that permeates her poetry which can enliven ones senses.

Also, she captured the feelings of a torn heart in wading grief or the soul's ecstasy, the doubts of a staggering mind or the triumphs of realisation, a sense of lost direction or exploration of the new, the glory of supreme God or the gifts of nature, the Majesty of Death or Life in its

myriad hues. Thus, the closest way we can discover the wonderful poet is through the volume of her poems and her personal letters which bore the weight of her subjectivity. This is why she is known as a private poet. Dickinson had a graceful sense of style with regard to poetry and a creative way with words through which she expressed the depth of her thoughts. Her poems were rather short in length and systematically arranged into folders when she wrote and compiled them.

She devised her own 'punctuation' through the wide use of 'dash-marks' or 'dashes' (of different lengths) for different purposes such as causing a break in the flow of verses or creating a musical effect. Also, she took the poetical liberty of using 'capitalisation' in her own way, in order to highlight and emphasise select key-words. Her verses were cast into irregular meters, slant rhymes and broken lines which read like little fragments that provided a certain measure both in pause and rhythm. Most of her poems had rhyming patterns and a musical quality similar to that of the hymns that she learnt as a child. Her poetry unraveled a wide spectrum, enriched with the vivid imagery that was woven into her verses. She had an eye for details combined with an economy of expression.

Here in the poem "The Soul Selects Her Own Society," the element of the soul is personified which is why it is capitalised as 'Soul' and at other places the capitalisation is used for emphasis. She was much inspired by the transcendental movement that took place in America and also widely read the works of the Ralph Waldo Emerson. Thus, it had significant bearings on her approach towards poetry and led her to explore the mystical aspects of the soul and being, death and immortality, God and divinity. If we draw our attention to the other aspects of her poetical language, there is the element of repetition such as "Unmoved-she notes the Chariots- pausing, At her low Gate-, Unmoved- an Emperor be kneeling" which stresses on the aspect of indifference. While the poem is punctuated with dashes, the short phrases also contain a lot of restraint or a measured control that also adds to the element of compression in her poem, which also happens to be her characteristic style.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 1:** How does nature inspire Emily Dickinson?

.....

.....

**Q 2:** Why is Emily Dickinson known as a private poet?

.....

.....

**Q 3:** How did Emily Dickinson device her own punctuation?

.....

.....

## 4.6 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Emily Dickinson may have suffered obscurity as a poet in her lifetime, but her poetry has a timeless appeal and significance for readers across the world. In the critical opinion of Harold Bloom, she stands as one of the major American poets with the likes of poets such as Walt Whitman or Robert Frost. Her reading of literary works by writers like William Shakespeare, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot, Thomas Carlyle, Charlotte and Emily Bronte enriched her creative sensibilities. Following her demise in 1886, her siblings and well-wishers estimated the literary worth of her discovered works and arranged for their publication.

Some of these publications were: *Poems* (1886), *Poems: Second Series* (1896), *Poems: Third Series* (1914), *Further Poems* (1929), *Unpublished Poems* (1936) and *Bolts of Melody: New Poems* (1945) among others. But several of these publications did not retain the complete originality of the poet's work and rather tried to edit them in a way to ease the reader's understanding. But the publication titled *Emily Dickinson: The Complete Poems* (1955) in the form of three volumes edited by Thomas H. Johnson gave readers the original versions of her poems, just as she had written them. This was followed by another precise work by Conrad Aiken who edited *Emily Dickinson's Selected Poems* (1924)

who brought the poet's literary repute to the fore.

If you happen to pick up an important essay titled "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson" by Adrienne Rich you will find a detailed discussion on the creative genius of the poet and the critical nuances in some of her selected representative poems. Rich discusses Dickinson's creative genius and intellectual scholarship and notes how the poet had known that her poems were 'not acceptable' in her time (a reason owing to which she had only published a total of seven poems in her lifetime). Dickinson also had learnt that the poems of Walt Whitman were considered 'disgraceful' and unsuited to the tastes of readers, although she did not subscribe to the same opinion herself. But, you may agree that in the historical canons of literature, often that which is undervalued or unacknowledged in one century receives its due recognition in another. If you carefully reflect on this aspect, you will certainly find your answer.

In her essay, Rich mentions her visit to Amherst where she tried to imagine the presence of the poet in an empty house that was once her (Dickinson's) home, writing thus: "a red-haired woman with hazel eyes and a contralto voice wrote poems about volcanoes, deserts, eternity, suicide, physical passion, wild beasts, rape, power, madness, separation, the daemon, the grave. Here, with a darning-needle, she bound these poems….into booklets secured with a darning-thread to be found and read after her death." Also, Rich elucidates how the poet explored the secret realms of the human mind and considers her a great psychologist who in her words "…began with the material she had at hand: herself. She had to possess the courage to enter, through language, states which most people deny or veil with silence."

Here, was a brilliant woman, a kind of legend who chose to remain unknown and unnoticed during her own lifetime and even after it. She had a gift for poetry which in combination to her soulful sensibilities found an expression through her remarkable poetry. Although, Emily avoided seeing or being seen by others, little gestures of affection could be seen in the form of flowers and letters sent to friends and acquaintances or baskets of gingerbread meant for little children in the neighbourhood, tied to ropes

and let down from her balcony. She was a spiritual person and a soul that could not be tied to the tenets of religion or religious dogma. Her room was her "freedom." She lived a private life that was veiled from public glare and attention. As a young woman she may have been too shy to accede to the request of being photographed but eighty two years after her demise, a postal stamp was issued in her honour in the year 1971 that bore a picture of her. Perhaps, she would have been very embarrassed if she would have known of such a tribute in her name or if she would have simply learnt of her published works, open to readers across the world.

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their seminal book *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (1979) opens up a plethora of discussion on the nineteenth century women writers such as Mary Shelley, Jane Austen, Emily Bronte and George Eliot. It also includes a study of Emily Dickinson's poems in its discussion of the nineteenth century women poets. The final chapter in the book titled "A Woman-White: Emily Dickinson's yarn of Pearl" focuses on the study and critical appreciation of Dickinson's select poems. As the words of the chapter title indicates, unwinding 'yarn of pearl' is the specific artistry of the 'spider'. Dickinson had often used the metaphor of the spider herself in several of her poems where she drew resemblance to the spider as an 'artist' who not only unwounded yarn of pearl in the form of 'poetry' but also wove a mysterious veil around her as a private poet.



## 4.7 LET US SUM UP

After a thorough reading of the poem the learner will be able to highlight its major themes that emerge from the text. Also, you may reflect and discover your own interpretations to add to the poem. The text boxes include certain facets of Dickinson's life and works which shall add to your wider knowledge.

A detailed study will also enable you to analyse the style and language and in general discuss the critical reception of Emily Dickinson's

poetry. The cluster of 'soul poems' by Dickinson provides you with a very brief idea of their basic content and its symbolic meaning. Moreover, a more comprehensive reading of Emily Dickinson's poetry will stir your interest and appreciation of the brilliant poet.



## 4.8 FURTHER READING

1) Susan M. and Susan Gubar. (2000). *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* New Haven and London: Yale Univerity Press

2) Johnson, Thomas H. (1975). *Emily Dickinson: The Complete Poems London*: Faber and Faber.

3) Tandon. Neeru and Anjana Trevedi. (2008). *Thematic Patterns of Emily Dickinson's Poetry*. New Delhi: Atlantic



## 4.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1:** Emily Dickinson found solace in nature and poured just about everything under the sun that inspired her into her poetry; be it the early mornings, the fleeting sunsets, the green wilderness, the murmuring trees, the changing seasons, the flowering gardens, the visiting birds and little creatures among other things.

**Ans to Q No 2:** She captured the feelings of a torn heart in wading grief or the soul's ecstasy, the doubts of a staggering mind or the triumphs of realisation, a sense of lost direction or exploration of the new, the glory of supreme God or the gifts of nature, the Majesty of Death or Life in its myriad hues. Thus, the closest way we can discover the wonderful poet is through the volume of her poems and her personal letters which bore the weight of her subjectivity. This is why she is known as a private poet.

**Ans to Q No 3:** She devised her own 'punctuation' through the wide use of 'dash- marks' or 'dashes' (of different lengths) for different purposes such as causing a break in the flow of verses or creating a musical effect



## 4.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

**Q 1:** Discuss the major themes in the poem "The Soul Selects Her Own Society".

**Q 2:** Briefly discuss the American transcendental movement and its influence in Emily Dickinson's poetry.

**Q 3:** Explain the Emily Dickinson's use of punctuation and the various figures of speech in the poem "The Soul Selects Her Own Society."

**Q 4:** Discuss the critical reception of the nineteenth century American poet Emily Dickinson.

*** ***** ***

# UNIT 5 : LANGSTON HUGHES: "I, TOO, SING AMERICA" – I

## UNIT STRUCTURE


5.1 Learning Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 Langston Hughes: The Poet

5.3.1 His Life

5.3.2 His Works

5.4 Text of the Poem

5.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

5.5 Let us Sum up

5.6 Further Reading

5.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

5.8 Model Questions


## 5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- gain a brief introduction on the trends in African American literature
- discuss the life and works of the American poet Langston Hughes
- explain the text of the poem "I too See America"

## 5.2 INTRODUCTION

The unit introduces you to one of the major poets in the history of American literature. The American poet Langston Hughes was one of the leading voices to have emerged from the literary scene in a racially segregated America of the 1920s. He was an American poet, novelist, dramatist, essayist, columnist, lyricist and a social activist. In his poetry, we find an igniting spark of impassioned fervour combined with a revolutionary zeal towards the cause of Black emancipation in America. The unit contains a representative poem titled "I, too, See America," the lines of which cast a glimmer of the poet's vision and emancipatory spirit.

Both as a poet and as a social activist, Langston Hughes was vocal about the problems of racial segregation and social alienation of the Black people from the American society. Before we read and find out more about the poem, let us gain a brief idea on the trends of African-American literature brought by the major shifts in the respective socio-cultural context. The introduction to the unit will provide you with a brief idea on the intellectual awakening with the arrival of the Black Renaissance and the celebration of Black cultural identity that came with it. Some of the profound leaders who advocated civil rights of the Black people also had a hand in shaping a history that had almost neglected them for centuries. Through some of these turning moments in the history of the Black people, a distinct Black culture and identity received recognition, creating waves in the history of the nation. Let us receive a glimpse of some of these leading movements.

**Harlem Renaissance :**

The 'Harlem Renaissance' is much significant to our study of both the time and context in which Langston Hughes lived and wrote. This socio-cultural movement spanned roughly over a period of three decades from 1918-1937 and encompassed a range of creative and cultural fields. Some of these fields included Black literature, music, art and folk culture. These significant years saw the 'efflorescence' or the flowering of the rich Black cultural heritage that had been overshadowed by centuries of White racial and cultural prejudice. This Renaissance movement was specifically concentrated in Harlem, New York City which also gave its name to the movement. In time, Harlem came to be associated with the intellectual awakening of the black people. Hughes had an affinity towards the cultural hub of Harlem right from his student years. Some of the leading names associated with the movement of Harlem Renaissance are the literary figures namely Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Zora Neale Hurston, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, Jessie Redmon Fauset known together as the "Niggerati Writers"; and the writers W.E.B. Du Bois Alain LeRoy Locke and James Weldon Johnson known as the "New Negro Intellectuals" among others.

**American Civil Rights Movement :**

The Harlem Renaissance also propelled the African American Civil Rights Movement during the late 1960s. The Civil Rights Movement was a major movement in the history of America that aimed at ending widespread racial segregation and discrimination of the Blacks in the White-dominated American society and protecting the Constitutional rights of Black citizens in America. Langston Hughes in his manifesto titled "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1926) stated that it was necessary to develop the Black arts by resisting dependence on the standards of White aesthetics. Such a development in practice saw the appealing elements of folk and oral traditions introduced in diverse fields that significantly included a distinct form of Black Literature.

**Influence of Jazz in Poetry :**

During this time, Langston experimented and infused jazz rhythms in his poetry. This blending of jazz music and poetry came to be known as 'jazz poetry' which became a popular African-American literary practice during the Harlem Renaissance. Jazz music like jazz poetry was Hughes' food for soul. He listened to records, encouraged jazz combinations, worked with jazz musicians, frequented nightclubs which played jazz music and even practiced jazz poetry. He wrote in "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" thus "...jazz to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America; the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul- the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world, a world of subway trains, and work, work, work; the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile."

Jazz poetry is closely associated with Langston Hughes who had a gift for music and wrote not just musical poetry but other musical pieces such as operas, musicals and cantatas. The birth of 'jazz' culture and particularly jazz music can be traced to America. With the flourishing form of jazz music and evolving poetry during the 1920s, the fusion of the two resulted in jazz poetry. It is difficult to define jazz music which itself has diverse forms and improvisations within its own ambit. It had developed from the work songs of African American slave and plantation

workers in the form of Blues music.

**Black Arts and Aesthetic Movements :**

The American nation can be considered as a pot-pourri of cultures which are characterised by their eclecticism and uniqueness. The Black Arts Movement started alongside the black freedom struggle in around the 1960s. The defining characteristics of the movement were the revival of the black arts which were politically charged and expressive of the angst and potential of the revolutionary black artists. With this new whizz in artistic activities and widespread awareness through various forms of media, the movement had gained much ground. The television, radio, public advertisements, newspapers, magazines like the *Umbra Magazine* and significant journals like *The Liberator, The Crusader, Freedomways* and *Black World* etc. propelled the movement to a great extent. The movement began in several places but was somewhat centered in intellectual hubs or circles of New York and Harlem.

The black arts movement encompassed all forms of art and culture, particularly music, theatre, dance, visual arts, poetry and literature. Several formal institutes and organisations had sprung up across the nation, in a bid to reeducate and enrich people's knowledge on the rich black arts and culture. One such institution was the first Black Arts Repertoire Theatre School set by Amiri Baraka in 1964 following which many other such formal institutes had come up. Significantly the Harlem Writers' Guild was a major pool of black poets, writers and intellectuals. The guild was formed by writer John O' Killens and included black writers such as Maya Angelou, Sarah Wright, Rosa Guy and Jean Carey Bond among others. Thus, the study of arts and aesthetics became a way of gaining consciousness and a form of liberation through expressions of creativity. The Black Aesthetic movement was a similar movement but it was separatist in its vision in that it believed in excluding all forms of dominant white culture, their standards and stereotypes. This movement began in the mid 1960s and lasted just about a decade. It included poets and writers such as Rita Dove, Amiri Baraka, Gwendolyn Brooks, Henry Dumas, Larry Neal among others.

Before we explore the text of the poem, "I, too, See America", let us gain an insight into the revolutionary and eventful life of one of the leading African American intellectual, Langston Hughes in the following subsections.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 1:** a. When is the Harlem Renaissance considered to have begun?

.....

.....

b. Name some of the fields that had developed during this socio-cultural movement.

.....

.....

**Q 2:** Make a list of some of the leading names associated with the Harlem Renaissance.

.....

.....

**Q 3:** Define the American Civil Rights movement.

.....

.....

**Q 4:** What is meant by jazz poetry?

.....

.....

## 5.3 LANGSTON HUGHES: THE POET

Langston Hughes was considered as the "people's poet", black "poet laureate and black peoples', "Shakespeare in Harlem" who not only stood as an representative of the black community but also as the pride of the American nation at large. He was very vocal on the prevalent racial issues of his time and harboured a true love for his people. A glance at his life and literary contributions will unravel the society and times that

Hughes lived in. It will also bring the racial, socio-cultural and political conditions of the 1990s into the picture. These issues and discourses are relevant to our study as they have a major influence on American literature. Thus, we cannot study any of the American poets or writers in isolation and will do well to study them in the light of these associated factors.

