

Support an English Teacher

Character foils are generally used by authors when they want to make a statement. Yesterday, while planning this lesson, I got in a discussion with two of the other English teachers about what Huck and Tom are supposed to represent. The conversation was left unresolved, so we are going to settle it here! With that in mind, with a partner, please pick one interpretation of what Huck and Tom represent and argue why it is the best argument using specifics from the reading.

Option #1: Twain is using Huck and Tom to represent the two sides of America that are always jockeying for its identity. Tom represents the inclusive, open-minded, worldly spirit while Huck represents the independent and tribalistic spirit.

Option #2: Twain uses Tom to represent what America sees itself to be: the loveable rascal who engages in some good-hearted mischief but is ultimately moral and good mannered. Huck is what America actually is: a good-hearted but troubled soul who, due to its rough upbringing, is easily led and can say hurtful things and engage in worrying behaviors without even thinking about them.

Option #3: Twain is making fun of the well-educated elite with Huck and Tom. Huck is mainly uneducated, but he is ironically able to take a deeper look at things. Tom is well-educated (he is a child who has read Don Quixote after all), but he does things exactly as they are done in books without critically thinking about them at all. While Tom is the educated one, Huck is the one who has the better mind, despite the fact he can't do multiplication tables above 5x7.

Which argument is best?

Why?