

Lesson on Love and Forgiveness
Based on Mark Twain's
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
By Ellen Greenblatt

Note To Teachers: An Explanation of the Focus on Love and Forgiveness

As young people learn to make their way in the world, they discover the values that will guide them. Sometimes they need examples outside themselves to shed light on their own lives, and often it is through literature that they can encounter, grapple with and, perhaps, even resolve some of the issues that face them.

The following lesson focuses on forgiveness and love between a white boy and an African-American man in Mark Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The love and forgiveness in the novel are all the more striking because they are often unspoken and sometimes seem to occur against the characters' own will.

Reading and discussing *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* invites students to consider the complexity of living and forgiving in a world where societal issues like race can disrupt the fabric of a loving life, not only in Twain's 19th-century novel, but in their lives today. After some reflection on love and forgiveness and discussion of two events in the novel, students will apply what they have learned by creating a dialogue to show their understanding of the difficulties of asking for or accepting forgiveness when they have offended someone or been hurt unintentionally.

In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck, a white boy in the pre-Civil War South, develops a deep friendship and loving relationship with Jim, a grown man who is a slave. But the society in which they live takes for granted that whites are superior to blacks and, further, that playing a joke on a grown man is just fine if that man happens to be a black slave. In today's society as well, thoughtless or unintentional acts create tension and hurt. Using the story as a jumping-off point, students will move from an understanding of the complexities of the relationship in the novel to insights into their own lives and relationships.

Materials Needed for Lesson

- Questions for introductory exercise (Handout 1)
- Copies of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* or selections from the online edition available at <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/Twa2Huc.html>
- Questions for discussion of scenes from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Handout 2)
- Rubric to assess dialogue writing (Handout 3)



This lesson is offered to educators by the Campaign for Love & Forgiveness as a tool to encourage young people to think about and practice love and forgiveness. Launched in 2006, the campaign combines PBS programming, community activities and events, and online discussions to encourage contemplation and conversation about how love and forgiveness can effect meaningful change in individuals and society. Initiated by the nonprofit Fetzer Institute. www.fetzer.org, the campaign encourages community conversations, inviting participants to connect and share about the topics of love and forgiveness. Learn more at www.loveandforgive.org.

Directions for Part One

Lesson Objective

Many students and teachers will already be familiar with *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, but this lesson will offer a different lens through which to view the novel, the lens of love and forgiveness. Part One of the lesson asks students to use their own life experiences to consider and reflect on the difference between asking for forgiveness and being asked for forgiveness.

Time Needed

- 10 minutes for first-round discussion
- 5 minutes for rearranging groups
- 10 minutes for second-round discussion
- 10 minutes for whole-class debriefing

Procedure

1. For the first-round discussion, divide the class in half, forming Group A and Group B.
2. Divide each large group into groups of four students.
3. Provide each group of four students with a list of questions. (Questions for both groups appear on Handout 1. The teacher can cut the handout in half where indicated.)
4. Ask all students to discuss the questions in their small groups and take notes on responses. (For some students, talking about issues such as love and forgiveness can evoke strong feelings. Consider establishing guidelines for respectful discussions ahead of time and/or giving students the option to pass.)
5. After 10 minutes, prepare for second-round discussion by rearranging groups so that each group of four students contains two students from Group A and two students from Group B. (One quick way to rearrange groups is simply to form two lines of students, one for Group A and one for Group B, and have them march off together.)
6. To guide second-round discussions, write the following questions on the board:
 - What is the difference between asking for forgiveness from another person and forgiving someone yourself?
 - Which is easier?
 - Why?
7. After students discuss the questions in their small groups, facilitate a whole-class discussion as students report their answers to the second-round questions.

Directions for Part Two

Lesson Objective

After students explore their own feelings about asking for or being asked for forgiveness, they will look outside themselves to an example from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as a way to enhance their understanding of what enables or impedes love and forgiveness.

Notes

- Although this part of the lesson assumes that students have read or are in the process of reading *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, it can also stand alone. Students and teachers can access Chapters 14 and 15, the two chapters of the novel at the core of the lesson, online at <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/Twa2Huc.html>.
- *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* uses the racial slur for African-Americans that was commonly used in the pre-Civil War South, the era in which the novel is set. Teachers should acknowledge to students **both** the damage that such a word did and continues to do **and** the historical accuracy of the novel's use of the word.

Time Needed

- 5 minutes for introducing the novel or, if students are already reading the novel, introducing the love and forgiveness focus of the discussion
- 20–30 minutes for students to work on questions in Handout 2 (If students have not read the novel, they will need additional time to read through Chapters 14 and 15.)
- 20 minutes to discuss the questions in Handout 2 as a class

Procedure

1. Introduce the exercise, noting that the focus will be on some examples of love and forgiveness that appear in the novel. Acknowledge the hurt that language can inflict. (See note above. In general, teachers will want to avoid saying the racial slur during discussion. Teachers should decide in advance how they want to handle the racial slur when students are reading a passage from the novel aloud.)
2. Working alone or in pairs, students should answer the questions on Handout 2.
3. Lead a class discussion about the questions on Handout 2.
4. With reference to the culminating questions on Handout 1 (What is the difference between asking forgiveness from another and forgiving someone yourself? Which is easier? Why?), lead a discussion about what Mark Twain might have had in mind about the role of love and forgiveness.
5. If desired, discuss the following questions, making sure that students understand the meaning of explicit, tacit and implicit:
 - Does the expression of love have to be explicit?
 - Can forgiveness be tacit or implicit? Is there a difference in the effect of implicit or explicit expressions of love and forgiveness?