### 5.3.1 His Life

In the following sections, we will trace and explore the life and career of Langston Hughes. The captioned headings will highlight the development of Hughes from his early childhood to his younger days, his education to his brilliant career, his personality and his achievements.

**Family and Childhood:**

James Mercer Langston Hughes (1February 1902- 22 May 1967) better known as Langston Hughes was born to Caroline Mercer Langston and James Nathaniel Hughes in Joplin, Missouri in New York City. He was mostly raised by his maternal grandmother Mary Patterson Langston, in Lawrence, Kansas, where he spent his early years as a child. Hughes belonged to a family of mixed ancestry of African American, White and Native American descent. His grandmother had a mixed ancestry i.e., African American, Native American, French and English ancestry and was married to Lewis Sheridan Leary who was of a mixed descent as well. After Leary's demise, she was remarried to the Abolitionist, Charles Henry Langston who was again an African-American, Native and European-American by descent and father to Caroline Mercer Langston. Langston Hughes took after both his maternal surname of 'Langston' and paternal surname of 'Hughes.' The Hughes were a reputed family and his grandfather had significant contributions to the abolitionist movement through his involvement with the Ohio Anti-slavery Society in 1858 and the campaigns for socio-political rights of the Blacks in America.

**Family Matters and Early Education:**

His father, James Nathaniel Hughes was estranged from the family and had legally separated from his mother. During this time, his father left the family to settle in Mexico as racism was rampant in America and his single mother took to travelling in search of new job opportunities. Thus, in the absence of his parents, Hughes had to pull through a difficult phase as a young boy. Although he suffered moments of loneliness in Kansas, yet he dealt with this crisis by diverting his mind towards reading literature. When his grandmother passed away, he moved in with his family friends, for a period of two years. He later joined his mother who was remarried and settled in Cleveland, Ohio. There he joined a grammar school where he graduated in the year 1920, following which he took a break to visit his father in Mexico. The father-son relationship was far too strained to improve and it turned worse when the young man was burdened with his father's unrealistic expectations with regard to his future career.

**Higher Education and Career:**

Hughes' father had decided to fund his education provided he studied to become an engineer but the young man's sensibilities were different and he was interested in the humanities with a desire to be a writer. After having given into his father's arrangement to study engineering at Columbia University, he chose to discontinue his studies after completing a year in 1921, owing to the prevalant racial prejudice. With this abrupt break in his studies, he began to look for new work opportunities and found work as a crew member in a vessel that took him to Europe in the year 1923. Thereafter, he returned home to his mother who had moved to Washington, D.C in 1924. There, he joined a black university known as Lincoln University in Pennsylvania where he completed his graduation. You may note that for a Black American in any kind of formal institution, whether an educational or a work-place, it was much difficult to find an equal footing in the White

dominated American society. Thus, for the average black citizen life meant a series of continuous struggle. It really did not matter that the American society was free from slavery as the seeds of prejudice were sown deep in the psyche of the Whites.

Hughes was a widely travelled-person who received several opportunities to visit Russia, Spain, China. In the year 1937, he even travelled to Spain as a war correspondent for various newspapers and was associated with several communist organisations such as the League of Struggle for Negro Rights. Also he was a visiting lecturer at Atlanta University in 1947 and University of Chicago Laboratory Schools in 1949.

**Death and Honour:**

Hughes breathed his last at the age of 65 on May 22, 1967 owing to a critical surgery while suffering from prostrate cancer. In his honour and fond memory, his ashes were laid beneath a designed floor-medallion in the entrance hall of the Arthur Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem. The floor-medallion contains a design of an African cosmogram with the engraved line: "My soul has grown deep like the rivers".

During his lifetime, Langston Hughes received several honours and awards for his varied contributions to the literature and socio-cultural life of America. Hughes received the Spingarn Medal for distinguished achievements by an African American (1960) from the NAACP. He received an honorary doctorate from Howard University (1963) and two honorary post-doctorates from Lincoln University (1943) and Western Reserve University (1964). The City College of New York had instituted the Langston Hughes Medal in 1973. In his honour Hughes' Harlem residence had received the New York City Landmark status in 1981 and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982. Interestingly, a postage stamp of Hughes was issued by the United States Postal Service and added to the Black Heritage series of postage stamps in 2002. The representations of his life have

been adapted for several film and stage productions.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 5:** Who is considered as the "people's poet" and why?

.....

.....

**Q 6:** What is the complete name of Langston Hughes?

.....

.....

**Q 7:** What was the condition on which Hughes' father decided to fund his higher education?

.....

.....

**Q 8:** Why was life difficult for the average Black citizen?

.....

.....

**Q 9:** Briefly describe the design of the floor medallion for Hughes in the Arthur Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

.....

.....

### 5.3.1 His Works

Hughes is considered as one of the major poets in American Literature. He was a poet and versatile writer who was very much at ease writing and experimenting with various literary forms as discussed in the following section.

**Literary Vision and Early Interests:**

Langston Hughes literary vision and aim was in his own words "to explain and illuminate the Negro condition in America and obliquely that of all human kind." He had a flair for poetry right from his school days when he was also elected class poet at Grammar School owing to his natural sense of rhythm. He also

dabbled in writing while in high school, a time when he contributed to the school newspaper, yearbook and began penning his first literary pieces in the form of poetry, short-stories and plays. This is when strains of jazz poetry found an expression through his poem "When Sue Wears Red." He is acknowledged for his fusion of jazz music into poetry, a form that has a strong musical impact on the reader and the listener.

Prior to taking up writing as a career, the young Hughes had a string of various jobs and even as he found work with the historian Carter G. Woodson as a personal assistant, to devote his full time in writing. It was where his heart was set right from the start and a chance meeting with the poet, Vachel Lindsay who discovered his talent for poetry, had encouraged him to follow his interests. That was the making of a profound poet and writer whose literary works capture and represent the life and struggle of his people and the celebration of the rich Black cultural heritage. Much through his literary works, he voiced his protests against White prejudice, racial discrimination and the disturbing socio-political conditions in America. He came to profoundly influence the Harlem Renaissance in a bid to instill black pride in his people and to celebrate their rich cultural heritage. The range of his works came to include various literary genres such as poetry, fiction, non-fiction, autobiographies, short stories, prose, plays, screenplays, operas, music and children's literature.

**Beginning with Poetry:**

Hughes was greatly influenced by the black poets like Paul Laurence Dunbar, Claude McKay and others such as Carl Sandburg and Walt Whitman. His passion for jazz and blues in combination with his poetical expression and social concerns saw the creation of his first major anthologies, *The Weary Blues* (1926) and *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927) which also established him as a powerful voice of the Harlem Renaissance. His poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" which found a place in his first volume

of poetry came to be considered as his signature poem. Some of his other significant anthologies of poetry are: *The Negro Mother and Other Dramatic Recitations* (1931), *Dear Lovely Death* (1931), *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* (1932), *Let America Be America Again* (1938), *Shakespeare in Harlem* (1942), *Freedom's Plow* (1943), *Fields of Wonder* (1947), *One-Way Ticket* (1949), *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951), *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz* (1961) and *The Panther and the Lash: Poems of Our Times* (1967).

**Experiments with Various Literary Forms:**

He received the patronage of Charlotte Mason to write his first novel titled *Not Without Laughter* (1930) which won the Harmon Gold Medal for literature in the same year. And under the patronage of Noel Sullivan, came up with his first collection of short stories called *The Ways of White Folks* (1934) again expressing his concerns on race relations. Some of other novels and short story collections are: *Simple Speaks His Mind* (1950), *Laughing to Keep from Crying* (1952), *Simple Takes a Wife* (1953), *Simple Stakes a Claim* (1957), *Tambourines to Glory* (1958),*The Best of Simple* (1961), *Something in Common and Other Stories* (1963) and *Simple's Uncle Sam* (1965).

Hughes' wrote his autobiographies *The Big Sea* (1940) and *I Wonder as I Wander* (1956) under the kind patronage of his best friend and writer Arna Bontemps and friend Carl Van Vechten respectively. Some of his other non-fictional works are *Famous American Negroes* (1954), *Famous Negro Music Makers* (1955), *A Pictorial History of the Negro in America* (co-authored with Milton Meltzer) (1956), *Famous Negro Heroes of America* (1958), and *Fight for Freedom: The Story of the NAACP* (1962) which were centered on the real concerns, struggles and achievements of the Black community.

The 'New York Suitcase Theater' based in Los Angeles was co-founded by Hughes along with the playwright Paul Peters in

1931 and established 'The Skyloft Players' in Chicago a decade later in 1941,aiming to provide scope and encouragement to black playwrights. He had a keen interest in working for films. Some of his major plays are *Mule Bone* (with Zora Neale Hurston) (1931), *Mulatto* (1935), *Troubled Island* (with William Grant Still) (1936), *Little Ham* (1936), *Emperor of Haiti* (1936), *Don't You Want to be Free?* (1938), *Tambourines to Glory* (1956), *Simply Heavenly* (1957), *Black Nativity* (1961) and *Jericho-Jim Crow* (1964).

Hughes wrote a series of books for children such as: *Popo and Fifina* (with Arna Bontemps) (1932), *The First Book of the Negroes* (1952), *The First Book of Jazz* (1954), *Marian Anderson: Famous Concert Singer* (with Steven C. Tracy) (1954), *The First Book of Rhythms* (1954), *The First Book of the West Indies* (1956), *First Book of Africa* (1964) and *Black Misery* (1969).

**Awards and Recognition:**

Hughes widely contributed his writings in several journals and magazines, particularly, *The Crisis* and was instrumental in creation of the *Fire* magazine with the likes of Countee Cullen, Zora Neale Hurston, Wallace Thurman and a few other leading intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance. He was a part of the editorial board of the literary magazine known as *Common Ground* and his contribution to the weekly column in *Chicago Defender* for twenty long years in 1942 became one of his most countable literary achievements. The Harlem character of 'Jesse B. Semple' became one of his famous creations. Among his literary awards and recognitions are the Witter Bynner Undergraduate Poetry Prize (1926), a Guggenheim Fellowship (1935), a Rosenwald Fund fellowship (1941) and the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award (1954). The literary archives of Hughes' letters and manuscripts among several other works document are housed in the Library of Yale University.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 10:** What was Langston Hughes' literary vision?

.....

.....

**Q 11:** Name some of the poets and writers who had influenced Langston Hughes.

.....

.....

**Q 12:** Which poem is considered as Hughes' signature poem?

.....

.....

**Q 13:** What were the names of Hughes' two autobiographies?

.....

.....

**Q 14:** a. What was one of the most countable literary achievements of Langston Hughes?

.....

.....

b. Which character was one of his famous creations?

.....

.....

## 5.4 TEXT OF THE POEM

The poem "I, too, Sing America" is taken from Hughes first collection of poetry titled The Weary Blues which was published in 1926. Although, the poem is rather short and compact in its structure, it stands as a powerful expression of both racial and national pride, bearing a powerful impact on the reader's mind. He wrote the poem just before his return to America from Europe when he was denied passage on a ship for being a black man. You may well imagine how hurtful, humiliating and

unfair it must have been for the many black people who suffered discrimination in multiple ways like Hughes himself. This psychological angst finds an expression through the poem that answers the dip in the balance of American justice and socio-politics. Read the text of the poem and try to figure out its symbolism to see how best you grasp the message in it, in the light of the preceding discussions of the poem.

**"I, too, Sing America"**

I, too, sing America.
I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed-

I, too, am America.

### 5.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

After going through the text of the poem, you will perhaps be able to locate it in the context of the discussions already made

in the introduction and in the next unit featuring some of the major themes. Let us, explore it in details by dividing it into several parts for the ease of reference:

**Line 1**

**"I, too, sing America."**

The introductory line reads like a statement that asserts the fact that the poet 'also' sings the national anthem. The American national anthem like any other is an expression of the collective identity and unity of the nation. It voices the patriotism, pride, honour, dreams, aspirations and the admiration of millions of American citizens. The very act of singing the national anthem represents the voice of all the citizens and their birthright in their own home-land. But, if you re-read the first line of the poem, you will also find a note of resentment. The very use of "I" implies a form of self-assertion if you note the line. But, you will realise that it is not just the poet's voice alone but also the representative voice of the larger African American or black community of America. The introductory line and the title are the same and are symbolical as the national anthem is much more than a harmonious composition or song. The words of an anthem have a deeper meaning and bear nation wide relevance to the citizens living together as one family.

**Line2-7**

**"I am the darker brother.**
**They send me to eat in the kitchen**
**When company comes,**
**But I laugh,**
**And eat well,**
**And grow strong."**

Thus, through the preceding lines, we find that the poet identifies himself as the "darker" brother or rather represents the brotherhood amongst the black and white communities. The use of the word 'darker' itself denotes that it is already an implied

comparison to white people who have silenced and segregated his people. This is symbolically expressed through the image of a black person who is sent away to the kitchen when guests arrive. This represents the relegation of the black people to the margins of the society and the nation. Yet, such a person is shown to emerge stronger out of any such injustice or humiliation meted out to him, just as the black people have done right from their historical struggle to their emancipation. Thus, we are presented with the image of a healthy, joyful and resilient black individual who emerges from all the trials and tribulations to turn even a set-back into a phenomenon of self-revival.

**Line 8-15**

**"Tomorrow,**
**I'll be at the table**
**When company comes.**
**Nobody'll dare**
**Say to me,**
**"Eat in the kitchen,"**
**Then."**

The next few lines express the optimism and confidence of the poet to overcome any form of step-brotherly treatment towards him. Without hesitation he asserts that he would find his rightful place at the family table instead of having to eat in the kitchen. None of his family members would dare to humiliate and separate him from their company. The image of the table here symbolises the American nation and sitting at the table represents equal participation at every level with equal opportunities, freedom from all forms of restraints, exercising one's birthrights and living with dignity. These lines embody the hope and aspirations of the black people who have suffered as "secondary citizens" in a nation that was suppose to uphold the equality promised in the Declaration of Independence.

**Line 16-18**

**"Besides,**

**They'll see how beautiful I am**

**And be ashamed-"**

The closing lines of the poem reveal much optimism through the image of the black individual who is confident of his identity. He says that "they" referring to his family members who would respect his difference and acknowledge both his inner and outer worth. It represents how the black people will no more live in injustice, humiliation and suffering of racial prejudices. The black people would be the equal partakers of freedom and dignity for which their forefathers had equally fought for. Thus, these last lines exude the confidence of the poet who envisions the bright future of his people which was close at hand. The poet asserts that the day was not far when their white counterparts would realise the beauty of the black people. It is a clear assertion that they would no more bear being reduced to a mere colour or remain subject to the prejudices of the colour-bar that had divided the entire nation. It almost echoes the 1900s concept of "black is beautiful." Also the last line adds the factor of shame waiting for their white counterparts who had the upper hand and control of the nation's history for far too long. The poet asserts his faith that black people would rise up to their own aspirations and be a phenomenon in the nation's history. After ages of historical struggle and suffering, they would soon be the ones to have the last laugh.



## 5.5 LET US SUM UP

After having completed the study of the introductory unit to the course of American Literature, you will be well versed with the historical, racial, socio-cultural and political discourses of America. In the light of

these brief highlighted inputs, you have received a brief introduction on the developing trends of Africa American literature. The unit will familiarise you to the eventful life and literary contributions of the American poet Langston Hughes and the selected poem "I, Too See America." The learner will also be able to discuss the text of the poem in detail.



