

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer Summary of Chapters 1-18

Chapter 1 Summary:

The novel opens with Aunt Polly searching for Tom Sawyer, the young protagonist of the novel who, along with his younger brother Sidney, was sent to live in St. Petersburg, Missouri, after his mother's death. After hearing no answer to her calls, Polly finds Tom eating out of the jam closet. Tom escapes Aunt Polly's beating by diverting her attention, leading Polly into a tirade against Tom's irreverent ways.

During dinner, Aunt Polly tries to trick Tom into admitting that he played hooky from school that day to go swimming. But Tom, aware of Aunt Polly's motives, has sewn his shirt collar back in place after his afternoon swim. Aunt Polly apologizes to Tom for her suspicions, until Sidney - notorious for being "the Model Boy of the village" - points out that Tom's shirt is sewn together with black thread instead of the white thread that Aunt Polly had used that morning. Before she can punish him, Tom darts out the door and runs away from the house.

On the street, Tom runs into a well-dressed boy with a "citified air about him that ate into Tom's vitals." After a verbal fight, Tom and the nameless boy begin to throw fists at each other until Tom is finally victorious. Tom returns home late in the evening by climbing through the window... but Aunt Polly catches him in the act.

Chapter 2 Summary:

On Saturday morning, Tom is forced to whitewash the fence outside the house as punishment for his behavior the night before. The day is beautiful, making the chore seem even more dreadful; in fact, Tom would rather do Jim's - the black servant's - chores than whitewash the fence.

Tom begins the job and imagines how all the "free boys" who come skipping by will make fun of him for having to do work on a Saturday. In perhaps one of the most famous scenes of the novel, Tom tricks the neighborhood boys into completing his entire chore. Tom pretends to love whitewashing, putting fake enthusiasm into his work. "Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?" Tom asks. Soon, all the neighborhood boys beg Tom for the chance to whitewash in exchange for small trinkets. In conclusion, Tom contends "that Work consists of whatever a body is obliged to do, and that Play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do."

Chapter 3 Summary:

For the time remaining of that Saturday, Tom is in good spirits, playing in a mock battle with his band of friends. Afterwards, he passes by Jeff Thatcher's house and notices a "lovely little blue-eyed creature with yellow hair" with whom he instantly falls in love, so much so that the girl he was in love with the week before - Amy Lawrence - is completely out of his heart. Until suppertime, Tom lingers in front of the Thatcher house, "showing off" by doing various gymnastic tricks, hoping that the little girl inside the house will see him.

During supper, however, Tom's moods are lowered when Aunt Polly raps his knuckles for attempting to steal sugar. When Sid reaches for the sugar-bowl behind Polly's back, he drops the bowl onto the floor. When Aunt Polly returns, she immediately begins to beat Tom. When she learns that it was Sid who was at fault, she doesn't apologize but instead justifies her beating, though inside she longs to say something loving to Tom. Tom, conscious of his Aunt's ruefulness yet refusing to acknowledge it, wallows in self-pity. He imagines his own funeral, and begins to cry to himself, reflecting that he leaves the house when his cousin Mary enters the house, unable to withstand any ounce of happiness.

He proceeds to wander through the streets, contemplating who would miss him when he died. Would the lovely "Adored Unknown" from this afternoon miss him? Presently, he wanders to her house, and stares up at her window, imagining the little girl crying over his lifeless body. But his imagination is interrupted by the maidservant who dumps a bucket of water out the window, and the drenched Tom Sawyer returns home.

Chapter 4 Summary:

On Sunday morning, Tom has still not memorized his Sunday school assignment of five Biblical verses. As she washes and dresses him, his cousin Mary attempts to help him learn, but he still has nothing but a vague general idea of the lesson. In church, the recitation of two verses was rewarded with a blue ticket; 1000 blue tickets could be exchanged for a bound Bible, which only the brightest and most diligent students earned. Tom has been trading various trinkets for tickets, not because he wants a Bible but because he wants the glory that comes with it.

That day in church, the visiting family of Judge Thatcher is given the highest seat of honor. Tom immediately begins to "show off" by acting up because the Judge's daughter is none other than the little girl he is in love with. In an effort to gain even more glory and attention, Tom has finally traded for enough tickets to receive a Bible. But after receiving the Bible, the Judge asks Tom what the names of the first two disciples were, and he incorrectly answers "David and Goliath."

