

ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN

UNCENSORED

Week 1

Book-It LITERATURE
REPERTORY THEATRE **MEET THEATRE.**

Book-It Repertory Theatre and Newspapers In Education shine new light on Mark Twain's American classic, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Learn how the company brings words on a page to life on stage; find out why Mark Twain stopped writing his book and what inspired him to finish it; and see how you can experience the story and make it meaningful in your life today.



Publicity shot of Huck and Jim. Caption: Jim (Geoffery Simmons) and Huck (Christopher Morson) in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: Uncensored*; photo by Alan Alabastro.

Readers, meet Book-It Repertory Theatre, a theatre company that transforms great literature into great theatre — and has been doing so for 23 years. The company brings works of literature — from *Pride and Prejudice* to *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet* — to the stage in a unique way. When you learn how Book-It looks at a book, you may never read the same way again!

Here's an inside look at how the company begins to adapt a novel in "The Book-It Style,"™ in this case, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain. For every new adaptation it undertakes, Book-It asks two important questions: How can we turn our chosen book into a work of insightful drama; and how do we best respect and maintain the intent of the original?

These two questions sometimes feel at odds with one another. In great literature, pivotal moments or memorable passages are not always dramatic; in great theatre, they have to be. This challenge is what inspired the development of The Book-It Style™. This technique of scriptwriting preserves narrative that moves the story forward, transforming it into dialogue between characters.

Company Founder and Founding Co-Artistic Director Jane Jones explains, "In adapting a work for the stage, we identify what we call the 'purple passages.' These are the 'royal' passages of a novel, the moments that stand out in a reader's mind long after they put down the book." For Book-It, purple passages are the moments of dramatic tension in the original work that can best provide a framework for the action on stage.

An example of this in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is the moment that Huck has returned to the escaped slave, Jim, knowing that men are on their way to find them.

"Git up... Jim! There ain't a minute to lose. They're after us!"

Jim never asked no questions, he never said a word; but the way he worked for the next half an hour showed about how he was scared. By that time everything we had in the world was on our raft, and she was ready to be shoved out from the willow cove where she was hid.

The narrative of this pivotal moment conveys the urgency in Huck and Jim's actions, but the dialogue is sparse. As a purple passage, this moment represents a turning point

for Huck and Jim. After this moment they are no longer individuals, but accomplices on a fugitive journey. This scene would translate well cinematically, but on stage Huck's line, "They're after us!" wouldn't tell the whole story. When the Book-It Style™ is applied to this purple passage, Huck and Jim's plight becomes clearer:

Huck: Git up, Jim! There ain't a minute to lose. They're after us!

Jim: Jim never asked no questions. In no time at all, everything we had in the world was on our raft and was ready to be shoved out.

From a single line of dialogue, the Book-It Style™ creates a scene between two characters. The tension in the narrative propels the two into action. For the actors, it provides a springboard of given circumstances to act upon and against. For audiences, a sense of danger is conveyed. Now, Mark Twain's narrative is not only preserved, it is given a new life through its internal drama.

Next week, we will explore the life and times of Mark Twain, and how his experiences led him toward publishing this seminal novel of American literature. Don't miss this second installment: The Inspiration of Twain!

JOIN US FOR

Twain Talks: Community Conversations on the Human Race and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

April 24, 27, 28 and May 5
Schedule and details at book-it.org

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: Uncensored by Mark Twain, conceived by Jane Jones and Judd Parkin

Directed by Jane Jones at the Center Theatre at the Armory
April 16-May 12

Tickets: 206.216.0833 | book-it.org