## 5.6 FURTHER READING

1) Andrews, William L., Frances Smith Foster and Trudier Harris. (eds.) (1997). *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature.* New York: Oxford University Press

Website: www. encyclopedia.com



## 5.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q 1 No:** a. The socio-cultural movement of Harlem Renaissance roughly spanned over a period of three decades from 1918-1937 and encompassed a range of creative and cultural fields.

b. Some of these fields included Black literature, music, art and folk culture.

**Ans to Q No 2:** Some of the leading names associated with the movement of Harlem Renaissance are the literary figures namely Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Zora Neale Hurston, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, Jessie Redmon Fauset known together as the "Niggerati Writers"; and the writers W.E.B. Du Bois Alain LeRoy Locke and James Weldon Johnson known as the "New Negro Intellectuals" among others.

**Ans to Q No 3:** The Civil Rights Movement was a major movement in the history of America that aimed at ending widespread racial

segregation and discrimination of the Blacks in the White-dominated American society and protecting the Constitutional rights of Black citizens in America.

**Ans to Q No 4:** This blending of jazz music and poetry came to be known as 'jazz poetry' which became a popular African American literary practice during the Harlem Renaissance.

**Ans to Q No 5:** Langston Hughes was considered as the "people's poet" who not only stood as a representative of the black community but also as the pride of the American nation at large.

**Ans to Q No 6:** James Mercer Langston Hughes.

**Ans to Q NO 7:** Hughes' father had decided to fund his education provided he studied to become an engineer but the young man's sensibilities were different and he was interested in the humanities with a desire to be a writer.

**Ans to Q No 8:** For the average black citizen life meant a series of continuous struggle. It really did not matter that the American society was free from slavery as the seeds of prejudice were sown deep in the psyche of the Whites.

**Ans to Q No 9:** The floor-medallion contains a design of an African cosmogram with the engraved line: "My soul has grown deep like the rivers".

**Ans to Q No 10:** Langston Hughes literary vision and aim was in his own words "to explain and illuminate the Negro condition in America and obliquely that of all human kind."

**Ans to Q No 11:** Hughes was greatly influenced by the black poets like Paul Laurence Dunbar, Claude McKay and others such as Carl Sandburg and Walt Whitman

**Ans to Q No 12:** Hughes' poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" which found a place in his first volume of poetry came to be considered as his signature poem.

**Ans to Q No 13:** Hughes' autobiographies were: *The Big Sea* (1940) and *I Wonder as I Wander* (1956).

**Ans to Q No 14:** a. One of Hughes' most countable literary achievements was his contribution to the weekly column in *Chicago Defender* for twenty long years in 1942.

b. The Harlem character of 'Jesse B. Semple' became one of his famous creations.



## 5.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

**Q 1:** Write short notes on the following:

a. The Harlem Renaissance

b. The American Civil Rights Movement

c. Literary vision and early interests of Langston Hughes

d. Black arts and aesthetic movements

**Q 2:** Give a detailed biography of the American poet Langston Hughes.

**Q 3:** Discuss the literary contributions of the American poet Langston Hughes

**Q 4:** Explain the poem "I, too Sing America" and the relevance of its title.

*** ***** ***

# UNIT 6 : LANGSTON HUGHES: "I, TOO, SING AMERICA"- II

## UNIT STRUCTURE


6.1 Learning Objectives

6.2 Introduction

6.3 Major Themes

6.4 Some of the Significant Poems

6.5 Style and Techniques

6.6 Critical Reception

6.7 Let us Sum up

6.8 Further Reading

6.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

6.10 Model Questions


## 6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- interpret some of the major themes pertaining to the poem
- analyse the style and language of the poet
- gain an insight into the critical reception of the poet
- appreciate the fervour and passion that emerges through the poetry of Langston Hughes

## 6.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the second part of the poem "I too Sing America" in which the themes, style and language together with the critical reception shall be discussed. Let us then begin by taking a look at the thematic concerns that are evident in the poetry of Langston Hughes as they are also telling of the socio-political and cultural concerns that defined black identity and the struggle for true freedom in America.

## 6.3 MAJOR THEMES

After reading through the text of the poem and the given explanation of the poem "I, too Sing America", we find the emerging themes reflecting the discourse of race, racial prejudice and national integrity which is closely knitted with the theme of celebration of black identity, culture and experience.

**Race, Racial Prejudice and the National Integrity :**

The concept of 'race' is a very complex and the can be considered as a hardened social construct. The term came into wide-use during the slave period of early seventeenth century which categorised people of a particular stock or breed especially with regard to their colour. History is witness to the fact that for several centuries, the black race defined generations of slaves. Langston Hughes' grandmother Mary Langston taught him to respect his racial and cultural identity from a very early age. But as a young boy, he was much perplexed to find that his father, with whom he shared a strained relationship, had a sense of dislike for his own people.

Drawing from his own early experiences, Hughes was very conscious of the problems that crowded and delimited the lives of Black people. And like his contemporaries, Hughes in his literary works represented the burning problems of race and racial prejudice, violation of basic rights and injustice, the disadvantaged poor and the black working classes along with the aspirations and potential of his people. He believed that it was time for his people to harness their talents and potential and to gain consciousness of these problems instead of suffering them in silence. The 'colour bar' as the Americans termed it or rather the stereotyped racial prejudices based on skin-colour was prevalent at that time, which made the black Americans feel discriminated, humiliated and hated by the Whites.

Imagine, how dehumanising and humiliating it is to be discriminated simply on the basis of one's skin colour that represents one's racial affiliation. This was heavily criticised by the black writers and Hughes

significantly came up with a write up titled "The Negro and Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1926) that was published in *The Nation :*

"The younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly, too. The tom-tom cries, and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain free within ourselves."

Later, this came to be considered as the manifesto for the Black people who began to realise the truths contained in that significant message and to celebrate the concept of "black is beautiful." He carried a sense of optimism with regard to his own people who were strong, talented and resilient. For the same reason, we find a sense of racial pride and optimism in his words "[w]e build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how…" He believed in the idea of black individuals being truly 'free' from any sense of inferiority and insecurity in his own nation. And further he saw the possibilities of racial integration by drawing the commonalities of black experience across the nation of America and beyond. This idea also inspired several writers of various nationalities such as Leopold Senghor, Aime Cesaire and Jacques Roumain among others. It also propelled the 'Negritude Movement' in France. Thus, through the weight of his literary works together with his social activism, he became widely known across the world and continued to inspire the new generations of black writers.

Through the poem, "I, too, Sing America", Hughes takes up these bitter-sweet experiences of history and implies the undercurrent of widespread of race, racial prejudice and the disintegration of national integrity. At the core of the poem is the message that the black people would claim the dignity that had been denied for far too long. The black people were compelled to live on the margins of American society for centuries devoid of human rights and justice. And that America would emerge stronger only when her citizens would transcend the racial

prejudices and uphold their national integrity and identity.

**Celebration of Black Identity, Culture and Experience :**

The Black Renaissance, the artistic and aesthetic movements were some of the major events in American history which gave rise to expressions of the black consciousness and brought waves of revolution in America. At the core of all the revolutionary movements whether cultural, artistic or the socio-political was the assertion of 'black identity' which had been historically denied to the black people right from the slave period when their black predecessors were silenced, suppressed, dominated, controlled, disciplined, marginalised, trapped and exploited by the dominant whites. Together all these major movements established the significance of their identity and experience together with their aspirations and tremendous potential.

Although, an Amendment XIV of the American Constitution in 1968 promised equal rights and protection to the black citizens of America, widespread racism could not be wiped out easily from America. In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court had declared that the access to public facilities were to be kept equal but maintained separate for the whites and the blacks until the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) challenged it in 1950. In fact, it was only in 1954 that the Supreme Court had decided to rule out school segregation.

You will be startled to know that the whites were completely intolerant of the blacks who were considered inferior and had laws and policies in place that would segregate or keep out the black people from the privileges and advantages that they enjoyed. To cite a few examples, any public places or organisations such as schools, libraries, playgrounds, churches, work-places, localities, parks, hotels, restaurants, shopping centres and even public facilities such as drinking fountains or transportation were clearly divided between the whites and the blacks. This was particularly due to the enforcement of the Jim Crow laws which even affected political parties, trace unions businesses and properties among others. Segregation along the lines of race and colour was a complex phenomenon that gradually declined with the coming of Civil

Rights Act in 1964 and Voting Rights Act in 1965.

Thus, you can imagine the long stretch of time and struggle that was required in order to establish the stake and identity of the black people. The celebration of the black identity and experience finds a major expression through black arts and literature. Hughes published a poem titled "My People" in The Crisis, 1923 which reflected the profound sense of solidarity and admiration towards his own people in these following celebratory lines:

"The night is beautiful,
So the faces of my people.
The stars are beautiful,
So the eyes of my people
Beautiful, also, is the sun.
Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people."

This is also echoed in the poem "I, too, Sing America" where the poet symbolically expresses how beautiful the black people are in every way. The poem is presented in the form of a self-examination or self-realisation, rather it is in the form of a self-assertion where the poet asserts the beauty of the black race and their collective identity, culture and experience. The black people had resisted the forces of history with their perseverance and resilience to finally establish their worth which was nothing short of a collective triumph and celebration.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 1:** What is meant by the colour-bar?

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**Q 2:** What was at the core of the black revolutionary movements?

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**Q 3:** State the full form of the abbreviation NAACP.

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## 6.4 SOME OF THE SIGNIFICANT POEMS

A study on these selected and widely antholgised poems of Langston Hughes will reveal some of the pertinent issues already discussed above, such as the bottled up angst of the Black Americans in the poem "Harlem", the internalisation of dehumanising racial prejudices in "You and Your Whole Race" and racial pride in "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" to mention a few. Read through the following poems and try to discover both the hidden and the outwardly expressed messages in their core.

**Harlem**

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore-
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over-
Like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags
Like a heavy load.
Or does it explode?

**You and Your Whole Race**

You and your whole race.
Look down upon the town in which
you live
And be ashamed.
Look down upon white folks
And upon yourselves
And be ashamed
That such supine poverty exists
There,
That such stupid ignorance breeds children there
Behind such humble shelters of

despair-
That you yourselves have not the
sense to care
Nor the manhood to stand up
And say
I dare you to come one step nearer,
Evil world,
With the hands of greed seeking to
Touch my throat, I dare you to
come one step nearer me:
When you can say that
you will be free!

**The Negro Speaks of Rivers**

I've known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the
world and older than the flow of
human blood in human veins.
My soul has grown deep like the
Rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when
Dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it
Lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised
The pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi
When Abe Lincoln went down to
New Orleans, and I've seen its
muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.

The first poem, "Harlem" records the long deferred dream of the black people who are overburdened with the pressures of living on the margins of American society and are demoralised with their share of sufferings. The images of the poem such as the sun-dried raisin, festered sore, stinking rotten meat and overpowering syrupy sweet define the kind of extremities of sufferings experienced by the black people. The second poem, "You and Your Whole Race" contains a message for his people to awaken from their indifference towards their sufferings and degeneration. It is almost like a wake-up call to his people to march towards freedom from their own despair and disillusionment. The third poem, expresses a sense of affiliation to the larger community of black people across the borders of the nation and a sense of pride in the very idea of racial integration. The line "My soul has grown deep like the Rivers" is a beautiful way of expressing the depth of the black soul that has remained resilient across the changing times and painful experiences of history.

## 6.5 STYLE AND TECHNIQUES

Hughes was a rare poet and a pioneer of modern black literature with a distinct style of poetical expression and experimentation that was unique to him alone. He was also one of the first poets to have used Black folk rhythms to suit his free verses such as jazz and blues as well as, black spirituals and gospels. Also, he employed the everyday dialect of his people in most of his works in order to capture their regular expressions of their experiences. His poetry is embedded with striking metaphors, regular idioms, sharp irony and musical improvisations that create and attest his distinct poetical caliber which is at once optimistic and at the same time powerful and revolutionary in spirit. His poems are widely anthologised and memorable lines from his poetry oft-quoted such as: "Hold fast to dreams/For if dreams die/ Life is a broken winged bird/ That cannot fly"; "My soul has grown deep like the rivers"; What happens to a dream deferred?" or "Life is for the living/ Death is for the dead/ Let life be a music/ And death a note unsaid" among many other such poetical quotes.

In his essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1926) Hughes mentioned that his poetry featured the lives and experiences of the ordinary black individuals who knew no better than to "have their hip or gin on Saturday nights and [were] not too important to themselves or their community, or too well fed, or too learned to watch the lazy world go round." Given his lineage and his own experiences, he was very sensitive towards the issues of race and had an inclination towards leftist ideology. Hughes had also focused on working in the area of black folk tradition and in 1926 collected much of his resources in the South along with black folklorist and women writer, Zora Neale Hurston.

In his own words, "an artist must be free to choose what he does, certainly, but he must also never be afraid to do what he might choose." Some of his early influences were his early reading of W.E.B Du Bois' *The Souls of the Black Folk* and his love for the poetry of Carls Sandburg, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Edgar Lee Masters, Theodore Dreiser among others. Hughes wrote, "I felt the masses of our people had as much in their lives to put into books as did those more fortunate ones who had been born with some means..." The poet Arna Bontemps wrote "[n]o one loved [blacks] as Langston Hughes did." Throughout the body of Hughes' literary works we find his concerns on race relations, racial pride, black experience, rich black cultural traditions and a unified vision for their future strongly expressed through the message of hope and optimism.

The poem "I, Too Sing America" is almost like a window to the black soul that longs for emancipation in every sense of the word. It is written in the form of self-assertion and is structured in just a few short phrases and economy of words. It contains a number of metaphors and images that bear symbolical meaning both at the microcosmic and macrocosmic level. This is to mean that when the lines are literally interpreted they express the silent suffering of a black slave relegated and confined to the kitchen area and not allowed in the company of white folks at the family table. This becomes a literal description of the white household where the black servants are merely meant to be the domestic help without any other role suited to them. Thus, it is the presentation of

the black experience at the microcosmic level in that it is a picture of the suffering and the overcoming of humiliation by a suffering black person.

Similarly, it also stands for something larger in that it represents much more than one's literal imagination and understanding. To amplify or elaborate the macrocosmic representation of the poet, we must look through the symbolical images. It represents a wider canvas of a white dominated nation where the struggling black people are meant to live on the margins of the nation being unequal and unworthy of participating in the national affairs. But the black people envision their bright future of excelling in everyway, of being at par or competent with their white counterparts and claiming their rightful place of being equal citizens of the American nation. The dignity and welfare of the black people was crushed under the weight of the white dominion and injustice for centuries which was ought to put the white race into utter shame.

The discourses of racial domination, segregation and exploitation are presented in an interestingly crisp manner through the compact structure of the poem. The use of symbols is a way of representing different poetical ideas or concepts in a creatively interesting manner which is again similar to the use of metaphors that compare and juxtapose two dissimilar images. In just a few words, the poet conjures up both a literal and a symbolical representation of the poem. Through the use of symbols and metaphorical devices, the poet expresses a range of ideas, emotions and beliefs. Some of these symbolical and metaphorical devices in the poem are the act of singing- that represents a collective participation; America- that represents more than just an anthem and stands for national identity and integrity; darker brother- that represents the black people at large; kitchen- the margins of nation and society; company- stands for the fellow white people who are considered at par with each other etc.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 4:** Briefly discuss the distinct poetical style and expression of the poet Langston Hughes.

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**Q 5:** Name few of the early literary influences on Langston Hughes.

