

HKFN:
THE ABBREVIATED ADVENTURES OF
HUCKLEBERRY FINN

A one-act comedy by
Jeff Goode

Inspired by Mark Twain's novel

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

THE GIRL WHO PLAYS AUNT POLLY and later TOM SAWYER

THE BOY WHO PLAYS HUCK

THE BOY WHO PLAYS JIM

THE GIRL WHO PLAYS WIDOW DOUGLAS and DUKE and others

THE GIRL WHO PLAYS MISS WATSON and KING and others

NOTES

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain is a novel about race in America. Written after the Civil War, but set 40 years earlier, the story explores the hypocrisy of slavery and the moral confusion it creates.

Ironically, the book—which is generally considered an American classic—has frequently been banned because of objectionable language and racist situations in its depiction of the pre-Civil War South, presenting educators with the challenge of engaging students in discussions about race when it is sometimes difficult to even discuss a book on the subject.

HKFN is a play about our discomfort with discussions of race and specifically our difficulty in discussing *Huckleberry Finn*.

In a sense, it is a play about "the elephant in the room," where characters often avoid the same topics we all do when faced with situations of bias or inequity. (Even when it should be pretty obvious to everyone what we're really talking about.)

This plays is presented, not so much as a direct adaptation of the original, but as a means of jumpstarting a conversation about social taboos, which can lead to a fuller discussion of the original novel and other challenging works on race, gender and stereotyping.

CASTING NOTES

The author generally encourages color-blind and gender-blind casting whenever possible. It should be noted, however, that certain aspects of the gender and ethnicity of the characters are important to the story, and should be taken into consideration when casting.

HUCK AND JIM

In the original novel and in these plays, the characters of Huck and Jim are Caucasian and African American, respectively. While there can be some flexibility in the exact ethnicity of the actors playing the roles, it is important that Huck be lighter-complected than Jim and vice versa. When Polly expresses rigid opinions about who can play Jim and who can play Huck, it should be obvious that the two were cast mainly because of their skin color.

AUNT POLLY, WIDOW DOUGLAS and MISS WATSON

In the novel, the characters of Aunt Polly, Widow Douglas and Miss Watson are white, but their ethnicity is not relevant to the play. Their gender, however, is. It is important that we know that Polly would not have cast any of them, including herself, as Huck, Jim or Pap Finn because of their gender.

As the play goes on, all of the "actors" evolve in their ideas about casting, so that by the end of it, they all feel free to play characters of any race or gender, and the show ends with Jim playing Huck, Huck playing Polly and Polly playing Tom.

ADDED ROLES

The play was written for a cast of five: three females and two males. If a larger cast is desired—adding actors to play King, Duke, Pap Finn, or Militia, for example—the gender and ethnicity of the additional characters is at the discretion of the director.

SCENE - A REHEARSAL FOR THE SCHOOL PLAY

(Enter THE GIRL WHO PLAYS AUNT POLLY and is apparently in charge. She curtsies.)

POLLY: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, also known as Huck Finn, by Mark Twain, also known as Samuel Clemens, American humorist 1835 to 1910. The end.

(She starts to leave, but comes back.)

Of the title, I mean. The play is just starting. *(Awkward silence.)*
I play Aunt Polly. *(Awkward silence.)* The end.

(She quickly runs offstage.)

HUCK: *(In darkness:)* You don't know about me —

POLLY: *(Off:)* Wait for the lights!

(Lights up on THE BOY WHO PLAYS HUCKLEBERRY FINN. He nervously reads from a script and clearly has not had time to memorize his lines.)

HUCK: You don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* —

POLLY: Louder!

HUCK: *(Louder:)* *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* —

POLLY: And where's your hat?

HUCK: I don't want to wear the hat. It's stupid.

POLLY: It's historically accurate. Give him the hat.

(THE GIRL WHO WILL PLAY WIDOW DOUGLAS enters with a straw hat and hands it to Huck.)

You gotta wear the hat or how is anybody gonna know you're Huckleberry Finn?

HUCK: Because you just told them?

POLLY: Just wear that hat!

(Huck puts it on, fuming.)

HUCK: Anyways, that book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth mainly, with some stretchers, but mainly he told the truth. I never seen anybody but lied, one time or another, without it was Aunt Polly –

POLLY: Louder!!

HUCK: *(Louder:)* Without it was Tom's Aunt Polly, or maybe the Widow Douglas.

WIDOW DOUGLAS: *(Waving from the wings:)* That's me!

