

# The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

US : 1960 : dir. Michael Curtiz : M-G-M : 107 min  
 prod: Samuel Goldwyn Jr : scr: James Lee : dir.ph.: Ted McCord  
[Eddie Hodges](#); [Patty McCormack](#); [Sherry Jackson](#) .....  
 Archie Moore; Neville Brand; Tony Randall; Buster Keaton; Andy Devine; Judy Canova;  
 John Carradine; Mickey Shaughnessy; Sterling Holloway; Royal Dano; Josephine Hutchinson  
 Finlay Currie

| Ref:  | Pages | Sources | Stills | Words | Ω | 8 | ≠ | M | ☺ | Copy on VHS | Last Viewed |
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| 2022a | 8.5   | 12      | 10     | 2,510 | - | 7 | 7 | 3 | 7 | Yes         | Sept 2001   |



*Variety wrote: "Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn is all boy. Eddie Hodges' Huck isn't. Therein lurks the basic reason this production of the Twain classic is not all it could, and should, be."* Source: original front-of-house still

## Leonard Maltin's TV Movies and Video Guide review:

"Good version of Twain's story with an appealing Hodges (Huck) and excellent Archie Moore (Jim). Assorted characters played by veterans Buster Keaton, Andy Devine, Judy Canova, John Carradine, Mickey Shaughnessy, and Sterling Holloway. Shot in CinemaScope.  
 \*\*\* "

## Speelfilm Encyclopedie review – identical to above

## Halliwel's Film Guide "review":

"Another patchy remake. \* "



*Neither the first nor the last professional prizefighter to try his hand at film-acting, but gentle Archie Moore turned in one of the most sympathetic and believable of all the incarnations of Jim, runaway slave and Huck's river companion.  
Source: original front-of-house still*

#### **The M-G-M Story review:**

"To celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mark Twain's book, and perhaps earn an honest penny, Samuel Goldwyn Jr produced **"THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN"** with Eddie Hodges a sprightly Huck and world lightweight champion Archie Moore surprisingly good as Jim. It had been filmed by MGM before (and better), and twice by Paramount. This version was written by James Lee and directed by Michael Curtiz, with Tony Randall, Patty McCormack, Neville Brand, Judy Canova, Mickey Shaughnessy, Andy Devine, Buster Keaton, Finlay Currie, Josephine Hutchinson, John Carradine, Royal Dano, Sterling Holloway. Alan Jay Lerner and Burton Lane wrote four songs for it."

#### **Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89 review:**

"In this version of the Mark Twain classic, the Twain atmosphere is occasionally captured by a good cast. **\*\*1/2** "

#### **The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television review:**

"Don't expect more than a pretty picture-book illustration of Mark Twain's story from this 1960 attempt of Michael Curtiz; it's desperately short of real actors and even Tony Randall drowns in this insipidpi. 7 "

#### **The Time Out Film Guide review:**

"Fourth screen version of the Twain classic, made by a very tired and under-inspired Curtiz, but featuring light heavyweight boxing champ Moore as Jim, and the great Keaton as a lion-tamer among the veteran supporting cast (which includes Andy Devine, John Carradine, Sterling Holloway, Finlay Currie, Judy Canova and Royal Dano."

#### **TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:**

"This is a sprightly account of the adventures of Mark Twain's rural American boy which follows Huck Finn (Eddie Hodges) and the slave Jim (Archie Moore) as they travel down the Mississippi on a raft in the mid-1800s.

Along the way they are reluctantly drawn into the schemes of a pair of con-men (Tony Randall and Mickey Shaughnessy), find work on a riverboat, and join the circus. Though it is not entirely faithful to the book (the riverboat and circus scenes have been added), this is nonetheless a well-crafted film featuring strong performances from Randall, former middle-weight boxing champion Moore, and a host of beloved character actors,<sup>1</sup> with rich photography that beautifully captures authentic Mississippi river locations. This was Hollywood's second attempt to film the Huck Finn story<sup>2</sup>; Mickey Rooney had played the title role in 1939's "**HUCKLEBERRY FINN**". \*\*1/2 "

#### Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

"Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn is all boy. Eddie Hodges' Huck isn't. Therein lurks the basic reason this production of the Twain classic is not all it could, and should, be.