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## 6.6 CRITICAL RECEPTION

The literary appeal and revolutionary impact of Langston Hughes inspired the new generations of black writers in the mid-1950s and 1960s. He believed that the new black writers were to articulate and pursue their concerns of racial issues through rather impersonal expressions. Although, many black writers considered him as a 'racial chauvinist', yet someone who displayed extreme support to only the black people and his works as irrelevant with the gradual racial integration, the poet had a true sense of love and solidarity towards his people. He provided new openings to many upcoming black writers through his good advice, introducing them to literary circles and publishing communities. The black women writer Alice Walker was one such bundle of talent who was discovered by Hughes whom she considered a hero and champion of the black people.

Arnold Rampersad who co-edited the Selected Letters of Langston Hughes with David Roessel and Christa Fratantoro, opined Hughes to be "an inveterate letter writer" and had the experience of searching for the significant letters from among thousands of letters, penned by him during his lifetime. The significant literary critic and biographer Arnold Rampersad's first critical volume *The Life of Langston Hughes* published in 1986 was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, His second volume with the same title was published in the year 1988. He held another black woman poet and critic Elizabeth Alexander in great praise whom he considered as "one of the brightest stars" in their literary circle. Alexander in an

article titled "The Black Poet as Canon- Maker" discusses the contribution of the poet in the formation of a black literary canon or tradition writing thus: "[t]he work of Langston Hughes has for several generations of readers helped form a sense of an African poetics and the possibilities of African American literature."

In order to cite Hughes' opinion on the role of poetry, we may refer to his introduction for a children's poetry booklet which was eventually published in 1965 by the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in which he wrote: "Poetry can both delight and disturb. It can interest folks. It can upset folks. Poetry can convey both pleasure and pain. And poetry can make people think. If poetry makes people think, it might make them think constructive thoughts, even thoughts about how to change themselves, their town and their state for the better. Some poems, like many of the great verses in the Bible, can make people think about changing all mankind, even the whole world. Poems, like prayers, possess power."

During the late 1920s, Hughes resided in New York and was one of the leading figures of the Cultural Renaissance in Harlem. He is considered to be a trendsetter in black literature which put a complete literary tradition in place, shaping black intellect and experience in its entirety. He wrote and co-edited several books chronicling black history such as the *Fight for Freedom* (1962) or *A Pictorial History of Black Americans* (1973) and biographies on leading black figures such as *The Book of Negro Folklore* (1958). In a critical survey of black writers, contemporary critic David Littlejohn wrote that Hughes was "the one sure Negro classic, more certain of permanence than even [James] Baldwin or [Ralph] Ellison or [Richard] Wright..." and further that through the use of black musical tradition and common black expressions he retained "his own keen honesty and directness, his poetic sense and ironic intelligence, he maintained through four decades a readable newness distinctly his own." One of the noteworthy volume of compilation today is *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* (1994), a complete volume containing his collected works of poetry that was well-received by literary critics.

Hughes received as much criticism as admiration throughout his writing career. Many black intellectuals criticised his choice of representing the lives of the black lower classes, their colloquial expressions, local dialects, common stereotypes as they opined that it only made it worse. But at the same time, he also was upheld as the "people's poet" who had earned a world-wide repute and honour because there emerged a poet who dared to take on the world and envisage a bright future for his people whose talented potential was just short of recognition and receiving equal opportunities. As a poet, writer and an ardent activist, Langston Hughes made a great contribution to the narrative of African-American socio-cultural, literary and political history.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 6:** Name some of the non-fictional works written and co-edited by Hughes on black history and biography of leading black figures.

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**Q 7:** Write a brief note on the literary contribution and critical reception of Langston Hughes in your own words.

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## 6.7 LET US SUM UP

After having completed the study of the learner will be able to grasp some of the major themes pertaining to the poem. Along with analysing the use of style and language in the poem and gain an insight into the critical reception of the poet. This will certainly enable you to appreciate and further explore the fervour and passion that emerges through the poetry of Langston Hughes.



## 6.8 FURTHER READING

1) Andrews, William L., Frances Smith Foster and Trudier Harris. (eds.) (1997). *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press

Website: www. encyclopedia.com



## 6.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1:** The 'colour bar' as the Americans termed it or rather the stereotyped racial prejudices based on skin-colour was prevalent at that time, which made the black Americans feel discriminated, humiliated and hated by the Whites.

**Ans to Q No 2:** At the core of all the revolutionary movements whether cultural, artistic or the socio-political was the assertion of 'black identity' which had been historically denied to the black people.

**Ans to Q No 3:** The full form of NAACP is National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People.

**Ans to Q No 4:** Hughes was a rare poet and a pioneer of modern black literature with a distinct style of poetical expression and experimentation that was unique to him alone. He was also one of the first poets to have used Black folk rhythms to suit his free verses such as jazz and blues as well as black spirituals and gospels. Also, he employed the everyday dialect of his people in most of his works in order to capture their regular expressions of their experiences. His poetry is embedded with striking metaphors, regular idioms, sharp irony and musical improvisations that create and attest his distinct poetical caliber which is at once optimistic and at the same time powerful and revolutionary in spirit.

**Ans to Q No 5:** Some of his early influences were his early reading of W.E.B Du Bois' *The Souls of the Black Folk* and his love for the poetry of Carls Sandburg, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Edgar Lee Masters, Theodore Dreiser among others.

**Ans to Q No 6:** He wrote and co-edited several books chronicling black history such as the *Fight for Freedom* (1962) or *A Pictorial History of Black Americans* (1973) and *biographies on leading black figures such as The Book of Negro Folklore* (1958).

**Ans to Q No 7:** Attempt and answer in your own words.



## 6.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

**Q 1:** Discuss the emerging themes in the poem "I, too Sing America."

**Q 2:** Describe the Langston Hughes' use of style and language in his works.

**Q 3:** Briefly discuss the critical reception of the literary works by Langston Hughes.

**Q 4:** Explain the meaning and the relevant thematic concern with reference to context of the poem "I, too Sing America":

a. "I, too, sing America.
I am the darker brother"

b. "Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then."

c. "Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed-"

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# UNIT 7 : MARK TWAIN : *ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN*- I

## UNIT STRUCTURE


7.1 Learning Objectives

7.2 Introduction

7.3 Mark Twain: The Novelist

- 7.3.1 His Life
- 7.3.2 His Works

7.4 Reading of the Novel

- 7.4.1 Background of the Novel

7.5 Let us Sum up

7.6 Further Reading

7.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

7.8 Model Questions


## 7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- receive a cursory glance of the times in which Mark Twain wrote
- learn about the life and works of the author

## 7.2 INTRODUCTION

Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is considered as a masterpiece in American literature. It is a tale of adventure narrated by a young boy named Huckleberry Finn. Huck Finn is a rebel who does not like to be "sivilized" (civilized) and goes on a solitary river journey in the big Mississippi river. Along the way, he finds Jim, a black slave and thus grows an altogether different kind of bonding in a society dominated by ideas of racism. This novel is the sequel to Mark Twain's novel Adventures of Tom Sawyer. Some of the characters are present in both the novels.

In the title page of the novel, it is mentioned Huck Finn is Tom Sawyer's comrade. The scene is the Mississippi valley. The time is forty

to fifty years ago. The novel is published in 1885, so the time frame of the novel is about 1835-1845. This is the time before the American Civil War of 1865 in which the American North fought with the American South. The Northern states wanted to abolish slavery whereas the Southern states wanted to retain slavery. President Abraham Lincoln formally abolished slavery after the Civil War with the Emancipation Proclamation. A period of Reconstruction began in order to stabilise the lives in American South. Even then, racism did not die in America. Black people continued to struggle for equal rights in the American soil.

The novel is also a type of 'picaresque' novel. A picaresque novel usually relates the experiences of a low-born hero who uses his wits to survive in a hostile and hypocritical society. It is usually in the form of an autobiography. The picaresque hero lives in the dilemma between being a conformist to the ways of the society or finding his own moral principles.

## 7.3 MARK TWAIN: THE NOVELIST

Mark Twain is one of the foremost authors of nineteenth-century American literature along with Herman Melville, Walt Whitman. His original name is Samuel Langhorne Clemens. John C. Gerber said that Mark Twain is a term from his riverboat days which means "two fathoms deep" or "safe water." It is also the riverboat's leadsmen's signal "by the mark, twain"-which means that the water is deep enough for safe passage. The writings of Mark Twain are known for his unique brand of humour.

### 7.3.1 His Life

The original name of Mark Twain is Samuel Langhorne Clemens. He was born on 30 November, 1835 in Florida, Missouri. He was the sixth child of John Marshall Clemens and Jane Lampton Clemens. When he was four years old, he moved with his family to Mississippi River town of Hannibal, Missouri. After his father died, he worked as an apprentice to a Hannibal printer, Joseph P. Ament. In 1857, he became steamboat apprentice pilot on

Mississippi River and worked there until the Civil War. As a young man, he loved to travel to exotic places. He possessed an irrepressible spirit of adventure. His days on the Mississippi river contributed to his literary development by his close observation of the river and its people.

Edward Wagenknecht said in his biography, Mark Twain: The Man and his Work, "The great characters of fiction are built from the inside out…They are so many emanations of the man who created them; and the life that informs them, as they go about their business in the world, in his life. Only by life can life be created." Mark Twain himself wrote in Life on the Mississippi, "In that brief, sharp schooling, I got personally and familiarly acquainted with about all the different types of human nature that are to be bound in fiction, biography, or history." In 1861, he accompanied brother Orion Clemens to Nevada territory. He worked as a clerk of the Territorial Legislature. He also tried to earn money through mining.

While working as a reporter and humour writer, he first used the pseudonym 'Mark Twain' to sign his articles from February 1863. He worked as correspondent in Hawaii for Sacramento Daily Union and later for the Alta California in New York. From 1867, he travelled to Europe on extended lecture tours from time to time. In 1870, he married Olivia Langdon. They had a son Langdon who died at two, daughters Susan Olivia, Clara and Jean. In 1871, he took up residence in Hartford, Connecticut. In 1884, he founded publishing company with Charles Webster. He travelled extensively for lecture tours. In 1900, he returned to the United States, settling in New York. In 1908, he moved to his newly built mansion in Redding, Connecticut. In 1910, Mark Twain died on 21 April in Redding, Connecticut.

### 7.3.2 His Works

Mark Twain worked as a printer and reporter in Hannibal, St. Louis, New York, Philadelphia, Keokuk, Iowa and Cincinnati.

In 1852, he wrote an early sketch, "A Gallant Fireman," for his brother Orion Clemens's newspaper. In 1857, he wrote three "Thomas Jefferson Snodgrass" letters in Keokuk Post. In 1864, the New York Saturday Press published "Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog," his early masterpiece which helped Mark Twain to become famous. He published *Roughing It* (1872), *The Gilded Age* (with Charles Dudley Warner, 1873), *Sketches New and Old* (1875), *The Adventures of Tom Sawye*r (1876), *A Tramp Abroad* (1880), *The Prince and the Pauper* (1882) and *Life on the Mississippi* (1883). *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was published in 1885. Mark Twain published *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), *The American Claimant* (1892), *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894), *Tom Sawyer Abroad* (1894), *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (1896) and *Following the Equator* (1897).



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 1:** What is the original name of Mark Twain?

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**Q 2:** Name some of the famous works of Mark Twain.

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## 7.4 READING THE NOVEL

Let us gain an idea on the background of the novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* before we go into the detailed explanation.

### 7.4.1 Background of the Novel

Mark Twain had spent his childhood in Hannibal, Missouri. By writing the novel, he tried to recapture the experience of his childhood. Hannibal is the fictionalised town of St. Petersburg in both *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of*

*Huckleberry Finn*. Moreover, in his autobiography, Mark Twain noted that he based the character Huck Finn on Tom Blankenship, the poor-white son of a local drunkard who was exempted from school and church. His status of an outcast made him the envy of every respectable boy in Hannibal. Twain wrote, "In Huckleberry Finn I have drawn Tom Blankenship exactly as he was. He was ignorant, unwashed, insufficiently fed; but he had as good a heart as any boy had. His liberties were totally unrestricted. He was the only really independent person-boy or man-in the community, and by consequence he was tranquilly and continuously happy, and was envied by all the rest of us. We liked him, we enjoyed his society. And as his society was forbidden us by our parents, the prohibition trebled and quadrupled its value, and therefore, we sought and got more of his society than of any other boy's."

In 1868, Samuel Clemens got engaged to Olivia Langdon. He had a tough time to convince Olivia's family that he was a devout Christian. After their marriage in 1870, they often read the Bible together. He soon felt that the Bible is filled with mythology. He wrote the novel as a process of liberating himself from civilised social conventions of society which he had to endure due to his marriage with Olivia. Through the character of Huck Finn, he could relive his old values of self-indulgence, laziness, independence, skepticism, irreverence and forthrightness.



## 7.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through the unit, the learner will be familiar with the life of the American novelist mark Twain. Also the unit takes up the literary contributions of Mark Twain to the treasures of American literature. More on the prescribed text by Twain shall be dealt with in the following unit which is a continuation of the present unit.



## 7.6 FURTHER READING

1) Beaver, Harold. (1987). *Huckleberry Finn. London and Boston*: Allen and Unwin.

2) Bloom, Harold. (2007). *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*-Updated Edition. New York: Infobase Publishing.

3) Sloane, David E.E. (1988). *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: American Comic Vision*. New York: Twayne Publishers.

4) Twain, Mark. (1999). *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. 1885*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.



## 7.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1:** Samuel Langhorne Clemens.

**Ans to Q No 2:** *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *A Tramp Abroad* (1880), *The Prince and the Pauper* (1882), *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), *The American Claimant* (1892), *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894), *Tom Sawyer Abroad* (1894), *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (1896) and *Following the Equator* (1897).



## 7.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

**Q 1:** Discuss the life and works of Mark Twain.

**Q 2:** Write a brief note on the background of the novel Huckleberry Finn.

*** ***** ***

# UNIT 8 : MARK TWAIN: *ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN*- II

## UNIT STRUCTURE


8.1 Learning Objectives

8.2 Introduction

8.3 Summary of the Novel (in Chapters)

8.4 Let us Sum up

8.5 Further Reading

8.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

8.7 Model Questions


## 8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- give a detailed summary and outline of the novel
- appreciate the text of the novel
- analyse the content of the novel from your own reading

## 8.2 INTRODUCTION

In continuation of the previous unit, the present unit takes up the text and explanation of the novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. This novel is considered a timeless classic and undoubtedly is an important reading for those who are keen to know more about the memorable and widely popular adventures of a young boy known as Huck Finn. Let us then explore the summary of the chapters of the novel in a detailed manner.

## 8.3 SUMMARY OF THE NOVEL (IN CHAPTERS)

### CHAPTER I

The novel is narrated by the young boy Huckleberry Finn. In the beginning, Huck Finn introduces himself to the reader. He questions the reader if he or she has read the book *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*

by Mark Twain in which Mark Twain told the truth often by stretching it. The characters of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn are present in both the novels. Huck Finn says that Tom's aunt Polly, Mary and Widow Douglass are also familiar characters in both the novels.

