

Using information from the following texts, write an argumentative essay that expresses your point of view as to whether or not the book *Huckleberry Finn* should be included in the school curriculum. Use evidence from the readings to support your opinion.

Draft 1. We should eliminate *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* from school Curriculum.

A famous novel by Mark Twain is *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. It is recognized as a classic American fiction. However, it is the belief of some that it has no place in our schools. There are many reasons for the book's fame that include adventure, local dialect and local customs. However, it also includes deep currents of racism that are embedded within the culture and language.

The story takes place in the 19th century in Missouri and areas in the south. Slavery was still exercised in the United States at that time. Huck Finn was a young white man who helped Jim, a black slave escape from his owner. The story reveals their adventures as they try to escape capture.

Racist language is used throughout the book. Characters use "the n word" to refer to Jim and other African Americans. Huck states that Jim is "white" on the inside. Within the context of the book, this means that Huck knows Jim is a good man. However, it still remains offensive.

Some would argue that getting a feel for this period in history will help young people understand the legacy of slavery. But at what cost? Students will feel uncomfortable about the racist attitudes shown by the characters. Worse, reading the book may actually increase the use of racial slurs long considered unacceptable. So, despite the classic status of the book, and Huck's noble desire to help Jim, the book may not be appropriate for modern school audiences.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn Can Help Students Understand the Past

Mark Twain's novel was first published in 1885, is one of America's great classic stories. It is a tale of adventure, high spirits, friendship, and loyalty that readers have loved for more than 100 years. It examines serious issues surrounding racism and morality. It explores what it means to be loyal. It asks what it means to be free. It also gives readers a first-hand idea of what it was like to live in Missouri and the southwest in the days of slavery before the American Civil War. Unfortunately, that picture can be hard to look at. Some educators would ban it from classrooms because it violates our modern sensibilities.

Huckleberry Finn was one of the first novels to be written outside of standard American English and socially acceptable guidelines. Its characters speak in local dialects according to their social status and race, and their actions are in line with local customs. Twain tells the story of Huck, the untamed son of the town drunkard, in Huck's own voice. While this offers readers from other places and times an opportunity to learn about the region's unique history, language, and culture, the picture it paints can seem shocking to some. Racism and slavery were facts of life for these people.

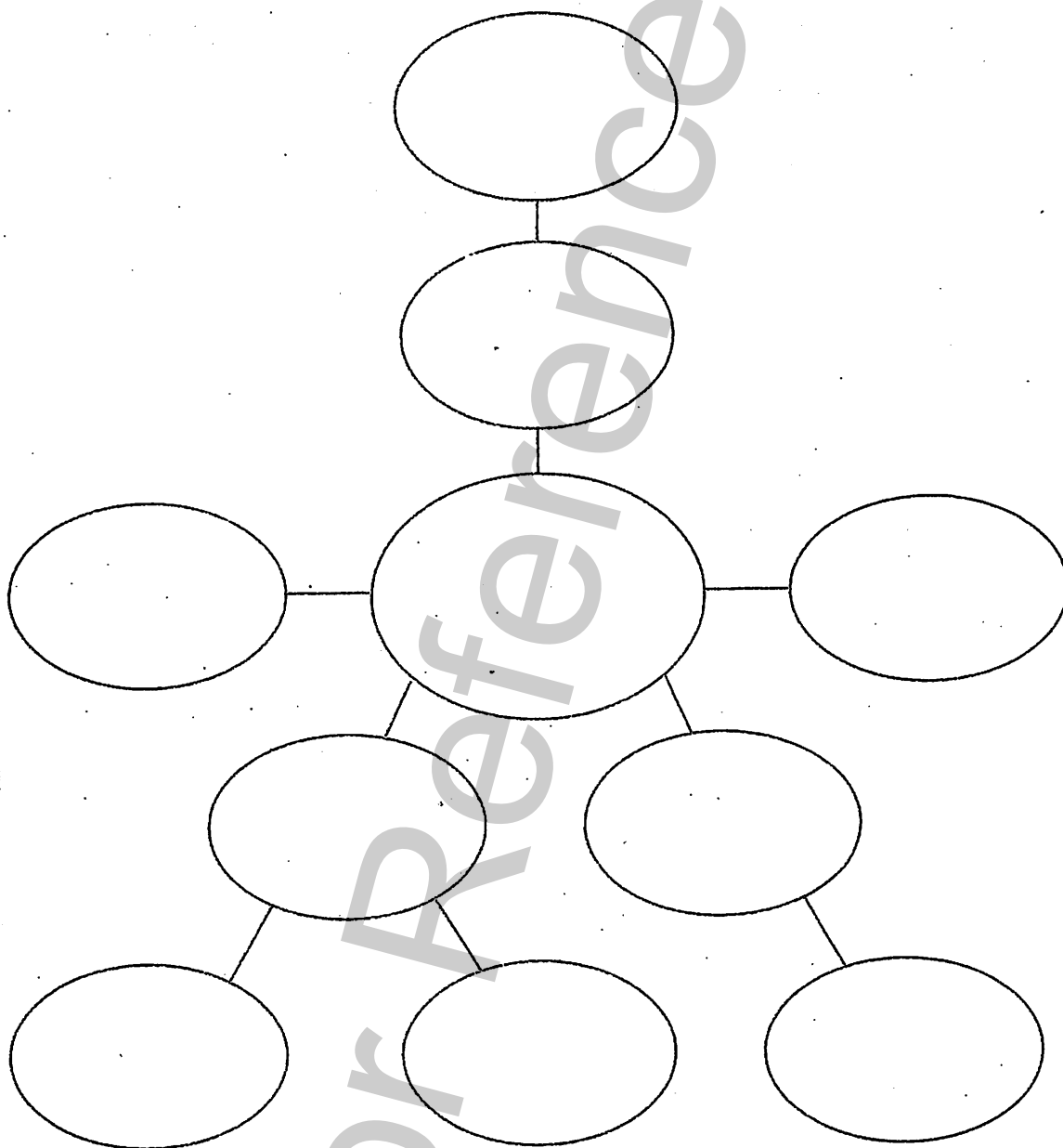
In summary, Huck Finn helps his black friend Jim, escape from slavery. This is not an easy choice for Huck. Early in the book he struggles with his "conscience" which tells him that by helping Jim escape, he is essentially stealing someone else's property. Is Jim "property," or is he a human being as worthy of respect as any other? Huck must struggle with this question.