There is something artificial and self-conscious about young Hodges' all-important portrayal of Huck, a lack of actor-character chemistry for which he's certainly not wholly responsible. An equal share of the rap must be shouldered by director Michael Curtiz, not only for the youthful star's shortcomings in the role, but for a general slack, a disturbing shortage of vitality noticeable at several key junctures.

James Lee's screenplay simplifies Twain's episodic tale, erasing some of the more complex developments and relationships, presumably for the benefit of the young audience.<sup>3</sup> Some of the more sinister, frightening aspects of the story have been forgotten.

On the brighter side of the ledger, there are some stimulating performances and the handsome physical production itself. An extremely colourful and experienced cast has been assembled. There is Tony Randall, whose work as the roguish "King" is a delightful balance of whimsy and threat. There is Archie Moore, the light heavyweight champion of the world, who brings the story its only moments of real warmth and tenderness.

<sup>1</sup> *Everyone but the boy, in other words?*

<sup>2</sup> *It was the fifth, but who's counting?*

<sup>3</sup> *For whom the book, after all, was originally written.*

And there is the solid supporting work of Neville Brand (as Huck's father), Mickey Shaughnessy (the "Duke"), Andy Devine (the circus owner), Buster Keaton (the lion tamer), Finlay Currie (the steamboat captain), Royal Dano (the sheriff), Sterling Holloway (the barber) and Josephine Hutchinson (the widow)."

#### Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

"A delightful version of the Mark Twain classic produced to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of its publication. A host of colourful character players bring the famous characters to life, and Burton Lane wrote four songs that are integrated into the story. \*\*\*\* "

#### Cast:

Huckleberry Finn.....**Eddie Hodges**  
 Jim.....Archie Moore  
 Pap Finn.....Neville Brand  
 The King.....Tony Randall  
 The Duke.....Mickey Shaughnessy  
 Joanna.....**Patty McCormack**  
 Mary Jane.....**Sherry Jackson**  
 Mr Carmody.....Andy Devine  
 Sheriff.....Royal Dano  
 Sheriff's Wife.....Judy Canova  
 Lion tamer.....Buster Keaton  
 Riverboat captain.....Finlay Currie  
 Barber.....Sterling Holloway  
 Widow.....Josephine Hutchinson

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "A Pictorial History of the Talkies", "Rating the Movies (1990)" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