Chapter 5 Summary:

Chapter five revolves around the remainder of Sunday morning following Tom's schooling, specifically with the morning sermon. The whole town is in attendance: Aunt Polly, Sid, Mary, Tom; the widow Douglas; Mayor and Mrs. Ward; lawyer Riverson; and a variety of other characters that remain nameless, such as the town belle, matrons, and young clerks. The church is bustling with noise as the minister begins his hymn, and Twain remarks that there was never "a church choir that was not ill-bred."

After the hymn and notices of meetings and societies have been read, the minister begins a prayer that seems excessive, or as Twain puts it: "a good, generous, prayer." The prayer pleads for the church, for the "children of the church," for the state to the President, for the "poor sailors" to the "Oriental despotisms," and continues on in this manner until a final "Amen" concludes it. Much like the prayer, the remainder of church is barely endured by Tom Sawyer, who counts the pages of the sermon but fails to listen to any of it. Tom's attentions, instead, focus on the antics of a poodle playing with a beetle. The poodle, eventually, sits on the beetle and disrupts the sermon with its distressful howling and barking,

bringing the entire congregation to stifled laughter. After the chaotic disruption, the sermon continues and Sunday services conclude.

Chapter 6 Summary:

On Monday morning, Tom finds himself in bed and wanting to avoid school that morning. Eagerly, he attempts to avoid school by "playing" sick, groaning and moaning enough to wake Sid, who is sleeping by his side. Once Aunt Polly comes to check on Tom's ailments, he tells her: "Oh Auntie, my sore toe's mortified." After Aunt Polly tells Tom to "shut up that nonsense," Tom then proceeds to tell her about his sore, loose tooth, hoping that maybe it will provide him with an excuse to skip school. Aunt Polly simply pulls out his tooth and sends Tom off to school without another word.

On his way to school, Tom stops to talk to Huckleberry Finn, the "juvenile pariah" of the town admired by all children for his aloofness and hated by all mothers for his bad manners. He comes and goes as he pleases, an orphan of-sorts who doesn't have the duty of going to school or completing chores. Huckleberry is dressed in cast-off clothes: a wide-brimmed hat, trousers with only one-suspender, baggy pants, and a worn coat. Tom, who was forbidden to play with Huck, begins to discuss the correct way to cure warts; Huck, who holds a dead cat in a burlap sack, is planning on entering a cemetery at midnight to perform a witch's ritual to cure warts. Both boys discuss the merits of various superstitions and strange chants before they agree to meet later that night to go to the cemetery together.

After trading his tooth for a tick and saying goodbye to Huck, Tom races to school. Knowing that his punishment for tardiness will be to sit on the girls' section of the schoolhouse, Tom explains his lateness by saying he stopped to talk with Huckleberry Finn, for the only vacant girls seat was next to the blonde, pig-tailed girl that Tom has fallen in love with: Becky Thatcher. After a period of flirtatious exhibition, Tom writes "I love you" on his slate, which is returned with Becky's pleasure. The two agree to stay at school for dinner so that Tom can teach Becky how to draw. The remaining time spent in class is futile, for Tom has not studied and makes errors in every area of his studies: geography, spelling, and reading.

Chapter 7 Summary:

Until dinner, Tom is restless and school and amuses himself by playing with the tick Huckleberry traded him. After a short time, Tom and "bosom friend" Joe Harper begin to fight over who is allowed to play with the tick, disrupting the classroom with a fistfight and attracting the attention of the schoolmaster. Finally noon comes, and Tom meets Becky in the empty schoolhouse after all the other pupils have gone home for dinner.

After discussing rats, chewing gum, and circuses, Tom asks Becky if she would like to be engaged to him; his definition of engagement is simply telling "a boy you won't ever have anybody but him" and then sealing it with a kiss. After whispering, "I love you" in each other's ears, the bashful Becky and Tom kiss. Inadvertently in his giddiness, Tom blunders that he was previously "engaged" to Amy Lawrence. After learning this, Becky rejects Tom and breaks into tears despite Tom's pleading. Tom attempts to win her over again by giving her his most prized possession brass drawer-knob but she throws it at the ground in anger. Heartbroken and enraged, Tom marches out of the schoolhouse. After realizing that Tom has left, Becky calls after him but is too late.