The present novel seems to be a continuation of the earlier novel. Huck Finn says that in the end of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, he and Tom had discovered the treasure which was kept hidden by robbers inside the cave. They had become rich by getting six thousand dollars apiece of gold. They had invested the money with Judge Thatcher for gaining interest. Widow Douglass has adopted Huck as her son. She intended to "sivilize" (civilise) him. Since Huck does not like the routine, regular and decent life in her house, his mind wanders for an adventurous life again. At once he gets into his rag clothes and escapes but Tom Sawyer insists that he stay in the house for sometime if he wants to get into Tom's gang of robbers. Widow Douglass takes him back, clothes him in decent clothes and reads him the story of Moses from the Bible. Huck Finn feels cramped in the clothes, lacks interest in the stories of dead people and wants to smoke. Widow Douglass's sister Miss Watson tells him about heaven and hell. Huck says he does not want to go to heaven where Miss Watson aspires to go but will instead go to hell where Miss Watson says Tom Sawyer will be. At night, Huck feels tiresome and lonesome and wishes that he was dead. His mind craves for adventure. On hearing a call, he escapes and is happy to find his comrade Tom Sawyer waiting for him.

**CHAPTER II**

Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer are crawling in the garden when they encounter Miss Watson's nigger Jim. A nigger was an offensive term used for black slaves during the ordeal of slavery. Jim was a black person of African descent. Jim stands between them but does not see them hiding. Huck's body terribly itches all over but he does not move and scratch. After sometime, much to Huck's relief, Jim sits down and falls asleep. Tom enters the kitchen to fetch candles and places five cents on the table. Although, Huck advises him not to disturb Jim, Tom

takes the risk to have a little fun. He takes off Jim's hat and places it over his right limb. When Jim wakes up, he makes up a story that the witches had placed his hat on his limb and they rode him all over the states. Jim's story gains immense popularity among the blacks who come from far and near to listen to him. Jim's story gradually gets modified with him telling that the witches had rode him not only the state, but New Orleans and the entire world. Soon, Jim also makes up the story that he had encountered the devil who had given him the five cents. Jim hangs the five cents in a string around his neck as a charm given by the devil.

Meanwhile, Huck and Tom goes into a hole inside a distant hill and forms the "Tom Sawyer's Gang" of robbers. The other boys are Jo Harper, Ben Rogers and Little Tommy Barnes. The aim of the gang was to commit robbery and murder. Tom Sawyer becomes the leader who writes an oath and demands that all the members sign with their own blood. One condition being that if any member reveals any secret, his family members will be killed. Huck feels almost left out because he does not have a family since his father is missing for over a year. Huck instantly offers Miss Watson as his family member to be killed! Tom Sawyer discusses how they will act as highwaymen, kidnap, rob and murder people and bring the women so that they fall in love and the women refuse to leave them later. Tom Sawyer gets all his ideas of adventure much adopted from his reading of pirate and robber books is ready to do everything mentioned in the books. After they disperse, Huck Finn returns to his room before dawn with his new clothes all greased up and dirty.

**CHAPTER III**

Huck Finn receives a good scolding for his dirty clothes from Miss Watson the next morning. She tells Huck Finn to pray every day to fulfill his dreams. Widow Douglass tells him to believe in Providence, to help other people and not be selfish and self-centred. She explains him that prayer brings spiritual gifts.

Huck Finn feels comfortable that his Pap (father) has been missing for more than a year. He considers his father as a domineering figure.

There was a rumour that he might have died because people found a drowned man, floating on his back in the river who possessed similar features like him. Huck Finn knew that a man does not float on his back but on his face, so he felt sure that he was not his Pap but a woman in man's clothes.

Meanwhile, Tom Sawyer's gang of robbers only pretends to rob and kill people, so everybody resigns. Once a member brings information that some Spanish merchants and rich Arabs were to camp in Cave Hollow with a herd of elephants, camels, and mules all loaded with diamonds. Huck Finn goes with the gang to lay an ambuscade believing they had swords and guns when they actually have only lath and broom-sticks. It turns out to be a primary class Sunday school picnic. When Huck Finn informs Tom Sawyer about their pretensions, Tom ascribes their lack of reading books like Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. Tom tells Huck about enchantment created by magicians with the help of genies who had probably transformed the rich congregation into a school picnic. Huck tries his best to find a genie by rubbing an old tin lamp but fails. Huck understand that he thinks different from Tom Sawyer who only believes what is written in books like *Arabian Nights* and *Don Quixote*, based on the imagination of the authors.

**CHAPTER IV**

Its been three or four months in winter. Huck Finn is slowly getting used to school and the civilised life in the widow's house. One morning, he sees tracks of somebody's footsteps on the snow and fears that his Pap has returned. He immediately goes to Judge Thatcher and requests him to keep the entire amount of money in his name. Judge Thatcher makes him sign an agreement saying Huck has sold his money to him. Huck Finn fears that Pap may demand his money from Judge Thatcher.

Jim has a hair-ball which has been taken out from the fourth stomach of an ox. Jim claims that it can be used to reveal the future. Huck pays a quarter to know from Jim's hair-ball about his future with Pap. After several attempts, Jim reveals that his Pap is surrounded by two angels, one white and one black, meaning both good and bad. Even

Huck's life was to witness quite lows but he would rise again.

As Huck Finn returns to his room at night, he finds that his Pap is sitting in his room.

**CHAPTER V**

Huck Finn's father Pap is almost fifty years old. He has a repelling white complexion like that of a tree-toad or fish-belly and is dressed in rags. He gets angry to find his son getting smart, educated, rich and in a much better condition than him. He scolds Huck for going to school and demands all his money. He takes money from Huck to simply get drunk.

The widow and Judge Thatcher files a lawsuit to free Huck from his father so that one of them can be his legal guardian. However, the judge is new to the place and does not want to separate the son from the father. In the meantime, Pap takes money from Huck and gets immensely drunk. He is jailed twice. The judge takes Pap to his house and takes pledge to refine and reform him. The judge and his wife sympathise for his welfare and try a hand at civilising him with good thoughts, good food, clothes and shelter. During the day, Pap pledges that he has started on a new life, but is soon thirsty at night. He trades his new coat to get drunk, breaks his left arm and almost freezes to death until somebody finds him.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 1:** To which novel by Mark Twain is The *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* a sequel?

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**Q 2:** Who are the people with whom Huckleberry Finn spends his childhood?

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**Q 3:** Who is Jim? Why does he become popular?

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**CHAPTER VI**

Pap soon returns to file a lawsuit against Judge Thatcher to give him Huck's six thousand dollars. Pap thrashes Huck for continuing to go to school. When the widow warns him, Pap says he will show who was Huck's boss. He takes Huck in a skiff three miles across the river to the Illinois shore and both of them stay in a log cabin. Pap makes sure that Huck is unable to escape. One day, Pap locks Huck and goes to town for three days. He returns in a bad mood cussing (cursing) everybody, mainly the govment (government). He curses the law for trying to separate his own son from him and for not giving him his son's money. He curses the government because he had seen a free nigger (a free black man) from Ohio who is immensely rich, highly educated and is a college professor. Pap is angry because when he asked somebody as to why the black man was not put on auction and sold, he received the reply that a free nigger could not be sold unless he lived in the State for six months. Pap becomes furious on finding that the black man is allowed to vote in the election. He decides that he will never vote in election owing to this ridiculous reason.

Huck thinks over everything and decides it is better to escape from both the miserable life of Pap as well as the civilised life of the widow. He plans to escape when Pap gets drunk and falls sleeps. That night, luck did not favour him as Pap is tormented in his sleep by dreams of snakes and devils. Pap awakes and chases Huck threatening to kill him before falling asleep again.

**CHAPTER VII**

Pap wakes up next morning to find the gun pointing at him. When he enquires Huck, Huck lies that somebody tried to get in. Huck goes outside to find that the river had risen. He feels immensely lucky to find a drifting canoe which is thirteen or fourteen feet long. He immediately hides the canoe in the woods and changes his earlier plan of escaping by land. Now, he plans to escape by the river. He develops another plan to 'pretend' that he is murdered so that neither Pap nor the widow would search for him. He brings a pig and hacks him to death, fills a sack with

rocks, bloodies it with the pig's blood, drags it from the cabin and throws it into the river. It would appear like Huck was murdered by robbers and his body dragged and thrown into the river. When his Pap leaves that night, Huck gets an old saw, makes a hole and escapes to Jackson's island by rowing across the river.

**CHAPTER VIII**

Huck Finn spends a 'powerful lazy and comfortable' time in Jackson's island. While he is dozing after breakfast, he is suddenly awakened by a booming sound. He wakes up to see Pap, Judge Thatcher, his daughter Becky Thatcher, Jo Harper, Tom Sawyer, Tom's old aunt Polly, Sid, Mary and many more people on a ferry-boat searching for his mortal remains. They had been firing cannon over the water, trying to make his dead body come to the surface. Huck observes everybody from a distance until they leave the Missouri shore and goes home.

He lives three days and nights thinking he is the boss of the island. Gradually, he begins to feel lonesome. On exploring the island, he is struck to see a smoking fire which means the presence of another person. Initially scared, Huck climbs a tree. After sometime, he decides to find out the person and is immensely relieved to find Jim. In a funny instant, Jim thinks he sees Huck's ghost since he thought him to be dead. Huck feels glad that he is not lonesome anymore. Both narrate their stories of how they made their escape. Jim had run off because he overheard Miss Watson talking to a slave trader about selling him for eight hundred dollars. Huck and Jim discuss superstitions. One of them is that hairy arms and chest, were signs of being a rich person. Thus, Jim is not disappointed by his failures in investment because he possesses hairy arms and chest. He claims that he owns himself and estimates his own worth to be eight hundred dollars as per the calculations of the slave trade.

**CHAPTER IX**

Both Huck and Jim begin exploring the middle of the island which is three miles in length and a quarter of a mile in width. They find a cavern and settle down with their belongings to cook and eat dinner.

Huck feels so good that he tells Jim that he does not want to be anywhere else. The river continuously rises for ten or twelve days. One day, while paddling in their canoe, they come across a two-storied frame house. They climb at an upstairs window. The house is empty except that there is a dead man lying naked. The man's face has become ghastly and he has been shot at the back. Jim prevents Huck from looking at the face of the dead man by throwing some rags over him. Huck and Jim collect all the leftovers from the house and paddle safely to the Illinois shore where they had settled. During daytime, Huck makes Jim lay down in the canoe and covers him up with a quilt, so that people cannot not tell that he is a nigger.

**CHAPTER X**

Huck wants to talk about the dead man but Jim avoids the same. Jim tells that a man who is not buried might haunt them. Huck and Jim feel happy on finding eight dollars in a coat pocket. Huck argues that although he had touched a snakeskin two days before, it did not bring them bad luck as per Jim's predictions. But Jim predicts their bad luck is yet to come. Surely enough on a Friday, Huck kills a rattlesnake and keeps it hidden inside Jim's blanket just for fun, forgetting all about it until Jim is awfully bitten by its mate which comes in search of the rattlesnake. Jim's foot and leg swells enormously and he suffers tremendously for four days and nights. But Huck does not reveal that he had kept the rattlesnake in the first place.

As things get normal, they catch an enormous cat-fish which is six foot two inches long, and weighs over two hundred pounds. Huck considers one big fish that has ever been caught in the Mississippi river. One morning, Huck feels a new craving for adventure. He decides to go to town and find out what is happening there. Jim comes up with the idea that Huck go disguised as a girl. Huck paddles his canoe to a nearby town. He finds a woman about forty years old, knitting. Huck makes up his mind to enter her shanty and tries his best to behave like a girl.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 4:** How is Huck Finn's relationship with Pap (father)?

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**Q 5:** Why do Huck and Jim escape?

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**Q 6:** What is Pap's opinion about the wealthy free black man?

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**CHAPTER XI**

Huck enters the woman's room introducing himself as Sarah Williams who is searching for her uncle Abner Moore. They begin talking and gradually the woman brings up the topic of Huck Finn's murder. She informs him that people thought the main suspect is Pap. When they find out that Miss Watson's nigger Jim had escaped on the same night of the murder, Jim becomes the prime suspect. There is a 'three hundred dollar reward' on Jim and a 'two hundred dollar reward' on Pap. Pap goes to Judge Thatcher to demand Huck's money. Judge Thatcher gives him a few dollars which he spends in drinking. Just when the people think of lynching or tearing him into pieces, he happens to disappear. The woman says that she had seen smoke in Jackson's island and suspects Jim could be hiding there. Her husband along with another man was to go in search of Jim, that night.

Meanwhile, Huck feels uneasy and begins to handle a needle and thread. The woman becomes suspicious and understands that Huck is a boy. She explains that usually a woman holds the needle still and pokes the thread into it, whereas he holds the thread still and fetches the needle up to it like a typical man. The woman says her name is Mrs Judith Loftus. After contriving other lies to justify his position, Huck quickly makes his way to save Jim. He makes a fire at the site of his old camp

and quickly informs a sleeping Jim to get ready. They put all their belongings in the raft and leave the island.

**CHAPTER XII**

Huck and Jim literally begin to live in the heart of the river. Jim constructs a snug wigwam on their raft to protect themselves from bad weather. They pass through several towns during the night. On the fifth night, they pass St. Louis. In the difficult weather, they see the wreck of a steamboat in the middle of the river. Huck enters the wreck against the wishes of Jim, citing the example of Tom Sawyer who is always crazy for adventure. Jim feels powerful sick and returns back. Huck does not return after Jim, thinking Tom Sawyer would not back out in such a situation. Huck becomes a witness of a murder ploy in which two men tie up a man named Jim Turner and abuse him as the meanest, treacherous hound in this country. Jim Turner begs Bill and Jake Packard not to kill him. As the two men walk toward the place Huck takes a chance to hide and crawls to an upper stateroom. The two men also move in there. Huck hides himself in an upper berth and is scared to overhear their plan of murder. They change their initial plan of shooting him thinking he could anyway naturally drowned within two hours as the wreck would break up and get washed down the river. Huck fetches Jim and orders him to get the raft immediately. Jim feels shocked to find their raft gone.

**CHAPTER XIII**

Huck and Jim are stranded in the wreck with a gang of murderers. Huck feels it is not a time for sentimentering (to be sentimental). Huck notices Bill and Jake suddenly getting into a boat but they again go inside to fetch the money. Huck and Jim in a half- second get on their boat and leave. They know that the murderers will be in as much trouble as Jim Turner.

Huck and Jim become glad to find their raft. Jim takes the raft whereas Huck moves onwards to find a village. Huck meets a watchman and cries deliberately telling lies that his Pap, Mam, Sis and Miss Hooker are stranded in the wreck. He requests him to go and save them. He

waits until the watchman goes in the ferry-boat. He also watches the drowning of the wreck. Finally, he feels good that had Widow Douglass known about his deeds, she would have been happy. Later, Huck finds Jim and both of them sleep like dead people being extremely tired after their rather misadventure. This adventure is may be referred to as the Walter Scott episode.

**CHAPTER XIV**

Huck and Jim find the wreck and fetch all the clothes, books, blankets and other things for themselves. Huck tells Jim that what they go through is called adventure. Jim replies that he does not want any more of that. Being an escaped slave, Jim knows about his vulnerable existence. If he is not saved, he would get drowned. If he is saved, his saviour would send him to Miss Watson to fetch his reward and sell him into slavery again. Huck says Jim is mostly right, he has an uncommon level head for a nigger.

Huck reads the books and they talk about King Solomon who is considered as the wisest king that lived on earth. Jim referring to the Bible feels Solomon was not wise to order the division of a baby into two pieces in order to find out the emotions of the real mother among the two claiming women. In Jim's view, Solomon proved to be cruel towards humanity.

Huck also mentions about the French monarch Louis XVI, who was executed and his son, the Dauphin who may have either died in prison or escaped to America.