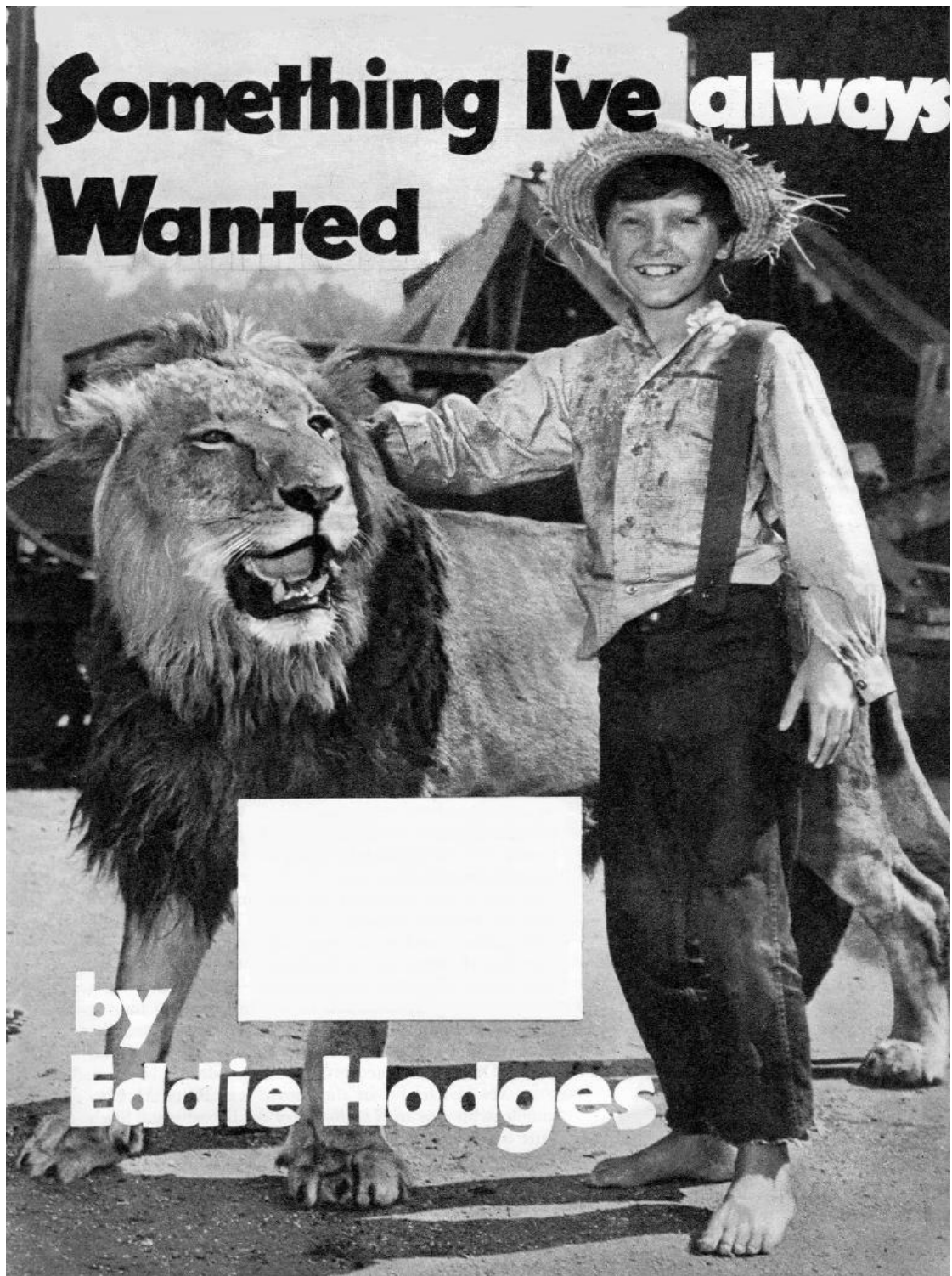
#### What's On TV note:

"Adaptation of Mark Twain's classic adventure, starring Tony Randall<sup>4</sup>."

#### The Moving Picture Boy entry on Hodges:

"Redhead Eddie's family moved to New York in 1953. He appeared on TV in "**The Jackie Gleason Show**", and then on "**Name That**

<sup>4</sup> *Oh? plays Huck, does he?*



Source: *The Film Show Annual* c1960

**Tune**" where he won himself a \$25,000 prize. Soon afterwards he was playing on Broadway in "*The Music Man*", before being cast as Frank Sinatra's son in "**A HOLE IN THE HEAD**" and joining him in the joyous duet "High Hopes".

He was too young and too well-washed, though, to be up to playing Huck Finn opposite

Archie Moore (who himself packed too light a punch on this occasion). They both did their best.

Later, like Johnny Crawford, Eddie became better known as a singer than an actor. His first hit was "I'm Gonna Knock on Your Door", and (perhaps in an effort to up-Huck himself) he recorded the original version of

"Ain't Gonna Wash For a Week". His last appearance in the charts was in 1965.