Chapter 8 Summary:

Meanwhile, Tom runs off into the dense woods, somewhere far away from the schoolhouse where Becky is. The woods are still, adding to Tom's lonely and melancholy state. Tom sits and begins to consider what it would be like to die, and at this point, the only thing that makes him hesitate is his bad Sunday school record. Becky would be sorry, he thinks to himself, about the way she treated him if only he were dead. "Ah, if only he could die temporarily!"

Instead, Tom decides he wants to run away from home and enter the pirate profession as "Tom Sawyer the Pirate the Black Avenger of the Spanish Main." After daydreaming for a while and playing around with "incantations" and witch's spells, Tom hears a trumpet blast in the distance. Flinging off his jacket and moving some brush to reveal a secret stash of toys, Tom is met by Joe Harper who is clad with the same toys: a bow and arrow, a tin trumpet, and a fake sword. The two boys reenact the story of Robin Hood with their gear, then finish playing for the day swearing that "they would rather be outlaws a year in Sherwood Forest than President of the United States forever."

Chapter 9 Summary:

Later that night, after Sid has fallen asleep, Tom waits for Huck's "meow" as the signal. About to succumb to slumber, Huck finally arrives and gives the signal and Tom becomes wide-awake, climbs out the window, off the roof, and runs off to the town graveyard.

The "old-fashioned Western" style graveyard is about a mile-and-a-half away from town, with overgrown grass and an eerie wind. The two boys hide themselves among a cluster of elm trees, just a few feet away from Hoss Williams (who had just been buried) waiting for the spirits to come at midnight. After remaining in the same spot for quite some time, the boys finally hear the sound of muffled voices from the other end of the graveyard, confident that devils are approaching them. But to their surprise, they recognize the voices as the figures come closer and closer!

The voices belong to Old Muff Potter - the town drunk, "that murderin' half-breed" Injun Joe, and young Dr. Robinson. By the light of their lantern, Tom and Huck make out what appears to be a grave robbery. Injun Joe and Potter dig up the coffin and remove the body as Dr. Robinson directs them. Just as the corpse is placed in a wheelbarrow, Muff Potter demands more money from the doctor, who refuses to pay any more. Injun Joe intervenes threatening the doctor with his fists. "You done more than [pay us]," says Joe, recalling how five years ago Dr. Robinson had turned the Injun away from his door when he was asking for food. With revenge on his mind, Injun Joe shouts: "And now I've got you, and you got to settle, you know!"

Dr. Robinson is quick to strike Injun Joe to the ground, after which Muff Potter tackles the doctor to the ground. The doctor flings himself free and strikes Potter unconscious with heavy headboard of the grave. Seeing his chance, Injun Joe grabs the knife Potter had dropped during struggle and stabs the doctor in the chest. As the fatally wounded doctor falls over Potter, Huck and Tom run away in fright.

"That score is settled," says Injun Joe as he robs the doctor's body and then places the bloodied knife in Potter's (who is still unconscious) open hand. When Potter comes to, Injun

Joe acts as if it is Potter who has stabbed young Robinson to death. Convinced that he has murdered the doctor, Muff Potter begs Injun Joe not to disclose the events of the night, and the chapter closes with the empty graveyard.

Chapter 10 Summary:

The two boys flee from the graveyard in horror at the scene they had witnessed: the murder of Dr. Robinson by Injun Joe. Out of breath and always looking over their shoulder, Tom and Huck manage to run all the way to the deserted tannery where they find shelter.

Once they gain their breath, the boys rationalize as to what they should do. Not knowing that Injun Joe is attempting to frame Muff Potter for the murder, the boys decide to not tell a soul about what they had seen for fear that Injun Joe would seek revenge upon them as well. They sign a contract to keep their secret "mum" (an image of the contract in Tom's handwriting is placed within the text) and sign their initials in blood after pricking their fingers with needles. After they bury the contract, Huck and Tom hear a dog howling a sign that death is coming, according to black slaves' tales. Still afraid for their lives, the boys let out a sigh when they realize the stray dog is howling directly at Muff Potter. After Tom and Huck say good-bye, Tom sneaks back into his bed through the window, unaware that Sid is wide awake.