HUCK: Now the way that book winds up is: Tom and me found the money that the robbers hid in the cave and we got to keep it as a reward. The Widow Douglas adopted me and tried to bring me up proper.

(The WIDOW DOUGLAS enters and smothers Huck with affection.)

WIDOW DOUGLAS: Oh, my little Huckleberry! My poor lost lamb! *(Pinching his cheeks:)* I'm going to make it my mission in life to civilize you. *(Poking and prodding him:)* Stand up straight. Pick up your feet. Clean up your room. Did you wash behind your ears?

HUCK: From time to time, her sister Miss Watson would come stay with us.

(Huck gestures toward the front door and JIM bursts in, loaded down with luggage.)

JIM: Howdy!

(Huck and Widow Douglas stare at him, puzzled by this casting choice.)

HUCK: You're Miss Watson?

JIM: (*Puzzled:*) I don't think so.

MISS WATSON: (*Behind Jim:*) Oof! Jim! Oof, you're blocking the doorway. Let me in!

(*MISS WATSON squeezes past Jim and into the room.*)

MISS WATSON: Oof!

WIDOW DOUGLAS: Sister! There you are!

MISS WATSON: Here I am! Jim, would you take my bags up to the guest room? And tell the others they can go work in the fields or something until suppertime. The two of us need to catch up.

JIM: You and me?

MISS WATSON: No, Jim, my sister and I.

JIM: So I'm just here to carry the bags in???

(*He exits, grumbling to himself.*)

MISS WATSON: I hear you muttering under your breath, Jim. Mind you don't catch a switchin'!

HUCK: So like I was saying, Miss Watson would visit from time to time.

MISS WATSON: (*To Widow Douglas:*) Oooh! Is that him?

HUCK: So then there was two of 'em.

(*They both rush over to Huck, poking and prodding.*)

WIDOW DOUGLAS: Stand up straight.

MISS WATSON: Wipe your nose.

WIDOW DOUGLAS: Wipe your feet.

MISS WATSON: Wipe off that grin.

WIDOW DOUGLAS: Take off that hat in the house.

MISS WATSON: Why don't you behave?

HUCK: Then Miss Watson took a set at me now with a spelling-book.

MISS WATSON: (*Pinching his cheeks:*) I'm going to make it my mission in life to educate you.

HUCK: She worked me middling hard till about suppertime and then they had to call in the— (*To Polly:*) I can't say this word.

POLLY: What word?

(We all know what word.)

HUCK: (*Substituting:*) —the people. They had to call in the people from the fields to have supper and everybody went to bed.

POLLY: What people?

HUCK: (*Squirming:*) You know...the people who worked for Miss Watson. (*Pointedly:*) For no pay. (*More pointedly:*) Because they were... (*Can't think of another word:*) people.

POLLY: You mean, slaves?

HUCK: (*Relieved:*) Yes, slaves.

POLLY: You can say the word "slaves." It's not a bad word.

JIM: (*Poking his head in:*) No, he can't.

POLLY: Jim, it's not your entrance. Go back offstage and wait for your cue.

HUCK: It's not the word "slaves."

JIM: (*Coming back in:*) I told you not to say it.

POLLY: Jim!

JIM: All right, I'm going offstage. But I can hear everything that goes on out here.

POLLY: You're both messing up the show. Now just say it.

JIM: You better not.

HUCK: But that's not the word. It's not the word "ssss—" ...people.

JIM: That's better.

(Jim, satisfied, goes back offstage.)

POLLY: I have no idea what you're trying to tell me.

HUCK: It's another word for...people that I'm not comfortable saying in front o' people.

POLLY: So just say "people." What is the problem?

HUCK: *(Resuming:)* And then they had to call in the people from the fields to have supper.

POLLY: Was that so hard?

(Jim re-enters, suspicious.)

JIM: Wait a minute, what word is he trying to say?

POLLY: Jim! Get off stage!

HUCK: After about a day of being educated and civilized, I was about ready to run off to the Territory and be a outlaw with Tom and his band of robbers. So later that night, Tom and me snuck off to plan our adventures, but when we got back home...

(Jim enters, yawning and stretching and plops down in the doorway for a nap.)

Who did we see setting in the kitchen doorway, fast asleep, but Miss Watson's big...people... (*Trails off...*) Than Jim. Than Miss Watson's big person Jim. (*Pointedly:*) Who works for her for no money and gets a switchin' when he does a bad job. And sometimes probably wishes he was free, but that's not gonna happen for another hundred years or so...

