**Huckleberry Finn: A Case Study**

**Directions: Read through Huck’s moral dilemma as well as the demographic information included in his file. Based on his upbringing and life experience, and your new understanding of Kohlberg’s Moral Stages, make predictions about how Huck will respond to this conflict and how he might resolve it.**

**Huck’s Dilemma:** Huck was born and raised in the pre-Civil War South, a member of a slave-owning society. He has been told his whole life, and truly believes, that slavery is beneficial to society and that African Americans are less than human. In his hometown of St. Petersburgh, MO, “Abolitionist” is a dirty word, and anyone caught sympathizing with slaves is shunned by the townspeople. In addition to social consequences, Huck lives in a time when the *Fugitive Slave Act* was enforced. This federal law outlined harsh punishments, even death, for both the runaway slave and their collaborator if captured. Due to an abusive situation at home, Huck finds it necessary to run away, even going so far as to fake his own death. Early in his journey, Huck finds himself in the company of a runaway slave named Jim. The two quickly become allies in order to survive. They travel down the Mississippi River together, stealing supplies and foraging food along the way. As they journey, evading the law or anyone who might turn them in, they develop an unlikely friendship. As their friendship deepens, so does Huck’s moral dilemma. Huck believes giving up Jim to authorities is the right thing to do. But in revealing Jim, he risks revealing himself and suffering the consequences. Does Huck help his friend Jim escape to the North even if it means breaking society’s laws? Does he help his friend to freedom even if it goes against everything he has ever been taught? By helping Jim, is he damning himself? What is the right thing to do? What would a “good boy” do? What will the consequences be?

**Demographics**

**Age:** exact DOB unknown; approx. 11-12 years old in 1845

**Known Addresses:**

* residence of the Widow Douglas, St. Petersburg, MO
* cabin in the woods, Illinois side of the Mississippi

**Family:**

* mother, deceased in childbirth
* Father, missing, presumed dead
* Foster parents, the Widow Douglas and her sister, Miss Watson

**Childhood influences:**

* Raised in Antebellum South, slave-owning state in a household with slaves
* physically and emotionally abusive, alcoholic father
* little to no adult supervision—evidence of neglect/abandonment
* developed a smoking habit before age of 10
* food and clothing insecure—basic needs not being met
* negative influences from family and friends (history of violence, theft)
* prone to exaggeration and lying
* no religion practice or study
* no formal education

**Now that you have read Huck’s case file, answer the following questions about his dilemma.**

1. The journey begins when Huck runs away from home to escape his abusive father. Is Huck’s action and deceit justified?
	1. Why or why not?
2. Huck and Jim steal from others in order to survive. Their actions are against the law, but are they immoral? Is stealing ever justifiable?

1. Does Huck help his friend Jim escape to freedom in the North even if it means breaking society’s laws? Is a person’s responsibility to their own morals more important than their responsibility to society? \*note the severity of punishment for breaking the Fugitive Slave Act
	1. Why or why not?
2. Do you consider Huck responsible for his negative actions considering his age and his upbringing? At what point should people be held accountable for breaking laws? Are there any exceptions?
3. In helping Jim is Huck damning himself? Should Huck be expected to help Jim at his own expense? What is our responsibility to people we barely know? Is there ever a time when personal sacrifice is necessary to ensure the benefit of others?