The next morning after breakfast, Tom finds out that Sid has told on him once more when Aunt Polly takes him aside. But instead of "flogging him," Polly simply weeps and asks Tom "how he could go and break her old heart so." Guilt and shame rise in Tom, forcing him into a miserable mood for the rest of the day. At school, his mood is none the better when both he and Joe Harper take a flogging for playing hooky the day before. Tom's mood sinks even further when, in his desk, he finds his brass knob wrapped in paper. The chapter ends with the line: "This final

Chapter 11 Summary:

At noon that day, the words had spread through town about the murder of Doc Robinson. A bloody knife, identified as Muff Potter's, had been found close to the crime scene. It was said that one citizen had come across Muff Potter washing himself particularly suspicious because Muff was known for his lack of cleanliness in the river, and it didn't help that he could not be found anywhere. Meanwhile, the entire town is gathered at the graveyard, including Tom and Huck, when Muff Potter unexpectedly returns to the crime scene. Confronted by the crowd as well as the bloody knife now in possession of the Sheriff, Muff breaks down and admits to the murder. Injun Joe, who is present, tells the listening citizens the tale of how Dr. Robinson was murdered, but lies and claims Muff committed the act of violence in a drunken rage. Both Huck and Tom are shocked when they realize that Injun Joe is lying, yet ignore their consciences and remain silent.

In the days following, Sidney begins to notice a change of behavior in his brother. Tom tosses in his sleep, keeping Sid awake with his nightmares. At school, Sid notices that Tom seemed to lose interest in all schoolyard activity, including the dissection of dead cats. Instead of playing with the other children, Tom would sneak away from the schoolyard to the jail cell where Muff Potter was held prisoner, smuggling small tokens and gifts through the barred cell window an outlet to ease Tom's guilty conscience.

In the meantime, the court trial for Dr. Robinson's murder is being planned. Though the citizens of St. Petersburg secretly wish to tar-and-feather Injun Joe for his escapades in grave robbing, no one is willing to come forth and suggest a punishment for the "half-breed." The whole town, scared of Injun Joe's poisonous demeanor, decide not to charge him with any crime for the moment.

Chapter 12 Summary:

Soon, Tom's mind "drifted away from its secret troubles" regarding the murder because Becky Thatcher had become ill and had stopped attending school. What if she should die, thought Tom. He no longer took any interest in playing games, pirating, or causing mischief. Aunt Polly, concerned with Tom's health, practices a multitude of home-remedies and cure-alls on Tom. Gullible when it comes to quack periodicals and medicine, Polly tries everything from water-treatments to feeding him "Pain-killer."

The "Pain-killer" became a regular treatment, and to Tom, it tasted like liquid fire. Tired of the daily doses, one day Tom feeds a spoonful to the cat, which upon receiving the medicine begins to do somersaults in the air while "spreading chaos and destruction in his path." When Polly learns that Tom has fed the cat the painkiller, Tom explains for his actions by saying that he "done it out of pity for [the cat] because he hadn't any aunt" to "burn him out" and "roast his bowels." Polly suddenly feels remorse, seeing that her endless doses of medicine were as much torture for Tom as it was for the cat and the two come to an unspoken understanding.

Every day now, Tom has been reaching school ahead of time□ an unusual occurrence. Loitering by the school gate rather than with his friends, Tom seems sick. When Jeff Thatcher arrives, Tom tries to question about Becky to no avail. At last, Becky returns to school and Tom's habits seem to turn around almost immediately. In his attempts to show off by doing somersaults, chasing the other boys, and tumbling around, Becky responds: "Some people think they're mighty smart." The embarrassed and crestfallen Tom sneaks away from the schoolyard.

