

Urban Legends and Huckleberry Finn

The most outrageous lies that can be invented will find believers if a person only tells them with all their might. - Mark Twain

Pre-reading Questions:

- Have you ever heard or read an urban legend?
- Have you ever believed one?
- Have you ever passed one on to someone else?

Follow these steps while reading "Legends of Our Own Minds" from the Cost of Deception by John Williams:

1. Underline vocabulary words you don't know.
2. Consider the title, "Legends in Our Own Minds." Speculate what it might mean.
3. Read the opening paragraph. Does the title have any more meaning now?
4. What is the main idea the author is communicating? State the main idea in your own words.
5. What is the purpose of the article?

Post-reading Questions:

1. What is the definition of an urban legend?
2. Where do urban legends originate?
3. What harm might there be in believing and passing on urban legends?
4. What are some similar characteristics of urban legends? Give examples from the evidence in the article.
5. List specific examples of how business or corporations suffered from the passing of urban legends.
6. How can we protect ourselves from these deceptions?
7. Why do you think people believe and pass on urban legends?
8. As if you were the author's editor, list some questions you have (something that didn't seem to be answered enough).

Urban Legends in Huck Finn

1. In chapter 23, what is the response of the audience to the Royal Nonesuch's performance?
2. What do you think Twain is implying about human nature by the actions of the townspeople after the performance?
3. What is Twain saying about the many townspeople Huck encounters in his travels regarding their willingness to trust and believe the king and the duke?
4. How is our belief in urban legends today similar to the society of Twain's time?

Writing Activity

In a well-developed, organized essay, discuss the role superstition and urban legends play in the novel. What is Twain criticizing when he portrays characters such as Jim, Huck, or any other characters, as gullible people? How does this same idea apply to our society today after reading the included articles on rumors and urban legends?