Huck Finn Comparative Essay Essay, Research Paper

Comparative Essay

In recent times there has been a considerable amount of media attention surrounding the movement of the youth culture. The topic of teenagers growing up in a violent and consumerist culture has been a hot topic as there has been growing concern over the adult issues that teenagers are forced to deal with in today s society. Generation after

generation there has been a division between the rebellious nature of the youth and the adult world. The Catcher in the Rye and The Adventures of Huckleberrry Finn although written in two different eras attempt to capture the essence of youth and explores the central theme of the journey of the adolescent into adulthood.

The two central figures of the novels Holden Caulfeld and Huck Finn reflect this central theme through the realities of the contrasting world s they have created and the experiences they encounter. The two novels take place in different eras, Catcher in the Rye tells the story of Holden exploring the modern New York society made up of different social classes and people from every walk of life. Huck Finn explores the world of the Mississippi river in the 1800 s during a time of slavery and also in the midst of the industrial revolution. Both these characters deal with two contrasting worlds on one hand a world filled with materialism, phoniness and urbanization and on the other hand a rural world that is not yet urbanized however has the elements of corruption that are taking form in the midst of modernization. Holden confronts characters that are a product of a modern city such as pimps, hookers, actors and overall a collection of phony people who thrive on worldly possessions and materialism. Huck Finn however deals with different characters who do not share qualities of urban intelligence but show a more natural form of human evil that is not influenced by the wickedness of the city. These characters are a representation of the kinds of people that were the reality of the Mississippi in those times. Holden and Huck deal with adult worlds from different times and different societies and therefor the view each character has towards life differ. However with the different social realities of the two figures they still struggle to understand the adult worlds they observe. Both characters in the midst of a modern and a rural society still encounter corruption, hypocrisy and a world that generally still has faults and evils lurking beneath the people who surround them.

Holden is necessarily one of the modern American descendants of Huck Finn , as once said by a critic. Both characters depict the adolescent youth for their generations and eras however both characters are different in their attitudes towards life and the world. Holden is a 16 year old boy that has a contempt for the phony world that encompasses him. His contempt is a result of his cynical view towards everyone and everything he observes and encounters in his experiences. Huck on the other hand is more innocent and childlike as he is warm hearted and in search of adventure. Holden holds the view that everyone in society is phony and protests anything related to phoniness. He hates television, movies, actors and Hollywood as they all represent a phony society. He goes on to comment on Hamlet as a, sad, screwed up guy who should be portrayed that way and not as a goddamn general. This indicates Holden s cynicism and his contempt for phoniness. Huck does not make observations or any criticisms on the corruption of the society around him other than the fact that he says he can not understand much of the ill treatment and behaviour of many individuals. Instead of criticizing or judging the people around him he seeks to create justice in a world of injustice. He sets out to do this by helping his pal Jim a black runaway slave reach his destination of freedom. Huck is too young to understand as much of the world as Holden does and does not have any concrete opinions on the reality that surrounds him. This is the reason for his innocence and naivete.

Holden and Huck both resist to be affected and influenced by the adult world s around them. Holden with his negative attitude and anti-social behaviour refuses to conform with the rest of society. He sets himself apart from the mass of the population criticizng the world for all their faults. He is at the age where he must mature and make the transition into adulthood however he struggles with the hopelessness of the hypocritical world and cannot bring himself to materialize into a man. Huck is a few years younger than Holden and is not yet at the stage where he must make the transition into adulthood however it is first time being exposed to a world beyond his reality and sees the adult world for the first time. He stays youthful with a sense of charm and adventure and combats the adult thieves and hoodlums of the world in the 1800 s. Holden and Huck are also symbols of the all American youth. They are rebellious as they will not listen to any authority figures like parents, teachers and the social norms that are presented upon them. Holden is kicked out of school and Huck is willing to help a black slave in times of great racial barriers. Holden and Huck represent youth and seek to be the saviours of youth. Holden with his wish to be the Catcher in the Rye represents his wish to save or catch children before they make the leap into adulthood. And Huck preserves the greatness of youth from his attempts to be go against the adult world that would condemn for befriending a black slave. This shows the innocence and greatness of youth culture who speaks out against the politics and injustice of the adult world.

Huck Finn and Catcher in the Rye are both novels that have been voices for their generations speaking out against the adult worlds of their times. These books also reflect the world in which we live in today where the increasing pressures of the world are making it difficult for young people to realise the greatness of youth. Holden Caulfeld and Huck Finn are truly good examples of the American youth misunderstood by American society and act as good examples to teenagers whom they may be able to identify with.