Mark Twain was born Samuel Langhorne Clemens on November 30, 1835, in the frontier village of Florida, Missouri. He spent his boyhood in nearby Hannibal, on the banks of the Mississippi River, observing its busy life, fascinated by its romance, but chilled by the violence and bloodshed it bred. Clemens was eleven years old when his lawyer father died. In order to help the family earn money, the young Clemens began working as a stroke clerk and a delivery boy. He also began working as an apprentice (working to learn a trade), then a compositor (a person who sets type), with local printers, contributing occasional small pieces to local newspapers. At seventeen his comic sketch “The Dandy Frightening the Squatter” was published by a sportsmen’s magazine in Boston, Massachusetts.

In 1853 Clemens began wandering as a journeyman printer to St. Louis, Missouri; Chicago, Illinois; New York, New York; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; settling briefly with his brother, Orion, in Iowa before setting out at twenty-two years old make his fortune, he hoped, beside the lush banks of the Amazon River in South America. Instead, traveling down the Mississippi River,
he became a steamboat river pilot until the outbreak of the Civil War (1861-1865), when Northern forces clashed with those of the South over slavery and secession (the South’s desire to leave the Union).

In 1861 Clemens traveled to Nevada, where he invested carelessly in timber and silver mining. He settled down to newspaper work in Virginia City, until his reckless pen and redheaded temper brought him into conflict with local authorities; it seemed profitable to escape to California. Meanwhile he had adopted the pen name of Mark Twain, a river man’s term for water that is just safe enough for navigation.

In 1865, Twin began to write a short story, *The Jumping Frog of Calaveras Country*, which first brought him national attention. Most of his western writing was hastily, often carelessly, done and he later did little to preserve it.

In 1865 the *Sacramento Union* commissioned Mark Twain to report on a new excursion service to Hawaii. His accounts as published in the newspaper provided the basis for his first successful lectures and years later were collected in *Letters from Honolulu* (1939). His travel accounts were so well received that he was contracted in 1866 to become a traveling correspondent for the *Alta California*; he would circle the globe, writing letters.

In 1870 Twain married Olivia Langdon. After a brief residence in upstate New York as an editor and part owner of the *Buffalo Express*, he moved to Hartford, Connecticut, where he lived for twenty years; there three daughters were born, and prosperity as a writer and lecturer (in England in 1872 and 1873) seemed guaranteed. *Roughing It* (1872) recounted Mark Twain’s travels to Nevada and reprinted some of the Sandwich Island letters.

Meanwhile Mark Twain’s account of steamboating experience for the *Atlantic Monthly* (1875; expanded to *Life on the Mississippi*, 1883) captured the beauty, glamor, and danger of the Mississippi River. Boyhood memories of life beside that river were written into *The Adventure of Tom Sawyer* (1875), which
immediately attracted young and old alike. With more exotic and foreign settings, *The Prince and The Pauper* (1882) and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (1889) attracted readers also, but *The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), in which Mark Twain again returned to the river scenes he knew best, was considered unacceptable by many.

Twain’s *Tom Sawyer*, better organized than *Huckleberry Finn*, is a narrative of innocent boyhood play that accidentally discovers evil as Tom and Huck witness a murder by Injun Joe in a graveyard at midnight. The boys run away, are thought dead, but turn up at their own funeral. Tom and Huck decide to seek out the murderer and the reward offered for his capture. It is Tom and his sweetheart who, while lost in a cave, discover the hiding place of Injun Joe. Though the townspeople unwitting seal the murderer in the cave, they close the entrance only to keep adventuresome boys like tom out of future trouble. In the end, it is innocent paly and boyish adventuring which really triumph.

*Huckleberry Finn* is considered by many to be Mark Twain’s finest creation. Huck lacks Tom’s imagination; he is a simple boy with little education. One measure of his character is a proneness to deceit, which seems instinctive, a trait shared by other wild things and relating him to nature-in opposition to Tom’s tradition-grounded, book-learned, imaginative deceptions. *The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn*, a loosely strung series of adventures, can be viewed as the story of a quest for freedom and an escape from what society requires in exchange for success. Joined in flight by a black companion, Jim, who seeks freedom from slavery, Huck discover that the Mississippi is peaceful (though he is found to be only partially correct) but that the world along its shores is full of trickery, including his own, and by cruelty and murder. When the raft on which he and Jim are floating down the river is invaded by two criminals, Huck first becomes theirs assistant in swindles but is finally the agent of their exposure.

Whatever its faults, Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* is a classic. Variously interpreted, it is often thought to suggest more than it reveals, speaking of what
man has done to confuse himself about his right relation to nature. It can also be thought of as a treatment of man’s failures in dealing with his fellows and of the corruption that man’s only escape is in flight, perhaps even from himself. Yet it is also an apparently artless story of adventure and escape so simply and directly told that novelist Ernest Hemingway (c. 1899-1961) once said that all American Literature begins with this book.