Huck's speech reflects the unspoken assumptions of the time. Some of that language is now viewed as inappropriate for anyone to use. For that reason, some people feel that the book should be banned in schools. But, that would be like hiding our heads in the sand. Slavery and racism are facts of our past. It is in our best interest to confront those attitudes and try to understand them. The book opens a window on that time and place. It can be seen as a strong argument against the racist attitudes common in the U.S. in the mid-nineteenth century and still echoing today. It is worth careful reading and study by all Americans.

Name _____ Date _____

Cluster Diagram

What do you do when you have trouble finding ideas or figuring out how the ideas you do have relate to each other? Sometimes using a diagram can help you see clearly what you think. Try making a cluster diagram like the one below to discover and develop writing ideas and to explore your reactions to what you read.



VOCABULARY

Draft1: WE SHOULD ELIMINATE THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN FROM THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Novel – Story; Book

Fame – Recognition; Celebrity

Complex – Multifaceted; Intricate

Portray - Depict

Generic English – General; Basic

Generic people - Common

Currents – Undercurrents; Flows; Fluxes

Embedded - Rooted

Capture – Take; Arrest

Inflict - Cause

Legacy – Heritage; Birthright

Uncomfortable – Difficult; Uneasy; Painful

Slurs - Insults

Despite – Even though

Noble - Honorable

Draft 2 : THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN CAN HELP STUDENTS UNDERSTAND THE PAST

Published – In print

Celebrated - Famous

Adventure - Exploration

Loyalty - Allegiance

Examines - Scrutinizes

Racism - Discrimination

Morality – Ethics; Standards; Integrity

Illustrates - Demonstrates

Bondage - Captivity

Civilization – How people live in society

Slavery – Captivity; Oppression

American Civil War

Educators - Teachers

Ban - Prohibit

Violates – Intrude upon

Sensibilities - Feeling

Standard Conventional English – Proper Grammar/Punctuation

Vernacular – Informal; conversational speech; slang

Dialects – Languages used in particular regions

Untamed – Wild; Undomesticated

Drunkard - Alcoholic

Unique - Exclusive

Culture – Background; Ethnicity

Conscience – Personal sense of right and wrong

Essentially – In actual fact

Assumptions - Guesses

Inappropriate - Unsuitable

Confront – Meet head on

Attitudes – Approaches; Outlooks

Echoing – Reverberating; Muffled

For Reference Only