**CHAPTER XV**

Huck and Jim think about going to Ohio which is a 'free state'. Soon, Huck finds himself struggling in a dense fog. Jim diverts into another way, thus getting separated. After tremendous struggle, Huck unites with Jim. Jim is extremely happy to find Huck alive. As Jim gets upset over the natural disasters, Huck tries to pacify him saying he was probably having a bad dream. Jim believes Huck and interprets the dream.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 7:** How does Mrs. Judith Loftus understand that Huck is a boy in disguise of a girl?

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**Q 8:** What is Jim's opinion about King Solomon?

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**CHAPTER XVI**

This chapter is called Raftsman's passage or raft episode. Next night, Huck and Jim are moving behind a long and monstrous raft which may have thirty men on board. Huck wants to know how they will find Cairo. Huck swims to the raft and finds thirteen men there. They are drinking and singing verses. The biggest man called Bob jumps up in the air three times and cracks his heels together every time. He calls himself, "Sudden Death and General Desolation." Next a man called "Child of Calamity" stands up and fights fiercely with Bob. A third man called Little Davy tries to reconcile them into friendship. The other men yell and laugh and clap their hands throughout the scene. All the men return to their respective occupations and when they meet again, they discuss on various issues. When the issue is related to ghosts, a man called Ed begins to narrate real experience. Five years before, he was on a raft with a man called Dick Allbright. A mysterious haunted barrel had come near their raft every night and caused storms and death and injuries to the crew members. When the captain busted the barrel, there was a dead child whom Dick Allbright claimed as his son, and unintentionally choked to death.

As Ed finish telling the story, the Child of Calamity finds out Huck Finn who was observing them from a hidden position. All the men surround and question him. Huck makes up stories that he is "Charles William Allbright," the ghost of Dick Allbright's son. As all the men start roaring, Huck make stories saying he is Aleck James Hopkins. After lots of questioning, the raftsmen finally lets him go.

Huck feels that Jim would be extremely happy to get his freedom. He plans to 'buy' his wife and two children for him. But it also becomes the moment when Huck's conscience pinches him since being a white, he allows a black to win his freedom. Huck feels he will tell somebody about Jim's whereabouts. Then Jim says that he would only be a free man because of Huck. Jim would always be grateful towards Huck, as he was his only best friend in the entire world. Moreover, he was the only white gentleman to keep his promise to old Jim.

Just then a raft with two white men approach Huck. They had been searching five runaway niggers. Despite his pangs of guilt, Huck takes the decision to save Jim. He protects Jim by lying to the men that his companion is white Pap who is sick. The men predict his Pap is suffering from smallpox. So, they leave giving Huck a twenty dollar gold piece. All these time, Jim hides in the river because he overhears their conversation. Jim acknowledges Huck for saving him.

They are soon disappointed to have crossed Cairo. They also lose the canoe and blame their luck as a consequence of the ill omen of handling the snake skin. To aggravate their ill luck, a big steamboat collides with their raft. They jump overboard but get separated. Huck climbs a bank and finds a big old-fashioned double log house.

**CHAPTER XVII**

Huck introduces himself as George Jackson to a big family whose members are equipped with guns. They ask Huck if he is connected to the Shepherdsons. The family welcomes him with great hospitality after they find out that he is not a Shepherdson. He is made to sleep with Buck who is almost his age. The Grangerford family appear to be nice and their home is equally nice. The interior decorations, paintings and books reflect the family's refined tastes. Huck becomes acquainted all the members of the Grangerford family. The family has lost a very talented daughter, Emmeline Grangerford. Emmeline had a peculiar obsession with death and even made paintings which had themes of death. She had a scrap-book in which she would paste obituaries and write poetry as tribute to the dead people.

**CHAPTER XVIII**

Colonel Grangerford is a born gentleman. His family is very well-mannered and sophisticated. His sons are Tom and Bob, daughters Miss Charlotte and Miss Sophia. He owns a lot of farms and over a hundred niggers. Each family member had a nigger to wait for the person. There is also another aristocratic family named Shepherdsons. One day, Huck with his new friend Buck go hunting in the woods. They encounter young Harney Shepherdson on horseback. Buck shoots at young Harney but fails to kill him. When Huck enquires the reason for shooting, Buck recounts the feud which had started thirty years ago, due to which the two families were at loggerheads with both their family members getting killed every year. The following Sunday, Huck goes to church with the Grangerford family. After dinner when everybody is sleeping, Miss Sophia secretly sends Huck to church to bring her Testament which she had forgotten. Huck finds a piece of paper with "Half-past-two" written on it with a pencil. Sophia tells Huck that it is just a book-mark to keep her place.

Huck's nigger Jack leads him to a swamp and to Huck's surprise, he finds Jim. Jim reveals that he had followed Huck the same night but did not reveal himself for the fear of being trapped into slavery again.

Huck regrets having to describe the following day. Miss Sophia had eloped with Harney Shepherdson leading to a massive feud between the two families. With a sickening feeling Huck is witness to the two families brutally killing each other and leading to the death of the Grangerfords. Huck feels responsible for the disaster as he had given Harney's message to Miss Sophia. Huck meets Jim and decides to leave quickly. As they move in the Mississippi, he feels that life on the raft was the most homely, carefree, easy and comfortable one.

**CHAPTER XIX**

Huck and Jim live a lovely life on the raft for several days. One morning, Huck finds a canoe (a light boat) and soon find two men begging for their lives to be spared. One of them is about seventy and the other about thirty. They initially do not know each other and reveal to have a variety of professions. Soon the younger man starts lamenting about the

secret of his birth. He claims to be a duke, the original descendent of the Duke of Bridgewater. As Huck and Jim pities his degraded status, he demands that they are to bow to him, and address him as "Your Grace," "My Lord" or "Your Lordship" and also wait on him at dinner. As Huck and Jim start following his instructions, the older man seems to have something in his mind. Soon, he claims to be the late Dauphin, the son of the French monarch Louis the Sixteenth and Marie Antoinette, the suffering rightful King of France. So, Huck and Jim treat both of them like royal people. Huck's clever mind does not take much time to discover that they are liars, low-down tricksters and frauds. Huck says that he had learnt from Pap that the best way to get along with his kind of people is to let them have their own way.

**CHAPTER XX**

The Duke and the Dauphin ask whether Jim is a runaway slave. Huck makes a story saying he was orphaned and Jim was his family slave. They did not move in daylight because people wanted to take Jim away from him. At night, the duke and the dauphin sleep inside the wigwam leaving Huck and Jim to suffer in the stormy night.

The duke plans that when they reach the first good town, they would hire a hall and perform the sword fight from Shakespeare's Richard III and the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*. Both of them do rehearsals for the performance. They reach a town to find that thousands of townspeople are gone to a camp-meeting to listen to preaching and sermons. The dauphin gets on stage and emotionally claims that he was a pirate for thirty years in the Indian Ocean. He was now transformed and aspired to transform other pirates too. The audience become emotionally overwhelmed and decide to collect donation for him. The dauphin thus collects eighty-seven dollars and seventy-five cents. On the other hand, the duke earns ten dollars by selling bills and advertisements. The duke makes a 'poster' of Jim as a runaway slave carrying a reward of two hundred dollars. He plans to tie Jim and show this handbill if any person questions his presence. In that way, they can travel in broad daylight as well. Jim innocently asks the dauphin to talk in French, not

knowing that he is an imposter. The dauphin lies that he had lived in America for so long that he had forgotten the language.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 9:** Why does Huck feel guilty about himself?

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**Q 10:** What is the significance of Emmeline Grangerford's obsession with death?

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**Q 11:** What does the sophistication of the Grangerford family ironically symbolise?

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**CHAPTER XXI**

The duke and the dauphin rehearse for their Shakespearean performances. The duke also adds Hamlet's famous soliloquy "To be, or not to be" to their performance. Since he practises the soliloquy from memory, he distorts the original by joining lines from *Macbeth* and Richard III. They reach the State of Arkanshaw and find that a circus is scheduled to be organised there. The duke distributes handbills announcing their theatrical performance. As Huck moves about the town, he observes a lot of loafers who discuss one tobacco-chewing. Then a fifty-year old drunkard called Boggs comes riding on horseback and challenge to kill a man called Colonel Sherburn. The people try to control him, failing which someone goes to fetch his daughter. Colonel Sherburn shoots Boggs just as his daughter arrives on the scene. The mob then decides to go and lynch Colonel Sherburn.

**CHAPTER XXII**

The mob reach Colonel Sherburn's house in anger. However, the Colonel comes out perfectly calm with a double-barrel gun in his hand.

He mocks the crowd saying the average man is a coward. He tells them that they should have come with a leader and arrived during the night, wearing masks and imitating the southern fashion.

Huck watches as the crowd leave and then goes to the circus. He enjoys the circus thoroughly. The same night, they have their show with an audience of twelve men only. The duke interprets that the Arkanshaw people are not fit to understand Shakespeare but something worse than low comedy. The duke prints handbills with the name "The King's Camelopard" and "The Royal Nonesuch." At the bottom it is written that ladies and children were not be admitted.

**CHAPTER XXIII**

The following night the house is packed with men. The dauphin enters the scene in a hilarious manner. He comes out walking on all four, his body naked and painted all over with ring-strips with varieties of colours like a rainbow. The people almost kill themselves laughing. Even though they get annoyed with the short performance, they decide to call their friends. The second night is also fully packed. The third night, they come with their pockets bulging with sickly eggs, rotten cabbages to throw at the performers. However, the duke manages to evade the attack by escaping before the show begins. The 'rapscallions' manage to get four hundred and sixty-five dollars. Jim is surprised at the behaviour of the royal people. Huck does not find it necessary to tell Jim that the two men are frauds. Instead, Huck narrates about several kings in history who behaved in a similar manner. During the night, Huck finds Jim moaning and mourning to himself. Jim feels rather homesick remembering his wife and children, little Elizabeth and Johnny. Huck believes that Jim is a mighty good nigger, that he cares for his people just as white folks did for their people.

**CHAPTER XXIV**

Jim tells the duke that he feels lonely and tiresome to stay in the wigwam all day tied with the rope. As a solution, the duke dresses him up in King Lear's outfit and paints his face and hands a dead dull solid blue colour. Jim looks horrible in the outfit and the duke writes "Sick

Arab-but harmless when not out of his head." Huck and the dauphin meet a man in a steamboat, from whom the dauphin extracts vital information regarding a man, Peter Wilks who had died the previous day, leaving a huge amount of property for his brothers Harvey and the deaf and dumb William who live in England as well as for his dead brother George's three daughters. The three daughters are Mary Jane who is nineteen, Susan who is fifteen and Joanna who is fourteen and hare-lipped.

The dauphin immediately hatches a plan with the duke. They would pretend to be the brothers Harvey and William in order to amass Peter Wilks's property. They land in that village and cry tremendously introducing themselves as the dead man's brothers. Huck feels that the pretension of the frauds was enough to make anybody ashamed of the human race!

**CHAPTER XXV**

The three girls welcome their uncles with great hospitality. Huck has a sickening and disgusting feeling by seeing the frauds shedding crocodile tears on the coffin. Mary Jane fetches her uncle's letter containing the 'will'. It mentions that the dwelling house and three thousand dollars in gold be given to the girls, the tanyard, some houses and land worth seven thousand and three thousand dollars in gold to Harvey and William. The will also mentions that six thousand dollars was kept hidden in the down cellar. And thus the dauphin, duke and Huck enter the cellar. The dauphin's eyes shines on seeing the gold. They count it and find that it is four hundred and fifteen dollars short. The duke make up the deficit money by adding his own. They come out of the cellar and hand over the money to Mary Jane, thus showing themselves in front of the people as loving and trust-worthy. The family doctor understands their hypocrisy by watching their worst non-convincing imitation as Englishmen. As he interrupts calling them scoundrels and impostors, Mary Jane hands over the bag of money to the dauphin thus supporting and trusting them to be their genuine uncles.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 12:** What does the Boggs episode imply?

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**Q 13:** Why does Huck feel ashamed of the human race?

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**CHAPTER XXVI**

Huck has a difficult time with Joanna, (the hare-lipped sister) over supper who is intensely curious to know about life in England. Huck invents several lies but fails to convince her. Mary Jane and Susan demand Joanna to ask pardon from Huck. Huck is so profoundly touched by their generosity and goodwill that he resolves to secure the money for the sisters. Huck begins to think and decides to steal the money from the place where the dauphin had hidden it. Huck hides himself and eavesdrops the conversation between the duke and the dauphin. The duke wants to run away with the money to prevent further problems such as created by the family doctor. On the other hand, the dauphin is still greedy for the landed property. After they leave the room, Huck takes the bag of money.

**CHAPTER XXVII**

In the middle of the night, Huck is able to only find the coffin as a safe hiding place for the bag of money. The funeral was to be held the next day. After the funeral speech, the people go with the undertaker and bury the coffin. The false Harvey consoles everybody saying that he would take the girls to England with them. Huck feels heavy to see the girls being fooled. The first day after the funeral, the girls receive their first jolt as the servant niggers are sold. It was rather scandalous to separate the mother and the children. Huck says he would never forget the sight of the miserable girls and niggers hanging around each other's necks and crying. Next day is the auction day. Huck knows that the selling and auction are all fake. When the dauphin questions Huck if he

had stolen the money, Huck replies that he had seen the niggers going to his room several times. Huck feels glad for having laid suspicion on the niggers but does not harm them in any way as they had been already sold.

**CHAPTER XXVIII**

One morning, Huck finds Mary Jane crying for being separated from the nigger servants. Huck tells her that the family will be reunited after two weeks. Huck takes the chance to tell her the truth. Huck advises her to take the truth like a man. He tells her that her uncles are a couple of frauds. It jolts her up. Huck advises Mary Jane to stay at a neighbour's Mr Lothrop's till night, so that he gets time to get away because the life of another person meaning Jim is attached with him. Huck tells her to leave before breakfast because her face may reveal that she knows the secret. He writes in a paper where he had hidden the money so that she is able to find it later. Huck says the sweet memory of Mary Jane would forever remain in his mind and Mary Jane also leaves saying she would always pray for him. Huck meets the other two sisters and tells that Mary Jane had gone to meet her friend Hanner who is suffering from mumps. In the meantime, while the fraud uncles are busy auctioning the property, the real brothers of Peter Wilks arrive from England.

**CHAPTER XXIX**

The family doctor Dr. Robinson and the family lawyer Levi Bell arrive to investigate which pair is real and which is fake. The lawyer tells the onlookers about the duke and dauphin that they actually came in a canoe and not from England. The doctor fetches Huck and asks him to describe about life in England. As Huck begins to make stories, the doctor says that he tells lies pretty awkwardly. They scrutinise the handwriting from the letters and again confirm the fraudery amidst denial. Finally, the true old brother questions the dauphin if he could tell what was tattoed in the breast of the dead man. After some thinking, the dauphin makes a guess that it is a small, thin, blue arrow. When they refuse, he says it is tatooed with the letters ‘P-B-W’. As the ensuing ruckus increases, the lawyer suggests that they exhume the dead man's

corpse and check. As the crowd disperse to dig the coffin, they also take Huck and the frauds with them. They constantly dig to finally find the bag of gold on his breast. Amidst the commotion over the gold, Huck makes his way to leave this entire thing behind him. Huck sees a flash in Mary Jane's window and gets to know that she had come back. Huck goes for his boat and finds Jim and he once again finds it truly good to be free again. However, his happiness is short-lived as he sees the dauphin and the duke coming towards them.

