

**Rockville HS English Department**  
**IB English 1 (Language A 1) GRADE 11 Summer Reading Assignment**

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Thoughtful analysis and critical reading are essential skills for every course in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme.

1. Read the following work by the first day of school:

**The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain (Category: Literary Genres)**

If possible, try to secure your own copy of this novel—you might try Friends of the Library, used books. It is also available at local book stores, public libraries, the RHS Media Center, or the RHS English department (for summer check-out). It is extremely helpful to annotate and/or highlight as you read. Write notes in the margins or use post-it notes for the books that you borrow from the library or English Department. You will use this novel for both your junior year, first semester AND second semester senior year, for your final external assessment, so having your own copy and writing in it is a great idea, if at all possible.

2. Write a commentary (see directions below). You have a choice of format:

- A. Put passage and commentary in a **marbled composition book**. Avoid using spirals or notebooks as they can fall apart. **Handwrite** your response.
- B. Or: Type your response, standard 12 font, double-spaced. Turn in separately. You will submit these to Turnitin.com.

3. Write one paragraph (200 word maximum) on your opinion of the last quarter of the novel (when Tom Sawyer returns to the story). How did you feel when reading it? Do you think it fits with the rest of the novel to create a unified whole? Why or why not? Be specific in your response. You are required to type and submit this paragraph to Turnitin.com. We will give you the account and password information on the first day of school.

Commentary directions: Commentary Response (multi-paragraph; 1500 word maximum)

**Read and follow the accompanying commentary rubric.**

Choose a 20-25 line passage of your choice from this novel. (**Note:** You can find the full text of Huck Finn online and do a copy/paste.) Follow the commentary format that we have used throughout grades 9 and 10. After identifying the passage that you plan to use (20-25 lines), annotate and color-code your passage.

Chunk the passage into sections (these sections should help you to organize the paragraphs of your commentary). Clarify the central focus. Discuss how language creates meaning in the passage. Remember it is not enough just to paraphrase or identify literary features. An effective commentary shows the relationship between meaning and language. Attach both the rubric and the annotated copy of your passage to your commentary.

**ASSIGNMENTS – to be collected on Tuesday, August 28, 2012**

Read the entirety of **The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn** carefully. You will be writing an in-class essay on this novel, a “supervised writing,” in the first week of school.

## Huck Finn and the Power of Words

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It's pretty rare these days when the printed word incites controversy. We're so concerned about the modern media of TV and film and Internet and rap music that a bad word in a book hardly seems to bother us anymore - unless, of course, that book is *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and the word is "nigger."

My English classes just finished the book, and in the course of our study, we also looked at the battles which are still going on over the book and its use of the "n-word." Words are indeed powerful things.

Mark Twain published *Huck Finn* in 1884 and was in trouble for it from the very beginning. The book was first banned only a year after its appearance by the Concord, Massachusetts Public Library - but not for its language. It was characterized as "rough, course, and inelegant, dealing with a series of experiences not elevating, the whole book being more suited to the slums than to intelligent, respectable people." Twain (tongue typically in cheek) wrote to the library, thanking them for the ban because it would mean that people would have to buy the book in order to read it.

Since then - and up to this very day - the book has variously been praised and reviled. Some call it the greatest book ever written in America. Others call for it to be removed from libraries and required reading lists in schools. It is one of the most-banned books in America.

As recently as 1995, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People called for the book to be removed from high school reading lists. Five years ago, a group of students in Cherry Hill, New Jersey protested being forced to read the book, and in 1998, a parent sued the Tempe, Arizona School District for requiring students to read the book.

Most objections to *Huck Finn* revolve around the use of the word "nigger" (used over 200 times in the book - mostly by Huck, but also by Jim and others.) People claim that forcing black students (especially) to read and hear the word used in English class legitimizes the slur. When supporters point out that the book is considered an American classic, parents ask why there are no required books which use the word "spic" or "kike" or other racist slurs.