Directions for Part Three

Lesson Objective

After focusing on love and forgiveness in two chapters from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, students will write a dialogue in which they create a dilemma potentially present in their own lives. With the lively dialogue and the confrontation and apology between Huck and Jim fresh in their minds, students should be ready to create, perform and explore an incident relevant to themselves and their classmates on the same theme of love and forgiveness.

Time needed

- 10 minutes for brainstorming ideas for writing a dialogue
- 10 minutes (before writing) to review the rubric that will be used to assess dialogues
- 30 minutes for writing
- 15 minutes for performance of selected dialogues
- 10 minutes for group debriefing
- 10 minutes for whole class discussion

Procedure

1. Instruct students to write a dialogue for one of the two following possible situations:
 - when a person has to ask forgiveness from someone he or she loves **or**
 - when a person has to forgive someone he or she loves
2. Lead a brainstorming discussion to help students come up with ideas for the following writing assignment. Write the ideas that students generate on the board. These might include situations where people
 - say unkind things, intentionally or unintentionally
 - exclude others from an activity, intentionally or unintentionally
 - damage a treasured belonging
 - fail to do something that they promised to do
3. After students have some ideas about situations for the assignment, distribute the rubric (Handout 3) and lead a discussion of the criteria described in it. Doing this *before* students begin the assignment guides them about how to proceed.
4. Students then take 30 minutes to write dialogues. A guide to punctuating dialogues can be read at <http://fictionwriting.about.com/od/writingexercises/qt/punctuation.html>.
5. As students are writing, circulate through the room, noting which dialogues might be appropriate and engaging for performance.
6. Invite particular students to perform, or ask for volunteers. (Since a dialogue has two voices, a student will, of course, need to ask another student to read with him or her.)
7. After the performance of several dialogues, students will discuss in groups of four the experience of verbally asking forgiveness from another or forgiving someone themselves, considering the following questions:
 - How is speaking the words different from writing them?
 - Which one is more difficult?
 - Why?(Remind students of the earlier conversation about respectful discussion and/or the option to pass.)
8. If desired, write the following on the board as a whole-class discussion prompt: Love and Forgiveness: How are they linked?
9. For assessing the spoken and written dialogue, return to the rubric in Handout 3.

Handout 1 Group A

Have you ever hurt the feelings of someone you care about or love? Think about a specific situation with your family, a friend, classmate, or at your job.

- If you hurt the person's feelings unintentionally, how did you know that you had hurt his or her feelings?
- When you realized that you had caused hurt feelings unintentionally, what did you do?
- If you hurt someone's feelings on purpose, do you remember what (perhaps anger?) caused you to act this way?
- What was your reaction after you saw that you had hurt the person's feelings intentionally?

Handout 1 Group B

Have you had your feelings hurt by someone you care about or love? Think about a specific situation with your family, a friend, a classmate or at your job.

- If the person hurt your feelings unintentionally, did you say something to him or her? Why or why not?
- If you said something, how did the person react?
- If the person hurt your feelings on purpose, do you remember trying to think about what the reason might be?
- If the person hurt your feelings on purpose, did you talk to him or her about it? Why or why not?

- Why does Huck lie to Jim? What does Huck's lie reveal about his view of Jim?
- Explain Jim's interpretation of the "dream" Huck convinces him he has had.

Read the last three paragraphs of Chapter 15 aloud.

- What does Jim say to Huck? How does that change Huck's and your view of Jim?
 - How does Huck respond to Jim? How does that change your view of Huck?
3. Why do you think, at the end of Chapter 15, Mark Twain has Huck say that it was hard to "humble" himself to Jim? Why doesn't Twain say "apologize" or "ask forgiveness"? What is the difference?
 4. What do you think Mark Twain wants us to think about the relationship between Huck and Jim at this point in the novel?

Handout 3
Rubric for Dialogue-Writing Assignment
After Discussion of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain

Your name _____

Note: As you write, keep in mind the following statement by Maya Angelou:
“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

Characters	Advanced	Proficient	Developing	Emerging	Beginning
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Characters in the dialogue are believable. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Characters develop over the course of the dialogue. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Characters are appropriate to the assignment about love and forgiveness.	Comments:				
Situation	Advanced	Proficient	Developing	Emerging	Beginning
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The problem or dilemma is believable. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The dialogue has “drama”—words and events that keep the audience engaged. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The conclusion attempts to resolve the situation, addressing love and forgiveness in a way that might acknowledge that a complete resolution is not always possible.	Comments:				
Style	Advanced	Proficient	Developing	Emerging	Beginning
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Details make the dialogue vivid. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The dialogue is well-organized from beginning to end—all elements belong. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The dialogue is well-written, with language appropriate to school and with careful attention to grammar, spelling and punctuation.	Comments:				