**CHAPTER XXX**

The dauphin gets hold of Huck and scolds him for deserting them. The dauphin begins cursing the town and the people. The duke says the dauphin needs to curse himself first. He accuses the dauphin of hiding the money all for himself. He tells that was the reason why the dauphin wanted to make up the deficit. He says that he trusted him like a father. They nearly come to blows and the dauphin finds no option but to own up the accusation. However, at night, the two frauds soften towards each other and go off to sleep snoring in each other's arms. Huck has a long conversation with Jim and tells him everything.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 14:** Why does Huck decide to help the Wilks sisters?

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**CHAPTER XXXI**

The frauds now turn their attention to other things. They explore villages and many professions like giving lecture on temperance, starting a dance school, trying elocution, being missionaries, mesmerising, doctoring, telling fortunes without much luck in any of these things. Soon, Huck observes that the two of them lay in the wigwam and talk low and secretly for several hours at a stretch. Huck decides that he will soon find a way to get separated from them. One day, they decide to go to a town.

They also take Huck along with them. Huck feels that as soon as he finds a chance he and Jim would get away from them. As planned he comes back but finds Jim gone. He sits down and cries bitterly. He enquires a passerby and comes to know that Jim has been taken to Silas Phelps's place, two miles below. Huck discovers in his disgust that the frauds had the heart to sell Jim into slavery again for forty dollars.

Huck initially thinks of writing a letter to Tom Sawyer to tell Miss Watson where he is. Then he decides to give up the idea for two reasons; that Jim will be disgraced and sold south, and because people would know that Huck Finn helped a nigger to get his freedom. Huck's conscience grinds him again. He feels Providence watches his deeds all along. He decides to pray but fails with the burden of his guilt. He then writes a note to Miss Watson. He feels good and washed clean of sin for the first time. Then he again sits down to think and remember Jim all over again. He fondly remembers all the memories and recalls the time they spent together talking, singing and laughing; the way Jim called him honey; stood his watch on top of his own so that Huck could sleep more; used to be glad every time Huck returned from adventures; called him the only best friend in the world. Huck takes a most difficult decision. He says to himself, "All right, then, I'll go to hell" and tears up the paper. This is one of the significant moments in the text. He decides never to think about being reformed and instead to do whatever it takes to steal Jim out of slavery again. This episode is famously referred to as 'Huck's crisis of conscience'.

Huck walks towards Silas Phelps's place when he meets the duke who was busy sticking bills for the Royal Nonesuch, three night performance. Huck accuses the duke of selling Jim. The duke says that if Huck promises not to disclose about their fraudulent deeds to the townspeople, he would reveal where Jim had been sold. He slips the name "Silas Ph" but tries to deceive Huck by saying that Jim had been brought by Abram G. Foster, who lives forty mile in the back country. Huck feels free to move on his own and work his plans. After walking a bit towards the back country, Huck doubles back through the woods

towards Silas Phelps's place.

**CHAPTER XXXII**

Silas Phelps's has a little one-horse cotton plantation. Huck trusts Divine Providence to help him and starts for the kitchen. A curious development begins in Huck's life as he is mistaken as Tom Sawyer by Tom's aunt Sally. Silas Phelps is aunt Sally's husband who has been visiting the town for the last few days to fetch Tom Sawyer. Aunt Sally is extremely happy to meet Tom Sawyer. When Silas Phelps arrives, aunt Sally puts up a surprise for him. Huck feels that being Tom Sawyer is easy and comfortable but what would happen if Tom Sawyer really arrives down the boat. So, he tells them that he had to go to town to fetch his luggage.

**CHAPTER XXXIII**

Huck meets his old friend Tom Sawyer on the road. Tom initially thinks Huck is a ghost. Huck tells him that he was never murdered at all. Tom Sawyer astonishes Huck by agreeing that he will help him to free Jim from slavery. Huck says that he could not imagine Tom Sawyer as a nigger stealer and in his estimation Tom seemed considerable for the same.

Aunt Sally feels happy to serve another guest as per southern hospitality. After fooling aunt Sally with different names, Tom finally reveals his name as "Sid Sawyer". Huck comes to know about Jim's presence in the house when Uncle Phelps discourages one of his little sons to go to a show. Uncle tells that a runaway nigger had told Burton that it is a scandalous show. At night, Tom and Huck climb out of the window. Huck tells Tom about the Royal Nonesuch rapscallions. They see that the dauphin and the duke are being carried astraddle a rail covered all over with tar and feathers. Huck mentions that he feels bad as human beings can be awful cruel to one another.

**CHAPTER XXXIV**

Tom finds out where Jim is imprisoned as he sees a servant taking a watermelon into a locked room. Tom plans to free Jim in the fashion of a detective story, full of style. Huck is not convinced with his plan but he

knows that when Tom says he would do a thing, he would have it done anyhow. At night, they go down to the hut and think how they would free him within a week. In the morning, they make friends with the nigger who feeds Jim. Jim is overwhelmed to find Huck and Tom. They tell Jim that they are going to set him free.

**CHAPTER XXXV**

Tom Sawyer is not in favour of simple adventures. If the work looks straight-forward and easy, he would create all the difficulties to make it look like the adventures in great models of daring escapes such as those of Friedrich von der Trenck, Giovanni Jacopo Casanova, Benvenuto Cellini and King Henry IV. Tom says Jim will need a rope ladder for which they were to steal a sheet off the clothes line. Tom also wants Jim to write a journal on a cloth, presumably with his own blood. Tom also asks Huck to steal case knives. On the other hand, Tom gets mighty upset when Huck steals a watermelon from the garden of the slaves and eats it. Tom makes him give the slaves a dime without telling them the reason.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 15:** What does Huck's famous crisis of conscience reveal about Huck Finn?

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**Q 16:** How does Tom Sawyer decide to free Jim?

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**CHAPTER XXXVI**

At night, Huck and Tom climb down the lightning rod to Jim's cabin. They keep digging with the caseknives till midnight but with little success. Huck advises Tom to be practical and pragmatic and not follow what is written in the adventure books. Huck says that as long as he gets whatever he wants: it did not matter how he got it. Tom differs from Huck

in being very particular and "full of principle." Next day, Tom steals a pewter spoon, a brass candlestick so that he is able to make pens for Jim. Huck steals three tin plates and both of them make way to meet Jim. Jim is so glad to meet them that he almost cries, calls them honey and all the pet names he could think of. Jim tells them that Uncle Phelps and Aunt Sally had been kind to him. Tom gets the idea that from now on, he would put small things in uncle's coat pockets and aunt's apron strings or apron pocket, to send it to Jim. Tom asks Jim to keep a journal on the shirt with his blood. Initially, Jim is unable to make any sense of Tom's fanciful schemes but then he agrees thinking white folks know better than him. Tom says Huck that he was having the best time of his life and also the most intellectual moment. He dreams that the adventures will make them all celebrated people.

**CHAPTER XXXVII**

In the morning, Tom fetches some shingle nails thinking that it will be handy for a prisoner to scrabble his name and sorrows on the dungeon walls. Just as they are busy putting things in uncle's coat pockets and aunt's apron, Aunt Sally becomes furious to find that so many things are missing in her house but does not suspect the two boys. Tom and Huck play with her temper by removing and then replacing the things, due to which she trembles in anger. Jim gets all the things that are sent to him. Jim hides the rope ladder inside his straw tick. He scratches some marks on a tin plate and throws it out of the window because Tom asks him to do so.

**CHAPTER XXXVIII**

Tom tells that Jim, like any state prisoner should have a coat of arms and a mournful inscription. They try to drag a big grindstone. While they fail, they call Jim to help them. Huck comments that while Huck and Jim were dragging them. Tom supervises them. Tom could easily outsmart any boy. Tom also advises Jim to have dumb pets such as spiders, rattlesnakes, gartersnakes or rats. Tom also asks Jim to raise a flower plant and water it with his tears. Jim protests that Tom is taking unnecessary trouble but Tom says it would give them opportunities to

become famous.

**CHAPTER XXXIX**

Next morning, Huck and Tom capture the bulliest kind of rats and keep them in a wire rat trap safely under Aunt Sally's bed. One of Sally's sons opens the door of the trap and when Aunt Sally comes inside, she shouts vigorously standing on top of her bed. Huck and Tom also collect spiders, bugs, frogs, caterpillars. The sack containing the snakes was half-tied and all the snakes crawl away creating a panic in Aunt Sally's mind. Jim does not like to live with spiders. Whenever a rat bites him, he has to get up and write a little in his journal while the blood is fresh.

Uncle Phelps decides to advertise Jim in the St. Louis and New Orleans papers. Huck gets cold shivers on hearing it. Tom says it is time to write the anonymous letters which mean giving warning to people that something was to happen. Tom wants to do it so that people come to know about their adventures. According to Tom's plan, Huck has to dress up in a servant girl's frock and slip the letter under the front door. Tom has written these words in the letter, "Beware. Trouble is brewing. Keep a sharp lookout. UNKNOWN FRIEND." The next night, Tom sticks a picture in blood of a skull and crossbones on the front door. He also sticks a picture of a coffin on the back door. The family gets very scared specially aunt Sally. At supper, the family decides that they would keep a 'nigger' as watchman at both the doors that night. At night, Tom goes down the lightning rod and sticks a letter at the back of the watchman's neck. The letter says that a dangerous group of robbers are set to steal the runaway nigger that night.

**CHAPTER XL**

The next morning Huck and Tom go fishing. After returning, they pack up a good lunch. Just as Tom tells Huck to return to the cellar to get the forgotten butter, Aunt Sally encounters Huck. Aunt Sally questions his purpose of visiting the cellar and sends him to the sitting room. Huck finds fifteen farmers standing guard and each one of them possessing a gun. Huck wants to go immediately and inform Tom on how they had overdone it in order, to get into trouble. While Aunt Sally questions Huck,

the butter hidden inside his hat melts and trickles down his forehead. Aunt Sally gets scared thinking Huck has brain fever and is immensely relieved on finding that it is butter.

Huck tells Tom about the armed men which excites Tom. Just as they hear the tramp of men, the three of them escape, Jim first, Huck next and Tom last which was according to Tom's orders. Tom gets caught in the splinter which makes a noise and somebody shoots in his direction. All three of them get into the canoe and paddle to the middle of the river for the island where the raft is hidden. At this point, Huck tells Jim that he is a free man again. Tom is the most glad among them because he has a bullet in the calf of his leg as a memorable trophy of his daring adventures! Jim advises them to get a doctor and it is then Huck feels that Jim is rather white inside.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 17:** What is the sole purpose behind Tom Sawyer's endeavour to free Jim?

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**CHAPTER XLI**

Huck goes to fetch a doctor who curiously asks him all sorts of questions. While returning from the doctor's place, Huck nearly strikes his head into Uncle Phelps's stomach. Uncle Phelps takes Huck to his house since Aunt Sally is very uneasy about their disappearance. Huck finds the house full of farmers and their wives discussing of what had happened. Old Miss Hotchkiss says that she had ransacked the air cabin and thought the nigger was crazy. They had been mystified by the bizarre contents of the cabin. Aunt Sally does not allow Huck to fetch Tom and instead sends Uncle Phelps to town.

**CHAPTER XLII**

Uncle Phelps is unable to find Tom in town. He hands a letter to Aunt Sally. The letter was from Aunt Polly, her sister from St. Petersburg.

Just as she is about to break it open, she drops it and runs outside because Tom Sawyer is brought lying on a mattress. Huck immediately hides the letter.

The doctor comes with Tom and Jim. Most of the people curse Jim and enslave him again in the old cabin with renewed security. The doctor comes forward and speaks for Jim. He says that Jim is not a bad nigger. When the doctor requires help in curing Tom, it is Jim who risks his freedom to be a faithful helper and a good nurse. Huck thanks the doctor for speaking in support and favour of Jim.

Tom wakes up and confesses the entire deed to Aunt Sally who is surprised beyond imagination. Tom says they have no right to enslave Jim again since old Miss Watson who had died two months ago had set him free in her will. When the question arises on that why Tom wanted to set Jim free even after knowing that he was already free, Tom answers that it was all for the sake of the adventure! Meanwhile, Aunt Polly arrives and brings an end to her confusion, when it strikes her or rather dawns on her- that the boy pretending to be Sid is actually Tom Sawyer and the boy pretending to be Tom is actually Huck Finn!

**CHAPTER XLIII**

Huck qestions Tom on what he wanted by freeing a nigger who was already free. Tom replies he wanted to 'repay' Jim and send him like a hero amidst a torchlight procession and brass band! When aunt Polly, uncle Phelps and aunt Sally come to know how Jim sacrificed his freedom to cure Tom, they unchain Jim, give him whatever he wants to eat. Tom gives Jim forty dollars. Jim says that his omen of having a hairy chest finally makes him rich. The three of them think of starting a new adventure amongst the Injuns, the American Indians. Huck says that his Pap might have taken the six thousand dollars from Judge Thatcher by now. Jim says that it will not happen because Pap was dead a long time. Jim reveals that the dead body they had seen in the floating house during the flood was of Pap. Huck says that he will try to get into another territory because aunt Sally was going to adopt and 'sivilize' him and he cannot tolerate being 'sivilized' any more. Huck is also glad that he has nothing

more to write because had he known what trouble it was to write a book, he would not have tackled it.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 18:** 'Tom gives freedom to an already freed man'-Is it justified?

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## 8.4 LET US SUM UP

After going through the unit, the learner will be familiar detailed summary of the novel will enrich the learner's knowledge on the text, background and its content. The learner is advised to read the original text of the novel and also to attempt his or her own analysis of the prescribed text which remains as a classic in American Literature.



## 8.5 FURTHER READING

1) Beaver, Harold. (1987). *Huckleberry Finn.* London and Boston: Allen and Unwin.

2) Bloom, Harold. (2007). *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn-Updated Edition*. New York: Infobase Publishing.

3) Sloane, David E.E. (1988). *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: American Comic Vision*. New York: Twayne Publishers.

4) Twain, Mark. (1999). *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. 1885*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

## 8.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1:** *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876).

**Ans to Q No 2:** Huck stays in the house of Widow Douglass and her sister Miss Watson. Judge Thatcher is also his guardian.

**Ans to Q NO 3:** Jim is the black slave of Miss Watson. He becomes famous on account of his self-made stories about meeting witches and the devil.

**Ans to Q No 4:** Huck has a difficult relationship with his Pap (father). His father abuses and traumatises him and degrades him from being a civilised, educated boy to a boy in rags.

**Ans to Q No 5:** Huck escapes from his domineering father. Jim escapes to prevent getting sold to American South where slaves are worst-treated.

**Ans to Q No 6:** Pap gets extremely furious to find a free black Professor in such a high position in nineteenth-century racist society.

**Ans to Q No 7:** Mrs. Judith Loftus finds out about Huck's disguise by the way he handles the needle and thread.

**Ans to Q No 8:** Jim feels that King Solomon was not wise in ordering to kill the baby to know who is the real mother. Jim, who experienced cruelty in the hands of slavery which always separated the family members of the black people, is not in favour of Solomon's so-called wise decision.

**Ans to Q No 9:** Huck feels guilty because being a white boy, the ideology of racism was deeply ingrained in his mindset.

**Ans to Q No 10:** Emmeline Grangerford's obsession with death predicts the brutal and unfortunate demise of her family members.

**Ans to Q No 11:** The refinement and sophistication of the aristocratic Grangerford family ironically symbolise the hollowness of civilised society since the family becomes extinct due to an unnecessary feud which started thirty years before.

**Ans to Q No 12:** The Boggs episode implies how the common people get cowed down by the powerful people in the society.

**Ans to Q No 13:** Huck feels ashamed of the human race by observing the extreme greed and hypocrisy of the duke and the dauphin.

**Ans to Q No 14:** Huck decides to help the Wilks sisters by observing the innocence, immense generosity and goodness of the sisters specially Mary Jane.

