

The Impact Of A Good Father Figure

The novel *Adventures Of Huckleberry Finn* written by Mark Twain discusses the aspects of having a proper father figure in your life, and how important it is, especially for a teenage boy. The story's main character, Huck, a fourteen-year-old boy finds a father within someone he would least expect. Throughout this story, Jim, an enslaved man, fulfills the need Huck has, by being present, caring for Huck's well-being, and also showing him that love is real. Because Jim has these attributes of a good father, Huck is pushed to break societal norms, which allows Jim to be free of his enslavement.

To begin, Huck never really has a good father in his life. Pap Finn, was a drunk who beat him. Pap taught Huck basics, such as hunting, and surviving with very little, which does help Huck after he faked his death, but other than that Pap wasn't much good. Jim, on the other hand, is the one who shows Huck what a true father figure should be. In the story, readers can see Jim's love for Huck in many different ways.

First, Jim cares for Huck by protecting him. In chapter nine, Huck and Jim are on an Island and they come across a frame house. In the house, a man lies still and while they try to call out to him, Jim realizes he's dead. At this time in the text, readers don't know that the dead man is Pap Finn, but Jim does and states to Huck, "Come in, Huck, but don't look at his face—it's too gashly'....Jim throwed some old rags over him"(Twain, 60). This is important because readers can see that Jim is protecting Huck from having to view his father in that state. Although Pap wasn't the best to Huck, Huck still had some type of love or affection for him. Jim stepping into this role of being a protector is one of the reasons why he becomes such an important figure, and why Huck breaks societal norms.

Second, Jim shows Huck what truly being cared for looks like. Although other characters care for Huck, such as Miss Watson and Judge Thatcher, who help Huck when Pap left him, no one truly cares for Huck the way that Jim does. Jim cares for Huck as if he were his son. Jim's need to make sure Huck isn't hurt or that Huck is fed, or even making sure he isn't alone, allows readers to view how much he has stepped into the role of being a father. One of the most important scenes where we see how important Huck has become to Jim is when they get lost in fog and are "whooping" to try and reunite. Once found, Jim states,

Goodness gracious, is dat you, Huck? En you ain' dead—you ain' drowned you's back agin? It's too good for true, honey, it's too good for true. Lemme look at you, chile lemme feel o' you. No, you ain' dead! you's back agin, 'live en soun' jis de same ole Huck—de same ole Huck, thank goodness! (Twain, 97).

What we see here is not only how grateful Jim is to have found Huck, but also the fatherly love he has for him. The aspect of wanting to feel him to make sure he is really there, and also wanting to just look at him, is something only a parent would do when a life-threatening situation has happened to their child.

In this chapter, we also see where Huck's view of Jim has changed, from viewing him as an enslaved person to then viewing him as a friend. After this incident, Huck plays a trick on Jim because he wants to be funny. Huck tells Jim it was all a dream, and that he was never gone at all. Huck essentially gaslights Jim into thinking what happened didn't happen. But Huck then ends up feeling bad that he lied to Jim and states,

It made me feel so mean I could almost kissed *his* foot to get him to take it back...but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither. I

didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd a knowed it would make him feel that way (Twain, 100).

This is a key turning point for Huck. He begins to not care about the societal norms of the South and begins to start viewing Jim as a human and less as an enslaved person. The importance of this is that without the change of perspective, Huck would have not cared about Jim's hurt feelings or about being mean to him in the first place. While this is a critical point in the story for Huck's character development, it is also where Huck is accepting of this father figure Jim has portrayed. Jim is not only now a friend to Huck, but he is the best example of a good man that Huck has ever known— a man with morals, and a kind, caring, and loving heart.

Although Jim has been a great father figure, and Huck's view of Jim is starting to break societal norms, Huck begins to have a war within himself about helping Jim be free. In chapter sixteen we see that Huck's conscience is telling him one thing, but his heart is telling him another. During this chapter, Huck is debating whether to go tell someone that Jim is trying to escape, but his internal war is stopping him from going. The text states, "My conscience got to stirring me up hotter than ever, until at last, I says to it, 'Let up on me—it ain't too late, yet—I'll paddle ashore at the first light, and tell.' I felt easy, and happy, and light as a feather, right off" (Twain, 103). Huck's conscience may have wanted to follow the societal norms, but Jim then states, "'Pooty soon I'll be shout'n for joy, en I'll say, it's all on accounts o' Huck; I's a free man, en I couldn't ever ben free ef it hadn' been for Huck... Huck; you's de best fren Jim's ever had; en you's de *only* fren' ole Jim's got now'"(Twain, 103-104). This is important because once Jim states this, Huck's motivation for going to find someone to tell, dies. He no longer follows his conscience, and begins to follow his heart by defying societal norms. As stated before, Huck

does truly care for Jim, and this act of not telling anyone would prove Huck doesn't only see Jim as his friend, but as a father.

Finally, in chapter twenty-three, Jim discusses his daughter and how he got angry with her for not listening, but then he realized she was actually deaf. This is an important part of the story and an important aspect of Jim being a father figure to Huck because it allows Huck to see what a loving and caring father should look like. Although Jim is in pain while telling the story because of how much he misses his family, his openness about his emotions allows Huck to see what a good father should be—a man that is loving, honest, and real. Jim is exactly the type of figure that Huck needed.

Overall, Jim fulfills Huck's need for a father figure and also allows Huck to break societal norms. This is important especially during this time period, because of the racial divide in the South. Jim is the person that Huck needs, he not only protected and cared for Huck but also taught him that it is okay to love and care for someone different than himself. Huck's abandonment of racism is influenced by Jim becoming the father he needs. The love and acceptance Huck has for Jim help Huck in more ways than we could imagine. Renowned author and critic, Toni Morrison would agree. Morrison stated,

The consolation, the healing properties Huck longs for, is made possible by Jim's active, highly vocal affection. It is in Jim's company that the dread of contemplated nature disappears, that even storms are beautiful and sublime, that real talk—comic, pointed, sad—takes place. Talk so free of lies it produces an aura of resentment and peace unavailable anywhere else in the novel. (Baym, 1478)

Twain wrote a very influential story in 1884, that not only critiqued the racism that occurred during this time period but also allowed readers to view how two different people can come together to love and care for one another.

Works Cited

Baym, Nina, and Robert S. Levine. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2013.

Twain, Mark, and Mary R. Reichardt. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: With an Introduction and Contemporary Criticism*. Ignatius Press, 2009.