

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn Chapters 14-16 Summary

Chapter 14 – “Was Solomon Wise?”

As Huck and Jim consider the loot from the robbers, Huck expresses excitement over the adventure and desire for more, but Jim does not want any of it. Huck concludes that Jim is level headed.

Huck reads to Jim from books found in the loot. This leads to discussion of kings and dukes. They discuss them in general and discuss the only king Jim knows, the bible's Solomon. The biblical Solomon is known for his intelligence, but Jim disagrees. Huck realizes he actually has learned from the Widow Douglas as he explains why Solomon's suggestion of cutting a child in half to discover his true mother is considered genius. Jim disagrees.

When Huck tells Jim that a Frenchman speaks a different language than they do, Jim is incredulous. Readers discover what a small worldview Jim possesses. He has been a slave his entire life. He has not had the opportunity of education. According to Jim, if all cats speak the same and all cows speak the same, why would people speak differently? Jim has spent his entire life in a restricted locale, and the idea that other languages exist is beyond his scope.

Readers should not, however, conclude Jim lacks intelligence. He is ignorant but not stupid. Huck is frustrated when Jim is unable to understand his points, and Huck misses the fact that Jim is incredibly logical within the realm of his understanding.

Chapter 15 – “Fooling Poor Old Jim”

Huck and Jim are headed to Cairo where the Ohio River intercepts the Mississippi where they will be able to head north toward free states where Jim can avoid trouble. A heavy fog rolls in, and Huck heads out in the canoe and gets separated from Jim and the raft. Unable to find each other in the fog, Jim eventually falls asleep. When Huck finds Jim the next day, he is still asleep, and Huck decides to play a trick on him.

Huck pretends they were never separated and convinces Jim he must have been dreaming. Jim believes it for a short while, but debris on the raft confirms Jim's initial remembrance correct. Jim tells Huck of the heartbreak he experienced when he thought he would never see Huck again, and he confesses how hurt he is that Huck fooled him.

Huck's realization of how hurt Jim is makes him feel “mean,” and he is not sure what to do (86). The chapter concludes with the following:

“It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger; but I done it, and I warn’t ever sorry for it afterward, neither. I didn’t do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn’t done that one if I’d ‘a’ knowed it would make him feel that way” (86).

This is an important moment as Huck realizes Jim has feelings. Society has raised Huck to believe slaves are not human, and they do not have feelings like Huck does. This incident suggests to Huck that society is wrong.

Chapter 16 – “The Rattlesnake-skin Does Its Work”

Concerned about missing Cairo, Huck decides to paddle ashore. While looking for the appropriate spot to do so, Huck experiences an internal crisis. Huck realizes Miss Watson tried to help him (by teaching him manners and religion), yet he is stealing her property (Jim). As Huck contemplates his crime, Jim goes on about being free, saving money, and going back to buy his family out of slavery. Jim continues that if he is unable to do so, he will just steal them out of slavery. The pressure is too much for Huck to stand, and as he heads to the shore, he decides to turn in Jim. Unaware of Huck’s plan, Jim calls out to Huck regarding how grateful he is to his good friend.

In the midst of Huck’s crisis, he runs into slave hunters. The ideal opportunity to turn in Jim appears, and Huck cannot do it. Instead, he lies to protect Jim, explaining that his father has smallpox. Rather than inspect the raft (where they would find Jim), the slave hunters throw money at Huck and leave.

Jim and Huck realize they passed Cairo in the fog. They decide to sell the raft and take a steamboat north. They stash their stuff and sleep. Upon awakening, they find the canoe is gone. This must be the rattlesnake skin causing their bad luck.

Back on the river, a steamboat smashes the raft. Trying to survive, Huck and Jim are separated. Huck comes ashore to barking dogs.