Chapter 13 Summary:

Full of self-pity, and ready to sulk, Tom walks down the street away from school thinking himself to be some kind of social degenerate: "He was a forsaken, friendless boy." In his plight of loneliness, Tom decides that society has forced him to go into a life of crime. Now sobbing and utterly dismal, Tom chances to come across Joe Harper, also crying for similar reasons. Joe, whose mother had whipped him for drinking cream (a crime of which he was innocent), is in tears and has decided to lead the life of a hermit; but after Tom's persuasion, Joe agrees that a life of crime would be more desirable. So the two boys, determined to become pirates, plan to run away from home and live on Jackson's Island: an uninhabited, narrow, wooded island in the middle of the Mississippi River.

Around midnight, Tom "the Black Avenger of the Spanish Main," Joe Harper "Terror of the Red Seas," and Huck Finn "the Red-Handed" meet by the bank of the river with stolen goods: a skillet, ham, tobacco, bacon, and other trifles. By raft, the gang of three drift toward Jackson's Island. After landing safely and setting up "camp," the boys contemplate the desirable lifestyle of pirates. But after Huck has drifted off to sleep and the campfire dies down, both Tom and Joe silently begin to regret their actions, listening to their guilty

consciences. Each says his prayers silently in his head and inwardly resolves never to steal again. Consciences satisfied, each member of the pirate gang succumbs to sleep.

Chapter 14 Summary:

The next morning, Tom awakes before the other two boys and marvels at the beauty of nature, admiring the plight of a small worm, a trail of ants, a ladybug, the calls of various birds. As Twain describes: "All Nature was wide awake and stirring now." When the other two boys rise, they begin their new lifestyles as pirates. "Living off the fat of the land," the boys swim, play, fish, explore the island, and lay around in the shade. But despite their freedom to do what they please, homesickness creeps over the boys. Though afraid to admit it, each falls to thinking about their friends and family back on the mainland.

But the peaceful atmosphere of Jackson's Island is suddenly disrupted by a "deep sullen boom" floating down out of the distance." As the boys investigate further, they find that the sounds are coming from cannons being shot over the waters of the Mississippi River a practice used to bring the bodies of drowning victims afloat. Tom comes to realize that the search party is for them, with the residents of St. Petersburg presuming the missing boys have drowned in river. Triumphant that they were missed sorely by those back home, the boys finally feel it is worthwhile to lead the life of a pirate.

Soon thereafter, night closes in on the small island and the pirate "troupe." Once Huck and Joe are fast asleep, Tom sneaks away from camp cautiously. He stops to write something on a piece of sycamore bark before he tiptoes away and heads for the island shore.

Chapter 15 Summary:

Stealing away from the other two boys, Tom decides to return home in order to deliver a message (written on the sycamore bark) to Aunt Polly. Because the raft has already drifted away, Tom sneaks himself onto a ferryboat headed toward the banks of St. Petersburg. After safely making it on shore, Tom hurries back home only to peer through the sitting room window and see Aunt Polly, Sid, Mary, and Joe Harper's mother in a solemn state. Quietly sneaking through the door, Tom hides under the bed and eavesdrops on their conversation.

Aunt Polly and Mrs. Harper are weeping and praying for the lost boys, who are presumed to be dead after drowning in the river. He learns that if the bodies remain undiscovered until Sunday, then a funeral service is to be held that morning. Staying hidden until everyone has either left or retired to bed, Tom hears Aunt Polly "making broken-hearted ejaculations" in her sleep, sobbing for "her Tom," and asking for forgiveness for every licking and scolding. Touched and full of pity for the old woman, Tom finally steals out from under the bed when Polly is finally asleep and kisses her on the lips. But after thinking twice, he decides not to give Aunt Polly his letter. Instead, he returns to the ferry landing, and makes his way back to the island on a stolen skiff.

By the time Tom has returned to camp, it is daylight and the pirates prepare for a day of fishing and exploring.

Chapter 16 Summary:

After returning to camp, Tom mentions nothing of his adventures the night before. Instead, the boys take on variety of activities: whopping and prancing, swimming, wrestling, and fishing. But presently, Tom finds himself drawing the name "BECKY" in the sand and both Joe and Huck grow melancholy. They are homesick. After arguing with Tom, both Joe and Huck admit that that pirate life isn't what they expected and wish to return to St. Petersburg. Tom, unable to convince them to stay on the island, is forced to reveal his secret plan (which remains a secret to the reader). After marveling over Tom's brilliance, the "lads came gaily back and went at their sports again with a will."

