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Dialect and Nonstandard English

In Chapter IV, Jim says, “Yo’ ole father doan’ know yit what he’s a-gwyne to do.” Would you give this same information using the same words as Jim? Maybe you would say, “Your old dad doesn’t know what he will do,” or “Your elderly father hasn’t made a decision.” All of these sentences give the same information. However, the place we were raised and the people we have listened to as children have given us our own special way of speaking.

Dialect is defined as speaking that is characteristic of a certain group or of the people from a certain geographical region. Dialects may differ from one another in the way vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar are used. In most countries, one dialect has become dominant. In America, this is called *standard English* and can be heard on news broadcasts. Most people, however, speak a different dialect. Some writers like Mark Twain, Langston Hughes, and Mildred Taylor use written dialect in the dialogue of their writings in order to let the reader know how the character would sound.

There are many distinct dialects spoken in the United States. Three of the most familiar are the New England dialect, the New York dialect, and the Southern dialect.

In groups of two or three, read each of the expressions below and determine how it might be said in standard English.

Example: *He was just a-settin’ quiet-like* means “He was just sitting quietly.”

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| 1. <i>Didn’t aim to tote it the whole way.</i> | (New England) |
| 2. <i>Can’t for the life of me understand.</i> | (New England) |
| 3. <i>He was givin’ me the one-two look with his eyes.</i> | (New York) |
| 4. <i>He’s the type person who lies.</i> | (New York) |
| 5. <i>He run off ever which way.</i> | (Southern) |
| 6. <i>If I had my druthers, I’d go.</i> | (Southern) |

Pick out five examples of dialect from the *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Write them down and have your group put them into standard English.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

What Has Huck Learned?

Huck Finn learns about human nature during his journey through the novel. Each new idea or concept is taught by an experience the young boy has. In the chart below, explain what Huck learned or describe the learning experience which taught him.

What Huck Has Learned	The Learning Experience
<p>Practical jokes are not always funny. You must consider the consequences of your actions.</p>	
	<p>Pap locks Huck up in a cabin and refuses to allow him to return to the Widow Douglas or to continue his education.</p>
<p>Appearances can be deceiving (or, to use an idiom, you can't judge a book by its cover.)</p>	
	<p>Colonel Sherburn is able to disperse the crowd by "explaining" how cowardly they are acting. The men forget about the lynching and return home.</p>
<p>Some people are very gullible (will easily believe others), even when it does not seem logical for them to believe those who are lying and cheating them.</p>	
<p>Things which society teaches you don't always make sense in practical situations.</p>	
	<p>Huck tells Mary Jane the truth about the king and duke so she will not be worried about the slaves being separated from their families.</p>