

# THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER

*By Mark Twain*

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## CAST

<b>AUNT POLLY</b>	<i>Tom's Aunt and Guardian</i>
<b>TOM</b>	<i>Mischievous Boy</i>
<b>SID</b>	<i>Tom's Younger Brother</i>
<b>JIM</b>	<i>Young Slave</i>
<b>BEN</b>	<i>Hannibal Boy</i>
<b>BILLY</b>	<i>Hannibal Boy</i>
<b>JOHNNY</b>	<i>Hannibal Boy</i>

**NARRATOR:** Most of the adventures recorded in this book really occurred. Although this book is intended mainly for the entertainment of boys and girls, I hope it will not be shunned by men and women on that account. For, you see, part of my plan has been to try to remind adults of what they once were themselves.

**AUNT POLLY:** TOM!

**NARRATOR:** No answer.

**AUNT POLLY:** TOM!

**NARRATOR:** No answer.

**AUNT POLLY:** Where is that boy, I wonder? (*yelling*) Yooo-hooo, Tom!

**NARRATOR:** No answer. The old lady pulled her spectacles down and looked over them about the room. Then she put them up and looked out under them. She never looked through them. They were her fancy pair, the pride of her heart, and were built for style, not service. She could have seen through a pair of stove-lids just as well.

**AUNT POLLY:** Where is that Tom?

**NARRATOR:** She looked perplexed for a moment, and then said just loud enough for the furniture to hear...

**AUNT POLLY:** Well, if I get hold of you, Tom, I'll—

**NARRATOR:** She did not finish, for by this time she was bending down and punching under the bed with the broom and so she needed breath to punctuate the punches with.

**AUNT POLLY:** You're not under there, are you?

**NARRATOR:** She resurrected nothing but the cat. (*squawking of a cat*)

**AUNT POLLY:** Well, I never did see the likes of that boy!

**NARRATOR:** She went to the open door and stood in it and looked out among the tomato vines and jimson weeds that constituted the garden. No Tom. So she lifted up her voice at an angle calculated for distance and shouted...

**AUNT POLLY:** Yooo-Hoo, Tom!

**NARRATOR:** There was a slight noise behind her.

**AUNT POLLY:** Ah-ha!

**NARRATOR:** She turned just in time to seize a small boy by the slack of his roundabout and arrest his flight.

**AUNT POLLY:** There! I might-a thought of that closet. What you been doing in there?

**TOM:** Nothing.

**AUNT POLLY:** Nothing! Look at your hands. And look at your mouth. What *is* that truck?

**TOM:** I don't know, aunt.

**AUNT POLLY:** Well, *I* know. It's jam—that's what it is. Forty times I've said if you didn't let that jam alone, I'd skin you! Hand me that switch.

**NARRATOR:** The switch hovered in the air. The peril was desperate.

**TOM:** (*crying out*) Oh my! Look behind you, aunt!

**AUNT POLLY:** (*startled*) What?

**NARRATOR:** The old lady whirled round, and snatched her skirts out of danger. The lad fled on the instant, scrambled up the high board-fence, and disappeared over it. His aunt Polly stood surprised a moment, and then broke into a gentle laugh.

**AUNT POLLY:** (*gentle laugh*) Hang the boy! Can't I never learn anything? Ain't he played me enough tricks like that on me? But old fools is the biggest fools there is. Can't learn an old dog new tricks is the saying. But my goodness, he never plays them alike! How is a body supposed to know what's coming?

**NARRATOR:** Aunt Polly returned her stick to its resting place.

**AUNT POLLY:** The Lord knows I ain't doing my duty by that boy. Spare the rod and spile the child, as the Good Book says. I'm a laying up sin and suffering for us both. He's full of the Devil, Old Scratch himself.

**NARRATOR:** She continued to address the cat.

**AUNT POLLY:** It's just he's my dead sister's boy, poor thing, and I ain't got the heart to lash him somehow. Every time I let him off, my conscience does hurt me so, and every time I hit him my old heart most breaks.

**NARRATOR:** That day Tom played hokey from school, and he had a very good time. He got back home barely in time to help Jim, the small colored boy, saw the next day's wood and split the kindlings before supper.

**TOM:** Guess what I did today, Jim!

**NARRATOR:** At least he was there in time to tell his adventures to Jim while Jim did three-fourths of the work. Tom's younger brother (or rather, half-brother) Sid, was already through with his part of the work (picking up chips) for he was a quiet boy, and had no adventurous, troublesome ways.