Others suggest that the character of the runaway slave Jim is made to look, act, and sound stupid. When he first finds Huck on Jackson's Island, Jim says, "Doan' hurt me - don't! I haint ever done no harm to a ghos'. I alwuz liked dead people, en done all I could for `em. You go en git in de river ag'in, whah you b'longs, en doan' do nuffn to to Ole Jim . . ."

Supporters of the book point out that Huck is an illiterate Southern boy who would naturally use the "n-word" to refer to Jim and isn't trying to be mean using it. In fact, as he helps Jim escape, he comes to recognize the humanity of this runaway slave and stops thinking of Jim as property and starts thinking of him as a man and as a friend. At one point in the narrative, Jim calls Huck "trash" (for playing a dirty trick on him), and Huck actually apologizes to Jim ( a first for him).

There have been countless attempts to "clean-up" the language in the book - all dismal failures. CBS Television went so far as to produce a made-for-TV version of Huck Finn that included no black cast members, no mention of slavery, and even no character of Jim!

My students were uncomfortable at first confronting the word, but slowly managed to put it into historical context. And at first they just didn't get the attempts to ban the book, pointing out that blacks often use the "n-word" to refer to themselves in language and rap music today, not understanding how people could be offended by a word they use themselves.

But we watched a PBS video on the banning controversy where a concerned mother asks, "How can you ask kids to go home and read the word 'nigger' 200-something times in the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and then expect kids to come back to school and not use the word?" We talked about slurs, too.

And so in the midst of studying Huck Finn as an American classic, as a book about traveling through the heartland of America, as a book about maturity and freedom and innocence and experience, we also looked at the awesome dynamite that words still retain.

Twain once remarked, "The difference between the almost-right word and the right word is . . . the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning."

Huck Finn was (and probably will remain) a lesson in the use of language, of epithets, of slurs and how they can change (or not) over time.

Hopefully, never again will my students repeat the schoolyard chant, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me."

We studied and got a brief glimpse of the power of words.