**Ans to Q No 15:** Huck's famous crisis of conscience reveals that he is a strong rebel who does not conform to the flaws and injustice created by civilised society. It also shows that Huck has a great thinking mind.

**Ans to Q No 16:** Tom Sawyer decides to free Jim by executing the models of famous daring escapes that he has read in history and fiction.

**Ans to Q No 17:** Tom Sawyer's sole purpose is to become famous like the immortal heroes in fiction.

**Ans to Q No 18:** The learner is advised to answer this question based on reading the entire novel.



## 8.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

**Q 1:** Discuss the summary of the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* from your own reading of the text.

**Q 2:** Discribe Huck and Jim’s experience on the raft.

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# UNIT 9 : MARK TWAIN: *ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN* III

## UNIT STRUCTURE


9.1 Learning Objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 Major Themes

9.4 Major Characters

9.5 Style and Techniques

9.6 Critical Reception

9.7 Let us Sum up

9.8 Further Reading

9.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

9.10 Model Questions


## 9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- read into the major themes pertaining to the novel
- gain an insight into some of the important and memorable characters
- form an analysis of the narrative style and technique
- receive a critical reception of Mark Twain's work
- draw a keen interest and enjoy the adventures contained in the larger narrative

## 9.2 INTRODUCTION

In continuation of the previous discussion the present unit takes up the emergent themes from the text of the novel. It also presents a discussion on the major characters, critical reception as well as the style and techniques so that the learner shall have a detailed idea of the novel and appreciate it in a holistic manner.

## 9.3 MAJOR THEMES

Some of the emesgent themes from the text of the novel are as follows :

**Racism and Slavery :**

Mark Twain had begun writing *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in 1876. It was published in 1885, twenty years after the Civil War and Emancipation Proclamation of 1865. He gives the time-frame of the novel to be 1835-1845. Before the Civil War, the black slaves were considered as 'chattel' worthy to be sold and purchased as property. The Civil War had abolished slavery in America. However, the black people continued to face racial discrimination in a country dominated by the Jim Crow laws, the atrocities of the Ku Klux Klan and white ideological supremacy. Earlier in the novel, Pap Finn is disgusted to find a 'free nigger' voting in an election. He being a poor white could not even imagine a black man being a rich Professor. However, such occurrences of a rich black Professor were very rare in America and Pap's reaction only showed the hostility of the whites toward the blacks.

In the novel, Jim is the representative of the black people along with the numerous servants who are referred as niggers. The word 'nigger' is considered offensive and many readers found the novel displeasing because the word occurs more than two hundred times in the novel. However, many critics said that at the time Mark Twain wrote the book, the term was commonplace. Jim is initially depicted as gullible and superstitious, thus reinforcing the racist notion of black people being foolish and ignorant. Jim is also unable to take an active part in the adventures of Huck. He has to remain hidden in the background because he is a runaway slave carrying a reward. It can be interpreted that Tom Sawyer uses Jim in order to become a famous adventure hero. He knew the fact that Jim had been freed by Miss Watson. Tom Sawyer also plans to indulge in adventures among the 'Injuns' meaning the American Indians who are another group of oppressed people in America. It is only Huck Finn who understood Jim as a decent human being, a genuine and loving companion. He took the significant decision of freeing Jim which was somehow unusually against the racist mindset of American society. However, when Jim's superior goodness is

seen by all people, when he sacrifies freedom in order to treat Tom Sawyer, Huck says that Jim is indeed white inside. It shows that the racist ideology has been so deeply ingrained in the mindset of white Americans that they are unable to fully acknowledge that black people can be genuinely great human beings.

**The Novel as a Bildungsroman :**

A bildungsroman is a novel of formation or education. A novel is a bildungsroman when it portrays the moral, educational, psychological growth of a young boy. Huck Finn has no formal education. Just as he was beginning to enjoy school, his Pap took him away. He received education from his varied experiences in life. His adventures on the Mississippi river brought him into close contact with life as well as the variety of people that one encounters in life.

Huck presents sensible maturity and generosity of spirit which is quite ahead of his age. He is a born rebel who takes a moral stance against the popular opinion of his day. His intuitive decision to protect and free Jim takes a toll on his conscience as he decides that he will go to hell if required. Huck also demonstrates his superior caring sensibility to both the good and bad alike. He manipulates a night watchman to save the potential murderers of the Walter Scott. He reciprocates to the natural goodness of Mary Jane and takes immediate steps so that the gold goes into the hands of the rightful owner. When the king and the duke dupe the Wilks sisters, Huck feels ashamed of the whole human race. When they are ultimately punished, Huck reflects how cruel human beings can be towards each other. Huck is also the only person who genuinely believes in the whole-hearted love and companionship of Jim.

**Childhood in Conflict with Adulthood/Rebellion against "Sivilized Life" :**

Huck Finn is a teenage boy who is on the verge of the dividing line between innocence of childhood and experience of adulthood. He is a child who is abused and threatened by his own father, Pap Finn, the adult who should have protected him instead. In the house of Widow Douglass, Huck sees the first signs of adult hypocrisy. When he wanted to smoke, he was rebuked but the widow took snuff and there was no

problem because she took it herself. The judicial system created by adults also failed to protect Huck as Pap Finn wins the custody battle over him. The aged Dauphin and the Duke are born imposters who utilise their witty ends for the most diabolical deeds in the adult world. The cold-blooded shooting of Boggs in open daylight by a suit-clad gentleman, Colonel Sherburn enhances the hypocrisy of the adults. After the gruesome murder, the people act the murder scene and get easily cowed down by the Colonel's words when they go to lynch him.

The feud between the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons depict the hollowness of the civilised world. Huck Finn describes the Grangerford house as the most refined and well-organised. The family members are described as the most sophisticated aristocratic family. However, one of the dead member Emmeline Grangerford's obsessions with death predicts the bleakness of their existence. Huck becomes the witness to the brutal killing of the Grangerford family and escapes into the river, receiving the most negative impact of civilised life.

The greatest hypocrisy of civilised life is the man-made inequality of racism. Jim, a decent adult par excellence has to remain hidden and imprisoned because he is not given the status of a human being but a mere property. He escapes because Miss Watson had wanted to sell him to American South where slaves were worst-treated. In South, when Huck makes up a story to Aunt Sally, of the blowing of a cylinder-head which killed a nigger, Aunt Sally exclaimed, "Well, it's lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt." It shows that according to Southern beliefs, a black person has no worth as a human being.

## 9.4 MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Huckleberry Finn :**

Huck Finn is a thirteen or fourteen year old boy who embarks on a journey on the Mississippi river in search of freedom. He embodies the Emersonian ethos of self-reliance. He is also known to be a miracle of self-emancipation. In the beginning of the novel, he is a rich boy with six thousand dollars. However, he is not seen using his money once he leaves civilised

society to lead a lonely life on the big river. His generosity of spirit makes him the best friend of the runaway slave Jim. His non-conformist nature makes him overcome his crisis of conscience to rebel against racism.

Huck Finn is a pleasure-seeker who finds life on the raft more comfortable than life in civilised homes. He is a trickster who can make up instantaneous tales. He is also a picaresque hero as well as a master of disguises but it is seen that he mostly does it for self-survival as well as for protecting Jim. For instance, when two white men ask him in the river about a runaway slave, Huck saves Jim by making up the story of his father suffering from small-pox. In the house of Mrs. Judith Loftus, where he goes disguised as a girl, he makes tales after tales. In the process, he gets information and protects Jim from getting caught by her husband. Thus, it is seen that his age does not prevent him from taking tough moral decisions as well as committing responsible acts on the spur of the moment.

**Jim :**

Jim is an adult slave of Miss Watson who escapes and becomes Huck's best companion in the Mississippi river journey. Jim is depicted as highly superstitious but it is seen that most of his predictions come true. Jim has ample knowledge of the natural world. If he predicts rains, it really rains; if he predicts ill omens, something bad really happens to them. Jim also has knowledge of interpreting dreams.

Jim is portrayed in such a way as to defy the ideological racist notion of black people possessing no feelings, no intellect and thus they are not human beings. Jim aspires to get united to his family who are sold in different places. Jim feels extremely bad because he scolds his young daughter Elizabeth once for a petty mischief, only to know that she was suffering from fever. Jim has the most caring attitude towards Huck. He is almost like a surrogate father-figure to Huck. He makes sure to guard the raft during night so that Huck can sleep more. In the end, it is Jim who advises Huck to get a doctor for Tom's bullet injury. Jim also sacrifices his new-found freedom to nurse Tom.

Jim is also shown to have a sharp intellent of his own. He is able to argue with Huck on any topic even if Huck does not agree with him. He even opines that in the Bible, King Solomon was not correct in giving

the order of killing the child to know its real mother. For Jim who belongs to the oppressed section of society, the life of the child is more important.

**Tom Sawyer :**

Tom Sawyer is the leader of the gang of which Huck Finn is a member. He has read an enormous number of European adventure classics such as Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. He deals with life with the authority of the classics. He believes life is similar to what is written in the classics. In this regard, his attitude is very different from Huck Finn who deals with life in a practical manner. As leader of Tom Sawyer's gang, Tom sends its members to rob rich Arabs and Spanish merchants which Huck finds to be only a Sunday school picnic.

Tom's excessive belief in romantic tales led him to free Jim by inventing all unnecessary difficulties. Both Huck and Jim had to agree under the patronising command of Tom Sawyer. Although Tom achieves the heroic status like his idols of adventure tales, yet it is disheartening for many readers to learn that Tom already learn that Jim was free since two months earlier. It can be interpreted that Tom used Jim as a plaything to attempt his adventures. Although, he pays Jim forty dollars in the end, yet it seems a petty compensation considering the situation that Jim was made to withstand throughout the adventure.



## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q 1:** Write a short note on the character of

a. Huck Finn, b. Jim.

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**Q 2:** Who was Tom Sawyer?

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**Q 3:** Briefly mention Tom Sawyer's role in freeing Jim.

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## 9.5 STYLE AND TECHNIQUES

The novel Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is written in the first-person autobiographical account of Huck Finn. The American author F. Scott Fitzgerald has said that Huck's "eyes were the first eyes that ever looked at us objectively that were not eyes from overseas." Huck Finn narrated his own story in the best American style, emphasising the American ethos of loneliness, self-reliance and freedom. The novel is narrated in colloquial style with a number of dialects. For example, the Missouri negro dialect, the extremist form of the backwoods South-Western dialect, the ordinary "Pike-county" dialect and four modified varieties of this last one.

Huck Finn's language is a kind of spoken language. It has the vocabulary and syntax of the uneducated son of an alcoholic father who rebels against the conventions of society. Huck uses words like "sivilize." It not only reflects the vocabulary of a young boy but also the fact that Huck mostly disagrees with the ways of civilised society. His language also has a unique brand of humour. Most of the impending dangers threatening the lives of Huck and Jim are mitigated by Huck's telling of made-up stories which enhances the humour of the narrative. It shows that Huck is a master-storyteller. It can also be interpreted that Huck wrote his autobiography as a means of survival. He tells in the last chapter that "there ain't nothing more to write about, and I am rotten glad of it, because if I'd a knowed what a trouble it was to make a book I wouldn't a tackled it and ain't agoing to no more." Just as he was a master-storyteller who could invent instantaneous lies for protection of himself as well as Jim, he is equally adept at writing an autobiographical narrative to combat his loneliness and uneasiness with the artifices of civilised life.

## 9.6 CRITICAL RECEPTION

T. S. Eliot has termed the novel as Twain's masterpiece. He said that two elements formed this great book and they are the Boy and the River. He differentiates Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn. In *Tom Sawyer*, "the

point of view of the narrator is that of an adult observing a boy… Huck we do not look at-we see the world through his eyes." Regarding their imagination, he said, "Tom has the imagination of a lively boy who has read a good deal of romantic fiction…Huck has not imagination, in the sense in which Tom has it: he has, instead, vision. He sees the real world; and he does not judge it– he allows it to judge itself." He said about the River, "It is Huck who gives the book style. The river gives the book its form. If it was not for the river, the book might have only been a mere sequence of adventures with a happy ending. A river, a very big and powerful river, is the only natural force that can wholly determine the course of human peregrination." Lionel Trilling opines that the prose style of *"Huckleberry Finn"* established for written prose the virtues of American colloquial speech."

The novel also received negative response of being racist and consequently was banned. The book has the accusation of using a single demeaning racial epithet 'nigger' more than 200 times. Toni Morrison said in "The Amazing, Troubling Book", that "Fear and alarm are what I [she] remember[ed] most about my (her) first encounter with Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Palpable alarm." Morrison said that Huck Finn lives in continuously dangerous circumstances and when he is alone, he is frequently suicidal. She poses the question, "What does Huck need to live without terror, melancholy and suicidal thoughts? The answer, of course, is Jim." She says, "For Huck, Jim is a father-for-free."

On the other hand, David L. Smith in "Huck, Jim, and American Racial Discourse" has argued on the novel for its explicitly 'antiracist' stance. He said that inspite of using the term nigger and showing Jim engaging in superstitious behaviour, Twain "portrays Jim as a compassionate, shrewd, thoughtful, self-sacrificing, and even wise man… Jim is cautious, he gives excellent advice, he suffers persistent anguish over separation from his wife and children, and he even sacrifices his own sleep so that Huck may rest. Jim, in short, exhibits all the qualities that "the Negro" supposedly lacks. Twain's conclusions does more than merely subvert the justifications of slavery, which was already long since

abolished." The narrative is used to reveal Jim's humanity. Smith also said that the poor-white Pap's tirade or outburst against the free nigger Professor is also Twain's critique of racism in *Huckleberry Finn*.



## 9.7 LET US SUM UP

The major themes, major characters have been highlighted for the learner's easy study, analysis and reference. The use of narrative style along with the critical reception provides a complete idea of the novel which is considered as an evergreen classic in American Literature. The learner will do well to go through the unit thorongly and patiently to gain a detailed idea of this great work by Mark Twain.



## 9.8 FURTHER READING

1) Beaver, Harold. (1987). *Huckleberry Finn.* London and Boston: Allen and Unwin.
2) Bloom, Harold. (2007). *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*-Updated Edition. New York: Infobase Publishing.
3) Sloane, David E.E. (1988). *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: American Comic Vision*. New York: Twayne Publishers.
4) Twain, Mark. (1999). *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. 1885*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.



## 9.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1 :** Refer to 9.4.1

**Ans to Q No 2 :** Tom Sawyer is the leader of the gang of which Huck Finn is a member.

**Ans to Q No 3 :** Tom's excessive belief in romantic tales led him to free Jim by investing all unnecessary difficulties. Although Tom achieves the heroic status like his idols of adventure tales yet it is disheartening for many readers to learn that Tom already knew that Jim was free since two months earlier.

## 9.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

**Q 1:** Discuss the theme of "racism and slavery" in the novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

**Q 2:** Discuss the novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as a bildungsroman.

**Q 3:** Write a character sketch of the following characters in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*



a. Huck Finn

b. Jim

c. Tom Sawyer.

**Q 4:** Write a note on the similarities and differences between the characters of Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer.

**Q 5:** How does the novel portray the injustice of civilised society? Why does Huck refuse to get "sivilized"?

**Q 6:** Write a note on Huck Finn as a rebellious child against the injustice committed by the adult world?

**Q 7:** Write a note on the style and narrative technique in the novel.

**Q 8:** Discuss the relationship between Huck Finn and Jim.

**Q 9:** How does the novel depict the American notion of the urge for freedom and self-reliance?

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