**SID:** We already did our part of the work, Tom. Why don't you get to yours?

**TOM:** Why don't you belt up?

**NARRATOR:** While Tom was eating his supper, and stealing sugar as opportunity offered, Aunt Polly asked him questions that were full of guile, and very deep—for she wanted to trap him into damaging revelations.

**AUNT POLLY:** (*slyly*) Tom, I bet it was warm in school today, wasn't it?

**TOM:** Yes'm.

**AUNT POLLY:** Powerful warm, wasn't it?

**TOM:** Yes'm.

**AUNT POLLY:** Didn't you want to go swimming, Tom?

**NARRATOR:** A bit of a scare shot through Tom—a touch of uncomfortable suspicion. He searched Aunt Polly's face, but it told him nothing.

**TOM:** No, ma'am. Well, not very much.

**NARRATOR:** The old lady reached out her hand and felt Tom's shirt.

**AUNT POLLY:** But you ain't too warm now, though. Hmmm.

**NARRATOR:** Tom knew where the wind lay now. So he forestalled what might be her next move.

**TOM:** Some of us pumped water on our heads. Mine's damp yet. See?

**NARRATOR:** Aunt Polly was vexed to think she had overlooked that bit of circumstantial evidence, and missed a trick. Then she had a new inspiration.

**AUNT POLLY:** Tom, you didn't have to undo your shirt collar where I sewed it on, did you? While you pumped water on your head, I mean. Unbutton your jacket!

**NARRATOR:** The trouble vanished out of Tom's face. He opened his jacket. His shirt collar was securely sewed.

**AUNT POLLY:** Bother! Well, go 'long with you. I was just sure you'd played hookey and been a-swimming. But I forgive ye, Tom.

**NARRATOR:** She was half sorry her wisdom had miscarried, and half glad that Tom had stumbled into obedient conduct for once.

**SID:** Well, I think you sewed his collar with white thread, but it's black.

**AUNT POLLY:** Why, I did sew it with white! Tom!

**NARRATOR:** But Tom did not wait for the rest. As he went out at the door he said:

**TOM:** Sid, I'll lick you for that!

**NARRATOR:** In a safe place Tom examined two large needles which were thrust into the lappels of his jacket, and had thread bound about them—one needle carried white thread and the other black.

**TOM:** She'd never noticed if it hadn't been for Sid. Confound it! Sometimes she sews it with white, and sometimes she sews it with black. I wish to geeminy she'd stick to one or the other. I can't keep track of 'em. But I bet you I'll get Sid for that. I'll learn him!

**NARRATOR:** Aunt Polly delivered Tom's punishment soon enough. Tom was to whitewash the fence—thirty yards of board fence nine feet high.

Saturday Tom appeared on the sidewalk with a bucket of whitewash and a long-handled brush. He surveyed the fence, and all gladness left him.

**TOM:** *(sigh)* Here we go.

**NARRATOR:** He dipped his brush and passed it along the topmost plank and repeated the operation. Then he compared the insignificant whitewashed streak with the far-reaching continent of unwhitewashed fence and sat down discouraged.

**TOM:** I'll never get this done!

**NARRATOR:** Just then Jim came skipping out at the gate with a tin pail and singing Buffalo Gals.

**JIM:** (*singing*) Buffalo gals, won't you come out tonight? Come out tonight.

**NARRATOR:** Bringing water from the town pump had always been hateful work in Tom's eyes before, but now it did not strike him so.

**TOM:** (*to himself*) There's always a group of white and slave boys and girls at the pump—trading playthings, quarreling, fighting, skylarking. And the pump is only a hundred and fifty yards off, Jim never gets back in under an hour. Even then somebody generally had to go after him. (*to Jim*) Say, Jim, I'll fetch the water if you'll whitewash some.

**NARRATOR:** Jim shook his head.

**JIM:** I can't, Mister Tom. Ole missis, she tole me I got to go an' git dis water an' not stop foolin' roun' wid anybody. She say she spec' Mister Tom gwine to ax me to whitewash, an' so she tole me go 'long an' 'tend to my own business. She 'lowed she'd 'tend to de whitewashin'.

**TOM:** Oh, never you mind what she said, Jim. That's the way she always talks. Gimme the bucket! I won't be gone only a minute. She won't ever know.