POLLY: What are you going on about? Would you, please, just stick to the script?

HUCK: I really can't say this word.

POLLY: What word??

HUCK: And it's all over the place. It's on, like, every page. And I really don't think we should be talking about it in school, should we?

POLLY: This is history. You can say anything, if it's history.

HUCK: I don't think that's true.

JIM: It's literature, actually.

POLLY: It's historical literature, so that means it's okay.

HUCK: I don't think that's what it means.

POLLY: (*Exasperated:*) It's just words! Look, which one is giving you trouble?

HUCK: (*Pointing in the script:*) That one.

POLLY: "Jim"???

HUCK: No, the word right before "Jim."

POLLY: Oh, for Pete's sake! "Nigerian"? You can't say "Nigerian"?

HUCK: I don't think that's how it's pronounced.

POLLY: It's where they come from. It's a real place.

HUCK: (*Shaking his head:*) Nuh uh. Nope.

POLLY: People from Nigeria are called Nigerians.

(Jim snores loudly.)

Are you asleep???

JIM: No, I'm bored!

POLLY: (*To Huck:*) Get on with it.

(Huck reluctantly resumes.)

HUCK: We liked Jim well enough. But we also liked pranking on him. So we hung his hat from a tree while he was sleeping and when he woke he thought he'd been haunted. He told all the other...Nigerians he was magicked by witches—I'm sorry, I can't.

POLLY: Just do it!

HUCK: Jim was monstrous proud about it, and Nigerians would come for miles to hear Jim tell about it, and he was more looked up to than any Nigerian in the county. Nigerians is always talking about witches in the dark by the kitchen fire; but whenever—I'm sorry, I can't be in this show.

(Huck walks off.)

POLLY: Where are you going? Huckleberry Finn, you come back here!

HUCK: Nope, no, I can't. I have to quit.

(He exits.)

POLLY: You can't quit! We just started!

MISS WATSON: That's okay. We don't need him.

POLLY: Yes, we do, because we don't have anybody else to play Huck Finn.

MISS WATSON: Anyone can play Huck. All you need is a hat.

JIM: Can I play Huck?

POLLY: No.

JIM: Why not? I read the book. And I know some of the lines. *(As Huck Finn:)* "I do believe he cared just as much for his people as white folks does for their'n. It don't seem natural, but I reckon it's so."

MISS WATSON: Why would you read the book?

POLLY: You can't play Huck. Because you're already Jim.

JIM: I don't want to be Jim. He spends most of the show tied up on a raft.

POLLY: Well, nobody else wants to do it either, so you're gonna have to play Jim.

JIM: What? So I have to do whatever nobody else wants to do? How is that fair?

POLLY: Augh! Why does everything have to be fair?!

JIM: You didn't answer my question.

POLLY: I am not having this discussion with you, Jim.

JIM: *(Pouting:)* Fine!

(The Girl who played Widow Douglas suddenly bursts in dressed in tatters and a crazy beard as PAP FINN!)

PAP FINN: *(Bellowing:)* Huckleberry Finn! Where'd you run off to? It's your ole Pap Finn and I need some money! Where is that boy? Puttin' on frills again, I reckon. I'll take you down a peg before I get done with you. Somebody fetch me a switch! I'll beat him black and blue!

JIM: You'll beat him what color?

POLLY: Who are you supposed to be?

WIDOW DOUGLAS: I'm Pap Finn.

POLLY: No, you're not.

WIDOW DOUGLAS: Why not?

POLLY: Because Pap Finn is a man. And he's old.

MISS WATSON: Pap is a boy's name?

WIDOW DOUGLAS: So who's gonna do it?

POLLY: I was gonna get Mister [*name any male teacher*].

WIDOW DOUGLAS: Oh, he'd be perfect for it! He's a man.

MISS WATSON: Yep. And he's old.

WIDOW DOUGLAS: So old.

MISS WATSON: Then who's gonna be Huck?

POLLY: (*Exasperated:*) Well, now, nobody's gonna be Huck, cuz he took the hat!

(She throws up her hands and storms out, followed by the others.)

SCENE - ANOTHER PART OF THE SCHOOL

(If a unit set is required, this scene can be played in the auditorium, as the actors are leaving the rehearsal to go home.)

(Huck storms in from the dressing room, on his way home. Jim runs after him.)

JIM: Hey, Huck, wait up! I'm coming with you.

HUCK: What do you mean, you're coming with me?