After a series of unsuccessful business ventures in Europe, Twain returned to the United States in 1900. His writing grew increasingly bitter, especially after his wife’s death in 1905. *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg* (1900) exposed corruption in a small, typical American town. *Eve’s* (1906), written partly in memory of his wife, showed a man saved from bungling only through the influence of a good woman.

In 1906 Twain began to dictate his autobiography to Albert B. Paine, recording scattered memories without any particular order. Portions from it were published in periodicals later that year. With the income from the excerpts of his autobiography, he built a large house in Redding, Connecticut, which he named Stormfield. There, after several trips to Bermuda to improve his declining health, he died on April 21, 1910.
SUMMARY

The first time we meet Tom Sawyer, he's in Aunt Polly's pantry, stealing from the jam jar. This is only the beginning of his rascally adventures. Tom narrowly escapes being hit by Polly, then plays hooky for the rest of the day. When Aunt Polly finds out about this – thanks to Tom's snitch of a brother Sid – he's sentenced to whitewash a fence the next day. But Tom gets out of the punishment by tricking the local boys into paying him for the privilege of whitewashing the fence. Tom heads off to enjoy himself. On his way back home, he sees a girl standing in Jeff Thatcher's house. He falls hopelessly in love and starts showing off for her. The next day, in Sunday school, Tom uses the loot he made with the fence scheme to buy a bunch of "tickets" from the other boys. He uses these tickets to get himself a Bible prize. But Tom makes a fool of himself in front of a visitor, Judge Thatcher, and the rest of the Sunday school crowd, when he tells them all that the first two apostles were named "David and Goliah."

Before school the next day, Tom runs into Huckleberry Finn. Huck is the son of the town drunk and he has no mother, so he basically gets to do whatever he wants. Everyone, including Tom, envies Huck. Tom and Huck start discussing various ways to cure warts, and then agree to meet up at the graveyard at midnight to try out a new cure involving a dead cat.

Tom shows up at school late, prepared to make up an excuse, when he notices that the only seat open on the girl's side is next to that girl. So when the schoolmaster asks him to explain himself, he tells him that he's been talking to Huckleberry Finn, which shocks the schoolmaster. Tom is whipped and then "forced" to go sit next to the girl. Tom impresses her with his awful drawing skills, then introduces himself. The girl's name is Becky. Just before Tom is pulled away by the schoolmaster for being disorderly, they agree to meet outside during recess. During recess, Tom gets Becky to tell her she loves him and to give him a kiss, but he mucks it all up when he mentions his old flame Amy Lawrence. He tries to make up by giving Becky a gift, but she throws it to the ground. Tom runs off to the woods and sulks for a while, but before too long he's dreaming about
being an "Indian" and a pirate. His fantasy is interrupted by Joe Harper, and the two boys play Robin Hood for the rest of the afternoon. That night, Tom sneaks out of the house and heads over to the graveyard with Huck Finn. Just as they are approaching, three men appear: Dr. Robinson, Injun Joe, and Muff Potter. The boys watch in horror as Injun Joe murders Dr. Robinson during a fight, and blames it on Muff Potter who, already drunk, had been knocked out in the middle of the scuffle. They run away as fast as they can. Once they've settled down, they promise never to tell anyone about what they've seen, write up a contract, and sign it in blood. The next morning, Tom is scolded by Aunt Polly; he gets whipped for playing hooky when he shows up at school and, to top it all off, he finds his andiron knob left on a desk.

By noon that day, word about the murder has gotten around, and school is let out. Everybody heads over to the graveyard. Soon, Muff Potter shows up, in the company of the Sheriff. Muff Potter swears he's innocent, but Injun Joe has already sold him out. Tom and Huck watch in horror, realizing nothing is going to be done about Injun Joe. Tom is so afraid that he talks in his sleep about the murder, and has to fake a toothache and tie up his mouth to prevent himself from letting anything slip. Though he doesn't dare to say anything about the murder, Tom stops by the jail whenever he can to bring gifts for Muff Potter. Soon, however, Tom falls into a deep depression. Aunt Polly attempts to help him by administering all sorts of medicines, but none of them work. Tom feeds a bit of one to the family cat, which causes the cat to go crazy. When Aunt Polly yells at him, Tom finally tells her that her "cures" don't work, and she apologizes.

 Feeling better about himself, Tom heads to school hoping to see Becky Thatcher. When she tells him to get lost, he falls back into a depression and ditches the schoolhouse. He runs into Joe Harper, who has just been scolded for drinking cream, and the two decide to abandon civilization, head off to Jackson's Island and become pirates. They take Huck Finn along for the ride. After getting supplies – a.k.a. stealing some bacon, a ham, and other provisions – they set out
for the island. Though Tom and Joe at first feel pangs of conscience, soon enough they're off relaxing, enjoying nature, swimming, and fishing. At some point, they notice a ferry, off in the distance, filled with people. They figure out that the people are a search party; someone has drowned. Soon the boys realize that they are the ones who have supposedly drowned. This makes the boys very happy. Joe begins to show signs of homesickness, but Tom manages to make him think twice. After Huck and Joe have nodded off to sleep, Tom has a brilliant idea. He writes two notes, leaves one by the camp – along with some marbles and toys – and takes the other with him. He swims over to the Illinois shore, then sneaks aboard the ferry back to St. Petersburg. Once there, he goes to his house, and listens in as Aunt Polly, Mrs. Harper, Sid, and Mary talk about him and Joe; he takes great pleasure in hearing them praise him. When Aunt Polly goes to bed, Tom goes up to her and considers leaving his note next to her bed. At the last minute he decides against the plan, kisses her, and leaves.