**JIM:** Oh, I dasn't, Mister Tom. Ole missis she'd take an' tar de head off'n me. 'Deed she would.

**TOM:** Her? She never licks anybody! She just whacks 'em over the head with her thimble, and who cares about that? I'd like to know. She talks awful, but talk don't hurt! Well, it don't if she don't cry. Jim, I'll give you a marble. I'll give you a white alley!

**NARRATOR:** Jim began to waver.

**TOM:** White alley, Jim! And it's a bully taw.

**JIM:** My! Dat's a mighty great marble, I tell you! But Mars Tom I's powerful 'fraid of ole missis—

**TOM:** And besides if you will, I'll show you my sore toe!

**NARRATOR:** Jim was only human, and this attraction was too much for him. He put down his pail, took the marble, and bent over the toe with absorbing interest while the bandage was being unwound.

**AUNT POLLY:** (*yelling*) What's going on here?

**JIM:** (*cry of fright*) Ah!

**NARRATOR:** In another moment Jim was flying down the street with his pail and a tingling rear, Tom was back whitewashing with vigor, and Aunt Polly was retiring from the field with a slipper in her hand and triumph in her eye.

But Tom's energy did not last. He began to think of the fun he had planned for this day, and his sorrows multiplied. Soon the free boys would come tripping along on all sorts of delicious expeditions, and they would make a world of fun of him for having to work. The very thought of it burnt him like fire. He got out his worldly wealth and examined it—bits of toys, marbles, and trash; enough to buy an exchange of work, maybe, but not half enough to buy so much as half an hour of pure freedom. So he returned his straitened means to his pocket, and gave up the idea of trying to buy the boys. At this dark and hopeless moment an inspiration burst upon him! Nothing less than a great, magnificent inspiration.

He took up his brush and went tranquilly to work. Ben Rogers hove in sight presently—the very boy, of all boys, whose ridicule he had been dreading. Ben's gait was the hop-

skip-and-jump—proof enough that his heart was light and his anticipations high. He was eating an apple, and giving a long, melodious whoop, at intervals, followed by a deep-toned ding-dong-dong, ding-dong-dong, for he was personating a steamboat.

**BEN:** Stop her, sir! (*bell sound*) Ting-a-ling-ling!

**NARRATOR:** The river headway ran almost out, and he drew up slowly toward the sidewalk.

**BEN:** Ship up to back! Ting-a-ling-ling!

**NARRATOR:** His arms straightened and stiffened down his sides.

**BEN:** Set her back on the starboard! Ting-a-ling-ling! (*steamboat sounds*) Chow! Ch-chow-wow! Chow!

**NARRATOR:** His right hand, meantime, made circles—for it was representing a forty-foot wheel.

**BEN:** Stop the stabboard! Ting-a-lingling! Chow-ch-chow-chow!

**NARRATOR:** The left hand began to make circles.

**BEN:** Ting-a-ling-ling! Chowow-ow! Get out that head-line! Lively now! Done with the engines, sir! Ting-a-ling-ling!

**NARRATOR:** Tom went on whitewashing—paying no attention to the steamboat. Ben stared at Tom a moment.

**BEN:** Hi-ya, Tom! You're up a stump, ain't you?

**NARRATOR:** No answer. Tom surveyed his last touch with the eye of an artist, then he gave his brush another gentle sweep and surveyed the result. Ben ranged up alongside of him. Tom's mouth watered for Ben's apple, but he stuck to his work.

**BEN:** Hello, old chap, you've got some work to do, huh?

**NARRATOR:** Tom wheeled around suddenly.

**TOM:** Why, Ben! It's you, Ben! I didn't even notice you!

**BEN:** I'm goin' swimmin'. Don't you wish you could? (*teasingly*) But of course you'd druther work—wouldn't you? Course you would!

**NARRATOR:** Tom contemplated the boy a bit.

**TOM:** What do mean work?

**NARRATOR:** Ben motioned toward the fence.

**BEN:** Ain't that work?

**NARRATOR:** Tom resumed his whitewashing.

**TOM:** Well, maybe it is, and maybe it ain't. All I know is this—it suits Tom Sawyer.

**BEN:** Oh come on! You don't mean you like it?

**NARRATOR:** The brush continued to move.

**TOM:** Like it? Well, I don't see why I oughtn't to like it. A boy doesn't get a chance to whitewash a fence every day, does he?

**NARRATOR:** That put the thing in a new light. Ben stopped nibbling his apple. Tom swept his brush daintily back and forth—stepped back to note the effect—added a touch here and there. Ben watching every move and getting more and more interested, more and more absorbed.