JIM: I quit the play, too.

HUCK: What? Why?

JIM: Cuz they did the exact same thing to me! After you left, they wouldn't let me be Huck.

HUCK: How is that the same situation? At all??

JIM: Because they won't let us do what we want.

HUCK: This isn't about doing what I want!

JIM: Sure, it is.

HUCK: No, it's exactly the opposite. I want to NOT do what they want me to.

JIM: *(Sarcastic:)* Yeh, you're right, that's totally different.

HUCK: You have to go back. They're gonna need somebody to play Jim.

JIM: They're gonna need somebody to play Huck.

HUCK: Anybody can play Huck. All you need is a hat.

JIM: Yeah, but you took the hat.

HUCK: *(Realizing he still has the hat:)* Aw, no. Now I have to go back. *(Getting an idea:)* Hey, why don't you go back and turn it in for me?

JIM: Why do I have to do it?

HUCK: (*Exasperated:*) Jim, please!

JIM: We don't have to go back. We can run off and start our own play!

(Enter the Girls who played Miss Watson and Widow Douglas as themselves. But we shall call them KING and DUKE. They've got a box of props, or maybe a steamer trunk.)

KING: Hey, are you guys really quitting?

DUKE: We wanna quit, too.

HUCK: Why are YOU quitting?

KING: She's being all bossy and won't let us do anything fun.

DUKE: Yeah, there's too many rules. Who put her in charge?

JIM: We're gonna start our own show so we can do whatever we want.

KING: That's awesome!

DUKE: Look, we stole a bunch of props.

(She opens the trunk.)

HUCK: Guys, you have to put those back.

KING: We've got wigs and costumes.

DUKE: And there's pillows. We could make a fat suit!

KING: I've always wanted to do Romeo and Juliet. (*Shakespeareanly:*) O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?

DUKE: (*As Romeo, groping in darkness:*) Juliet, is that you? I can hear you, but I can't see you. It's too dark in this jungle.

JIM: I think it's a garden.

KING: (*As Juliet:*) Set a pillow on fire and use it to light the way!

HUCK: No! No fire!

KING: (*As Juliet:*) Over here, Romeo! By yonder breaking window. It is the east and I'm the setting sun.

JIM: East is the rising sun, I think.

(Duke stuffs pillows under her shirt to make a fat suit)

DUKE: I've always wanted to play Hamlet, the Duke of Denmark. (*As Hamlet:*) To be or not to be! That is the bare bodkin! Ho ho ho!

KING: Ha! If you're the Duke of Denmark, I'm Martin Luther King.

DUKE: If you say so. (*Bowing to King:*) Your Majesty.

KING: (*Bowing to Duke:*) Your Majesty.

JIM: Can I be something?

DUKE: (*Regally:*) Of course, you can, my good fellow! Anything you want. It's a free country, after all.

JIM: I wanna be a robot!

(Jim robots around.)

KING: Ooh! I've always wanted a robot servant!

DUKE: (*Regally:*) You there! Android! Fetch His Majesty's luggage from the carriage.

JIM: (*Offended:*) Fetch your what?

DUKE: (*Regally:*) And mine, too! A duke should not have to carry his own stolen goods. Ho ho ho!

JIM: I'm not fetchin' nothin'. This is worse than when we were in a real play.

KING: We should plan a heist!

DUKE: We'll need disguises.

(Hands Huck a wig.)

Here, put this on.

HUCK: Why?

DUKE: You're a female spy sent to infiltrate the Antebellum South before the Civil War.

HUCK: No, thank you.

KING: *(To Duke:)* What are you talking about? He can't be a female spy.

DUKE: How come?

KING: Because there's no such thing. They're called spies. "Female spy" is like calling someone a...male fireman.

JIM: Fireperson.

KING: It's offensive.

DUKE: Right. Sorry. I forgot.

HUCK: I don't want to be a female spy anyway.

DUKE: *(Covering her ears, offended:)* You're not! Stop saying that word!

KING: I know! You could be a poor little orphan girl.

DUKE: Whose parents have died suddenly and tragically!

KING: Leaving all of their riches to you!!

JIM: So more of a rich little poor little orphan girl.

HUCK: What riches?

DUKE: I dunno. How much have you got on you?

HUCK: (*Looking in his pockets:*) Six dollars and a cell phone.

DUKE: (*Snatching the money:*) Six dollars!?!

KING: (*Snatching the phone:*) And a magic snuff box!?!

DUKE: Do you know what we could buy with this?!

