

Approved for use in English III

Summary of the Work:

Roxy, a young slave girl faced with the prospect of having her child "sold down the river," switches the baby with her master's child. Twain explores the effects of this switch on all involved, intertwined with observations on truth, human nature, closed mindedness, and public opinion. In addition, he delves into the topics of fingerprinting, palmistry and behavioral psychology as the switch leads to its denouement.

Rationale:

This classic Twain novel of manmade differentials and heredity vs. environment is a strong period piece. Twain levels several charges at slavery and its repercussions. In keeping with Twain's use of the vernacular, the novel reproduces the dialects of the time and area. This is one of the first American novels classified as a modern novel, what with Twain's characteristic realism, as well as his dabbling into social problems of the time. The novel also reinforces junior students' study of American history.

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

Hughes, Langston. "Introduction," *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, 1959. Bantam Books: Toronto.

Prichard, Michael, "Untragic Yarn: The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson," *Late Reviews and Latest Obsessions*. Tantor Media, Inc., 2002

* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.

* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

Noted Distinction:

Readability:

- Lexile Score: 1130
- Readability Level: 8.3

Learning Resources Guidelines:

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Standard Alignment: [\(link\)](#)

Approval: 1984

Submitted to Committee:

Approved for Adoption:

Notes on the Text:

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

Twain deals very openly with racial issues, as he does in all of his works. It is clear in this novel, however, that Twain abhors slavery.

Connection to the Curriculum:

Twain's use of realistic dialect and local color provide a strong example of this time and place in literature. The novel's conclusion also provides an opportunity to discuss poetic justice.

Additional Connections:

(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)

The inclusion of aphorisms in *Pudd'nhead's* calendar at the beginning of each chapter is a rich source for discussion or writing dealing with human nature as Twain sees it.