He gets back to Jackson's Island early that morning, takes a nap by the shore, and then heads over to the camp. He surprises Huck and Joe, who are puzzling over his note – which says they can have his stuff if he isn't back by breakfast. The next day, after more of the same kind of fun, Joe and Huck begin to get homesick. Tom convinces them to stay by telling them "his secret." That night, there's a terrible thunderstorm, which they manage to survive, and they spend the next day pretending to be Indians. The next day, the townspeople have assembled in church for the boys' funeral. Just after the preacher gives his sermon praising the saintly departed children, Tom, Huck, and Joe come out of nowhere and march down the aisle. Turns out they came back to town the night before and waited in the church until this moment to show their faces. Later on, Tom tricks Aunt Polly into thinking he's psychic by telling her all about the conversation he eavesdropped on when he snuck home from Jackson's Island. The boys are treated as heroes at school. Tom, still mad at Becky, ignores her and flirts with Amy Lawrence instead. In order to get back at Tom, Becky invites everyone within earshot to a picnic – except Tom and Amy – but when this doesn't work she's
forced to try another plan. When Tom sees her reading a book with another classmate, he gets angry and leaves.

Aunt Polly finds out that Tom's whole "psychic" bit was a scam, and she confronts Tom. She's angry that he didn't let her know he was still alive. He tells her that he thought about doing so – which he did – but she has a hard time believing him until she finds the note in his pocket. The next day at school, Tom sees Becky peeking at the schoolmaster's special anatomy book. When she sees Tom, she tries to put the book away as quickly as possible, but rips a page in the process. When the schoolmaster finds the torn page and starts asking who ripped it, Tom lies and takes responsibility so that Becky doesn't have to get punished. He's whipped, but he doesn't mind. Summer vacation rolls around and Tom finds himself incredibly bored. The murder trial starts, however, and he and Huck both become consumed with guilt. Finally, Tom breaks down and testifies on the last day of Muff Potter's trial, saving Muff. Injun Joe flees the courtroom before anyone can react.

Tom is hit by treasure-hunting fever, and he enlists Huck to help him look. The two boys decide to search inside a "haunted" house one night. Their hunt is interrupted by the appearance of two men, one of whom turns out to be Injun Joe dressed as a "Spaniard." Tom and Huck watch as Injun Joe happens upon a box of gold coins buried in the floor. Injun Joe, who has been using the place as a safehouse, becomes suspicious when he sees the boys' tools in the corner, and takes the coins with him. The boys only narrowly escape being found. Tom and Huck hear Injun Joe mention a hiding place, "Number Two, under the cross," which they determine to be in a room at one of the town's taverns. Tom sneaks into the room one night and finds Injun Joe drunk on the floor. Huck agrees to stand watch outside the room every night, until he sees some activity. Becky's picnic rolls around and Tom forgets about the treasure. Tom and Becky head into the local cave along with the rest of the kids. That night while on lookout duty, Huck sees two shadowy figures enter the room, then exit with a box. He follows
them to just outside the Widow Douglas's house, where he hears the men, who turn out to be Injun Joe and his partner, discussing their "revenge." Huck gets the help of the Welshman, a man who lives nearby, then runs away as fast as he can. The next morning, he returns to visit the Welshman, who tells him that the two men got away. Huck reveals that one of the men was Injun Joe and promptly falls sick.

Meanwhile, Tom and Becky are lost in the cave. They attempt to find their way out to no avail and, because Tom and Becky lied and said they were going to spend the night at the Harpers' house, no one notices until Sunday morning. Rescuers, including Judge Thatcher, are dispatched. Tom continues to look for a way out of the cave, and thinks he's found one when he sees a rescuer coming around the corner in the cave, but it's Injun Joe. Luckily, Tom escapes unnoticed. Eventually, he is able to find his way out of a small hole and heads back in to town with Becky. Once Tom is fully recuperated, he goes to visit Becky. He runs into Judge Thatcher, who tells him that the entrance to the cave has been sealed with a metal door. Tom tells the judge that Injun Joe was in there. The townspeople rush out to the cave and find Joe dead by the door. Soon after, Tom goes and tells Huck that he knows where the treasure is. He takes him to the cave, where they find Joe's hideout, and, hidden in a secret chamber, under a cross, the treasure. They are intercepted on their way back home by the Welshman, who takes them to the Widow Douglas's house. Once there, Huck's bravery is revealed, and the Widow tells everyone that she will be taking care of the boy from now on. Tom runs and gets the money, then dumps it on the table. It is split into two shares, and both Tom and Huck receive a considerable income as a result. Huck soon tires of living with the Widow, but Tom convinces him to go back and live with her.