**BEN:** Say, Tom, let me whitewash a little.

**NARRATOR:** Tom considered, was about to consent, but he altered his mind.

**TOM:** No—no—I reckon it wouldn't hardly do, Ben. You see, Aunt Polly's awful particular about this fence. It's right here on the street, you know. But if it was the back fence I wouldn't mind and she wouldn't. Yes, she's awful particular about this fence. It's got to be done very careful. I reckon there ain't one boy in a thousand, maybe two thousand, that can do it the way it's got to be done.

**BEN:** (*disappointedly*) Is that so? Oh come, on! Lemme just try. Just a little! I'd let you, if you was me, Tom.

**TOM:** Ben, I'd like to. Honest Injun, I would. But Aunt Polly! You know, Jim wanted to do it, but she wouldn't let him. Sid wanted to do it, and she wouldn't let Sid. Now don't you see how I'm fixed? If you was to tackle this fence and anything was to happen to it—

**BEN:** Oh, shucks! I'll be careful. Now lemme try. Hey! I'll give you the core of my apple.

**TOM:** No, Ben. I'm afeard—

**BEN:** I'll give you all of it!

**NARRATOR:** Tom gave up the brush with reluctance in his face, but alacrity in his heart. And while Ben, the former steamer *Big Missouri*, worked and sweated in the sun, the

retired artist sat on a barrel in the shade close by, dangled his legs, munched his apple, and planned the slaughter of more innocents.

**TOM:** (*through mouthfuls of apple*) That's a fine job, Ben.

**NARRATOR:** There was no lack of material. Boys happened along every little while. They came to jeer, but remained to whitewash.

**BEN:** That was fun, but I'm worn out!

**BILLY:** Let me have a try!

**TOM:** Now, Billy, you don't get to whitewash this fence for nothin'.

**BILLY:** I have a kite here I could give you. It's in good repair!

**NARRATOR:** Then when Billy played out, Johnny Miller wanted to buy in.

**JOHNNY:** I'll give you a dead rat, Tom! I even have a string to swing it with!

**NARRATOR:** And so on and so on—hour after hour.

And when the middle of the afternoon came, from being a poor poverty-stricken boy in the morning, Tom was literally rolling in wealth.

**TOM:** Let's see. I've got some truck now! Twelve marbles, part of a jews-harp, a piece of blue bottle-glass to look through, a spool cannon, a key that wouldn't unlock anything, a fragment of chalk, a glass stopper of a decanter, a tin soldier, a couple of tadpoles, six fire-crackers, a kitten with only one eye, a brass doorknob, a dog-collar—but no dog—the handle of a knife, four pieces of orangepeel, and a dilapidated old window-sash. Plus I've had a nice, good, idle time all

the while! Plenty of company! Plus, the fence has three coats of whitewash on it! Tarnation! If I hadn't run out of whitewash, I would have bankrupted every boy in the village. (*sigh*) I guess this ain't such a hollow world after all.

**NARRATOR:** Tom had discovered a great law of human action, without knowing it—namely, that in order to make a man or a boy covet a thing, it is only necessary to make the thing difficult to attain. If he had been a great and wise philosopher, like the writer of this book, he would now have comprehended that Work consists of whatever a body is obliged to do, and that Play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do. And this would help him to understand why constructing artificial flowers or performing on a tread-mill is work, while rolling ten-pins or climbing Mont Blanc is only amusement. There are wealthy gentlemen in England who drive four-horse passenger-coaches twenty or thirty miles on a daily line, in the summer, because the privilege costs them considerable money, but if they were offered wages for the service, that would turn it into work and then they would resign.

The boy mused awhile over the substantial change which had taken place in his worldly circumstances, and then wended toward headquarters to report.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

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1. When Mark Twain wrote *Tom Sawyer*, most books written for children either featured virtuous children who were rewarded or wicked children who were punished for their actions. How is Tom Sawyer a different type of character?
2. Does Aunt Polly actually care about Tom? Explain.
3. What's the difference between Tom and his brother, Sid?
4. What does dialect add to the story?
5. Is Tom Sawyer wise? Explain.
6. Why is Tom Sawyer an archetypal trickster character? How does this contribute to his appeal?
7. What philosophical wisdom does Twain insert into the whitewashing scene?
8. This is one of the most famous scenes in American Literature. Why do you think it's so popular?