**English A1 HL Written Paper One, Commentary, Assessment Chart**

<b>A: Understanding of the Text</b> <i>How well has the candidate understood the thought and feeling expressed in the text?</i>	<b>B: Interpretation of the text</b> <i>How relevant are the candidate's ideas about the text?</i> <i>How well has the candidate explored those ideas?</i> <i>How well has the candidate illustrated claims?</i> <i>To what extent has the candidate expressed a relevant personal response?</i>	<b>C: Appreciation of Literary Features</b> <i>To what extent is the candidate aware of the presence of literary features in the text, such as diction, imagery, tone, structure, style and technique?</i> <i>To what extent does the candidate appreciate the effects of the literary features?</i> <i>How well has the candidate supported claims about the effects of literary features?</i>	<b>D: Presentation</b> <i>How well has the candidate organized the commentary?</i> <i>How effectively have the candidate's ideas been presented? To what extent are supporting examples integrated into the body of the commentary?</i>	<b>E: Formal Use of Language</b> <i>How accurate, clear and precise is the language used by the candidate? How appropriate is the candidate's choice of register and style, for this task? (Register refers, in this context, to the candidate's sensitivity to elements such as the vocabulary, tone, sentence structure and idiom appropriate to the task.)</i>
<b>0</b> The candidate has not reached level 1.	<b>0</b> The candidate has not reached level 1.	<b>0</b> The candidate has not reached level 1.	<b>0</b> The candidate has not reached level 1.	<b>0</b> The candidate has not reached level 1.
<b>1 Little understanding of the text</b> (little understanding of the thought and feeling expressed in the text - mainly irrelevant and/or inappropriate references to the text.)	<b>1 Little interpretation of the text</b> (the candidate's ideas are mainly insignificant and/or irrelevant or the commentary consists mainly of narration and/or repetition of content.)	<b>1 Little awareness of the literary features of the text</b> (little mention or consideration of the literary features of the text.)	<b>1 Little sense of a focused and developed argument</b> (little evidence of a structure to the commentary - little attempt to present ideas in an ordered or logical sequence.)	<b>1 The language is rarely clear or coherent</b> (the use of language is not readily comprehensible - many lapses in grammar, spelling and sentence construction - vocabulary is rarely accurate or appropriate.)
<b>2 Some understanding of the text</b> (superficial understanding of the thought and feeling expressed in the text - some relevant references to the text.)	<b>2 Some interpretation of the text</b> (the candidate's ideas are sometimes irrelevant - the commentary consists mainly of unsubstantiated generalizations or the commentary is mainly a paraphrase of the text.)	<b>2 Some awareness or appreciation of the literary features of the text</b> (some consideration of the literary features of the text - superficial analysis of the literary features mentioned.)	<b>2 Some sense of a focused and developed argument</b> (some evidence of a structure to the commentary - some attempt to present ideas in an ordered and logical sequence)	<b>2 The language is only sometimes clear and coherent</b> (some degree of clarity and coherence in the use of language - some degree of accuracy in grammar, spelling and sentence construction - vocabulary is sometimes appropriate to the discussion of literature.)
<b>3 Adequate understanding of the text</b> (adequate understanding of the thought and feeling expressed in the text - adequate and appropriate references to the text.)	<b>3 Adequate interpretation of the text</b> (the candidate's ideas are generally relevant - the analysis is adequate and appropriately illustrated by some relevant examples.)	<b>3 Adequate appreciation of the literary features of the text</b> (adequate appreciation of the effects of the literary features of the text - the analysis is sometimes illustrated by relevant examples.)	<b>3 A generally focused and developed argument</b> (adequate structure to the commentary - ideas are generally presented in an ordered or logical sequence - supporting examples are sometimes appropriately integrated into the body of the commentary.)	<b>3 The language is generally clear and coherent</b> (adequately clear and coherent use of language - only a few significant lapses in grammar, spelling and sentence construction - some care shown in the choice of vocabulary, idiom and style - the register is generally appropriate for literary analysis.)
<b>4 Good understanding of the text</b> (good understanding of the thought and feeling expressed in the text as well as some of the subtleties of the text - detailed and pertinent references to the text.)	<b>4 Good interpretation of the text</b> (the candidate's ideas are clearly relevant and include an appropriate personal response - the analysis is generally detailed and well illustrated by relevant examples.)	<b>4 Good appreciation of the literary features of the text</b> (generally detailed appreciation of the effects of the literary features of the text - the analysis is generally detailed and illustrated by relevant examples)	<b>4 A clearly focused and well-developed argument</b> (clear and logical structure to the commentary - supporting examples are appropriately integrated into the body of the commentary.)	<b>4 The language is clear, varied and precise</b> (clear, varied and precise use of language - no significant lapses in grammar, spelling and sentence construction - effective and appropriately varied use of vocabulary, idiom and style - suitable choice of register.)
<b>5 Excellent understanding of the text</b> (perceptive understanding of the thought and feeling expressed in the text as well as some of the subtleties of the text - detailed and persuasive references to the text.)	<b>5 Excellent interpretation of the text</b> (the candidate's ideas are convincing and include an appropriate and considered personal response - the analysis is consistently detailed and persuasively illustrated by carefully chosen examples)	<b>5 Excellent appreciation of the literary features of the text</b> (detailed and persuasive appreciation of the effects of the literary features of the text - the analysis is detailed and illustrated by carefully chosen examples.	<b>5 A clearly focused, well-developed and persuasive argument</b> (purposeful and effective structure to the commentary - supporting examples are well integrated into the body of the commentary.)	<b>5 The language is clear, varied, precise and concise</b> (clear, varied, precise and concise use of language - no significant lapses in grammar, spelling and sentence construction - precise use of wide vocabulary and varied idiom and style - effective choice of register.)