On screen, he was in "**C'MON, LET'S LIVE A LITTLE**" (67), "**THE HAPPIEST MILLIONAIRE**" (67) and "**LIVE A LITTLE, LOVE A LITTLE**" (68)."

Spurious "from his own lips" article in **The Film Show Annual** c1960:

"When I was chosen to play Huck in "**THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN**", it was the happiest day in my life.

I'd always wanted to act the part since first reading the book a few years ago. It took me a full year to finally finish the story because I kept re-reading chapters that I liked as I went along.

I remember how excited I was playing and singing in "*The Music Man*" with Robert Preston on the stage in New York. And it was sure fun being with Frank Sinatra in the movie "**A HOLE IN THE HEAD**". But you might say playing "Huckleberry Finn" was a dream come true.

There were lots of things I liked about being in the movie. Of course, I had always heard of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios – where the picture was made – and it was fun being there for the first time. All the people on the set – like Samuel Goldwyn Jr, the producer; Michael Curtiz, the director and all the cast and crew – were very helpful to me.

Just being Huck for a little while was really great. I'd never travelled down a river in a raft, but sure did a lot of it up on the Sacramento River where we made some of the picture. That's something I'd always wanted to do.

Later in the movie I pretend to be the World's Youngest Lion Tamer in a circus. That's when I got a chance to play with lots of animals, besides having the fun of being an impostor. That was real sneaky. And in the circus scenes I met Buster Keaton and Andy Devine, two actors I certainly admire.

My girl friend in the movie was Patty McCormack, who was in "*The Bad Seed*" on Broadway. She's sure a good actress and lots of fun. But I didn't get a chance to be with her too much during shooting because both of us still go to school, and for three hours a day had

to go to class on the set. However, the movie was still filming at Hallowe'en time, and Patty came to a goblin party I gave at the Beverly Hills home I was staying in with my mother, father and sister.

Talking about school, my sister Diane and I have a tutor, Mr Jenkin, who travels with us wherever we go. Diane doesn't want to be an actress, but we like to study together. Our home town is Hattiesburg, Mississippi, but most of the time we're in New York or Hollywood for television and motion pictures.

Perhaps my biggest thrill in working in "**HUCK FINN**" was meeting and getting to know Archie Moore, the world's light heavy-weight boxing champion. He plays his first film role as the runaway slave, Jim.

Archie and I have many scenes together and, of course, we are the ones who start out together on the raft down the Mississippi River. Later we're joined by Tony Randall and Mickey Shaughnessy, who are real characters. They play impostors in the film and call themselves "The King" and "The Duke" and they were really funny.

Archie and I became good friends during the filming and I used to kid him about his swimming. We have to go into the water several times in the movie, but Archie doesn't like the water too much. He never really learned to swim.

Archie would teach me how to box between scenes when I didn't have to go to school. I'll never forget playing Huck and I hope they decide to make a picture of "The Further Adventures of Huckleberry Finn". I'll do the part again, if they want me."

[ These transparently bogus star "interviews" were the core feature of The

Film Show Annuals. We must put it down to good old "journalistic lie sense", but it would be hard to imagine any celebrity

today consenting to publication under his name of such ghost-written features. ]



*Top: Eddie with two blood-hounds used on the film.*

*Right: An uninspired publicity shot with co-stars Patty McCormack (left) and Sherry Jackson, erm.. "reading the script"..*

*Bottom: Chow time during location shooting at the Sacramento River. Eddie's father cautions him about over-acting for the cooks.*

*Source: The Film Show Annual c1960*





*Tempers flare on most film sets from time to time. But best not to pick a quarrel when your co-star's the world light heavyweight boxing champion.*

*Source: Film Show Annual c1960*

Set in 1851, this is a meek and mild rendition of the old familiar tale, steeped in lush colour photography and with a soundtrack which emphasises the lazy delights of rafting down the Mississippi – “You’re hankerin’ to wan-der, Huckleberry Finn” croons Archie Moore. The story’s more violent counterpoints, such as the family feud Huck and Jim blunder into, or Pap attempting to murder his son in a drunken rage, are played for light, even comic effect, and the result is to make the whole seem bland and Disneyfied. By contrast, Disney’s own later stab at the classic, with Elijah Wood, was notably darker and closer to the spirit of the original, but spoiled rather by the intrusion of contemporary sensibilities.