After dinner, Huck teaches Tom and Joe how to smoke tobacco from a pipe. At about midnight, the three awake to a solemn silence that has gripped the island. The air grows cold, and soon, a drenching rain begins to pour down upon them. In the darkness, they scramble to shelter underneath their tent, cold, scared, and wet. The storm passes violently, with blinding conflagrations of lightening, harsh winds, and ear-splitting thunder. With their fire burned out and their shelter damaged to the point of uselessness, Tom, Joe, and Huck attempt to distract themselves by playing "Cowboys and Indians." The chapter leaves the boys in a semi-happy state, smoking pipes and chatting away the night.

Chapter 17 Summary:

On Saturday afternoon, everyone in the town of St. Petersburg is in a somber mood.. Even Becky Thatcher wishes that she had Tom's brass knob to remember him by. Regretting her harsh words from the days before Tom's disappearance, she breaks down into tears. Meanwhile, playmates of both Tom and Joe gather around the schoolyard, recalling memories of Tom. Disputes broke out over who saw the departed boys last, who had spoken with them last, who had played with them last. Tom and Joe were like heroes.

The next morning, the church bell begins to toll and the villagers begin to gather for the funeral. Aunt Polly, Mary, Sid, and the Harper family are dressed in black and reverently sit in the front pew. After hymns and prayers, nothing but praise is sung of the boys. The clergyman "drew such pictures of the graces, the winning ways, and the rare promise" of the boys while even the minister "illustrated their sweet, generous natures □" As the mourners, congregation, and even the preacher begin to cry with such movement, the church door creaks open, unnoticed. Standing in the door are Tom, Huck, and Joe who had been hiding in the unused gallery listening to their own funeral sermon!

The families throw themselves over the "restored" boys, and even Huck is lavished with kisses from Aunt Polly. The event is almost miraculous, and Tom confesses "in his heart that this was the proudest moment of his life."

Chapter 18 Summary:

Tom's great secret is finally revealed to the reader: the scheme to return home and attend his own funeral. During breakfast, Aunt Polly reveals that she wishes Tom had given her some kind of message to ease her mind. "Sid would have thought. And Sid would have come and done it, too," says Aunt Polly. Tom, thinking quickly, replies that he wishes he did, but that he had dreamed about Aunt Polly. Out of curiosity, Aunt Polly inquires Tom about his dream. Tom recalls the incidents of Wednesday night, but implies that he dreamt the entire account. He recalls the entire family, including Mrs. Harper, sitting and crying by the door. "I took and wrote on a piece of sycamore bark, □ We ain't dead we are only off being pirates,' and put it

on the table by the candle □ I thought I went and leaned over and kissed you on the lips." Polly, convinced that Tom had prophesied the account and that an angel must have been present, rewards Tom with an apple and kisses before sending him off to school.

At school, Tom and Joe walk around with a "dignified air," telling tales of their adventures and putting envy in the eyes of all the other boys. In his glory, Tom comes to the decision that he can now be independent of Becky Thatcher. Although pretending not to see her, Tom observes that Becky is "showing off": screaming with laughter, chasing schoolmates, and casting a "conscious eye" in his direction. With vanity taking over, Tom begins to put his attentions into conversation with Amy Lawrence. Becky, trembling with tears, retaliates by going off in a corner with Alfred Temple and a picture book. Now feeling jealous and unable to stand Amy's meaningless chatter, Tom storms off angrily at his missed opportunity to reunite with Becky. Meanwhile, Becky becomes bored with Alfred once she realizes that Tom has already left the schoolyard. "Go away and leave me alone, can't you! I hate you!" she yells at Alfred as she walks away.

Alfred, humiliated and angry after realizing the truth, vows revenge upon Tom. Seeing Tom's open spelling-book, Alfred pours ink on the lesson for the afternoon, unaware that Becky is peering through the schoolhouse. She heads toward home, hoping to find Tom and win his thanks; but with a second thought, she remembers Tom's cold treatment of her, and resolves to let him receive a whipping for the ink-covered lesson.