KING: In the 1800s? You could buy a horse.

DUKE: We could buy SIX horses!

KING: And I could call the future and find out which horse to bet on! (*On the phone:*) Hello? Kentucky Derby? This is the King of France. I need to know who wins the Triple Crown next year.

HUCK: (*Snatching back his phone:*) All right, give me that! It's my money. You're not spending it on time-traveling horses.

KING: Ah, but what if I told you that secretly, I am your long lost uncle William from England. Pip pip! Cheerio! And in his will, your father left us all six of his dollars to split between us. (*Melodramatically:*) Oh my poor dead brother! How could this tragically have happened? (*Splitting the money:*) Three for you and three for me.

DUKE: And I'm your other uncle. Harvey. From Harvard. And I want a cut, too!

(She grabs a dollar from each of them.)

(Melodramatically:) Oh my poor dead sister! Curse the day that she ever set foot on that ill-fated riverboat!

HUCK: Give me back my money!

(The Girl who played Aunt Polly storms in.)

POLLY: All right, knock it off! (*To King and Duke:*) You're nobody's uncle! And neither are you!

JIM: (*Trying to play along:*) Tom Sawyer's Aunt Polly? What are

YOU doing here at the funeral home?

POLLY: You can't just be what you want to be and make stuff up and do whatever.

DUKE: It's a free country!

POLLY: No, it's 1845, and this is a play. With historical accuracy. There are rules and lines, and you have to do what you're told.

KING: But what if we don't like any of the rules?

POLLY: Too bad! You don't have a choice! Now get back in the right costumes, right now!

JIM: There's nothing right about these costumes.

POLLY: *(To Huck:)* And you, put on your hat!

HUCK: No! My conniving uncles are right! It's a free country. And if I want to give away all my money and run off to New Orleans, you can't stop me!

(He gives the money back to the King and the Duke.)

JIM: Can I be somebody's uncle?

POLLY: Quiet, Jim. I'm warning you! You're not a Duke, and you're not a King and these are not your uncles and you all have to get back in the play right this minute.

KING: *(Heckling:)* Boo!

DUKE: *(Heckling:)* Yeah, boo! Get off the stage.

JIM: *(Heckling:)* Boo!

HUCK: You don't get to tell us what to do! Or where to go, or who to be! From now on, we're gonna make our own rules and if you don't like it...too bad!

POLLY: All right, fine! But you'll be sorry you said that. Two can play at this game, y'know!

(She storms out.)

JIM: Two of what?

KING: Hooray! We did it! Good job, Huck!

DUKE: Yeah, you really showed her. Now we can do any play we want.

KING: Let's do one where we rob a stagecoach.

HUCK: I'm not Huck. And I'm not doing anything. She's right. This whole thing is stupid.

(He throws his hat on the ground.)

JIM: So can I be Huck now?

DUKE: *(Shrugs.)* It's a free country.

(Jim puts on the Huck hat.)

JIM: *(As Huck:)* Well shucks, Your Majesties. Now that we've got all this money, why don't we buy us a spaceship and explore the Mississippi Delta Quadrant?

HUCK: And that's my money. Give it back.

(He takes back the money.)

DUKE: Well, now we're broke again.

KING: I know! Let's tell people that "Jim" is an escaped criminal and turn him in for the reward!

(They turn to Huck, who suddenly realizes that he is Jim now.)

HUCK: Wait, what?

DUKE: Quick, get him! Tie him up!

(Duke and King pull some rope out of the prop trunk.)

HUCK: (*Fleeing:*) I'm not Jim! I'm not playing! Let go of me!

KING: Don't just stand there, Huck! Grab some rope!

(Duke and King chase Huck around the stage. Jim is not comfortable with this.)

JIM: I'm not comfortable with this.

(Duke and King chase Huck offstage. There is lots of yelling and crashing around.)

(Calling offstage:) Guys? Come on, leave him alone. If he doesn't want to be Jim, he doesn't have to.

(Duke and King return with the boy who used to be Huck bound securely.)

DUKE: All right, "Jim" – If that is your real name.

HUCK: But it's not my name!

KING: A likely story!

DUKE: Well, whoever you are, you're a wanted criminal now and you're coming with us.

HUCK: I'm not a criminal! I haven't done anything!

KING: He's got a point. What are the charges?

DUKE: Well, he's a slave. That's gotta be illegal.

KING: That's perfect! (*To Huck who is now Jim:*) You heard the man! You're going to jail for slavery!

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