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Lesson Eight

FOCUS: The Plot Unfolds

The author crafts a plot structure to create expectations, increase suspense, and develop characters. The pacing of events can make a novel either predictable or riveting. Foreshadowing and flashbacks allow the author to defy the constraints of time. Sometimes an author can confound a simple plot by telling stories within stories. In a conventional work of fiction, the peak of the story's conflict—the climax—is followed by the resolution, or denouement, in which the effects of that climactic action are presented.

Discussion Activity

Have students review the main events in the novel thus far. What are the most significant events? How has Twain chosen to pace the story? Is it too fast-paced and too fantastical? Is it realistic and believable? By drawing together a series of events and tall tales, is the novel the ultimate tall tale?

Writing Exercise

Mark Twain wrote, “Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities. Truth isn’t.” Using information from your discussion, have students write one page about how fiction might be “less strange” than truth. Conclude with a statement on how this quotation illuminates the novel or sheds light on the plot of the novel or the novel as a whole.

Homework

Read Chapters XXXII–Conclusion (pp. 204–225). Students should come to class prepared to discuss whether the novel has any larger thematic intent beyond the depiction of boyhood in a river town in the 1840s.