M-G-M sprinkled the cast with old faithfuls – John Carradine as a slave-hunter on the river, Andy Devine as a circus-owner, and Finlay Currie in a nice cameo as a riverboat captain – but to little effect. Buster Keaton is distinctly unimpressive as the circus lion-tamer cum factotum, while Sterling Holloway’s character (as a small-town barber who gives Tony Randall some background gossip on the family he intends to fleece) is cut out altogether from most prints seen today. Royal Dano, who plays the friendly sheriff here, was seen again as one of the hoaxers in a later version.

Patty McCormack, 15, four years after “**THE BAD SEED**”, makes what she can of her part as Joanna, the younger and more suspicious of the two daughters whom the Duke of Bilgewater and the rightful King of France attempt to cheat of their inheritance. Her sister Mary Jane is played by Sherry Jackson, who cut her teeth on TV in the long-running sitcom “**Make Room For Daddy**” (53-63, later renamed “**The Danny Thomas Show**”). McCormack also had her own TV series, “**Peck’s Bad Girl**” (59), but did surprisingly few features following such a promising debut. After “**AN EPISODE OF SPARROWS**” (56), “**ALL MINE TO GIVE**” (57) and “**KATHY O**” (58) her only other pre-adult appearance was in “**THE EXPLOSIVE GENERATION**” (61).



*Above: Jim and Huck flee the monstrous regiment of women  
Source: The MGM Story*

*Left: Huck, at the helm of a riverboat, dreams of uncharted South American rivers  
Source: Moving Picture Boy*

*Below: Eddie Hodges and sister Diane pictured with their on-set tutor, Mr Jenkin.  
Source: Film Show Annual*



In McCormack's few scenes with Eddie Hodges, where she tries to trap him in his "stretchers" (tall stories) there's no doubt where the talent lies. Hodges, 13, is too lightweight for the central role, and missing the essential feral quality that should distinguish Huck from Tom Sawyer. It isn't so much a question of his youth (I doubt Twain specified his hero's actual age), although the part is generally played by 15-19 year olds. His acting range is too narrow, so that whether called on to express fear, embarrassment, dismay or anxiety it all boils down to a state of agitation, like a boy with ants in his britches. This is as much the fault of director Curtiz and his screenwriters as of Hodges himself – a bland tale makes for a bland hero. The scene towards the end where Huck dons female guise to spring Jim from jail is the only one in which he could be said to be genuinely amusing. On the whole, the comment of the Variety critic is a fair one.

The film's most pleasing performance is that of boxer Archie Moore as Jim. Most of the latterday Huckleberry Finns have been escorted by runaway slaves with a post-Civil Rights bill agenda: making a statement about black slavery without even attempting to capture the mindset and manners of an illiterate man for whom slavery is an accepted fact of life. Of all the interpretations I've seen, Moore comes closest to making Jim a believable and deeply sympathetic character – gentle, deferential, fatalistic but dignified throughout. He is not (thank god) a slave “with attitude”, and this is also the only version I can recall where he addresses the boy fondly as “Huck honey”. Mickey Rooney would have balked at that.

See subject index under **MARK TWAIN** for a chronological list of other film and TV versions, and under **CIRCUS, HISTORY, ORPHANS / ADOPTION, RUNAWAYS / STOWAWAYS, SPECIAL FRIENDSHIPS, WESTERNS** and **WOMEN AS BOYS / GIRLS AS BOYS** for a (smaller) sub-section on cross-dressing boys..