

## Key Passages

A *key passage* is a section of reading that in some way strengthens our understanding of a text. These passages can vary in length from a single line to an entire page. The point is that the passage must reveal something important. Remember, a revelation can occur in different ways. Sometimes the text will come right out and tell us something. Literary works of depth, however, often give us subtle direction toward our own revelations.

When I ask you to identify key passages in the reading, look for places where it seems as though the author is trying to tell us something. The example below will show you what I expect from you when I give you this task.

The following text is taken from page one of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

*The switch hovered in the air—the peril was desperate—*

*“My! Look behind you, aunt!”*

*The old lady whirled round, and snatched her skirts out of danger. The lad fled on the instant, scrambled up the high board-fence, and disappeared over it.*

*His aunt Polly stood surprised a moment, and then broke into a gentle laugh.*

If you selected this as a key passage, this is how I want it to appear in your notes:

Key Passage, Chapter 1

Page 1

“The switch . . . gentle laugh.”

This passage gives us important clues about Aunt Polly as well as Tom. Here we come to understand that Tom is mischievous as he has been eating jam against his aunt's wishes. We also see that by threatening to whip Tom she at least wants to be a strict disciplinarian. The fact that he fools her into letting him escape shows that he is a trickster and doesn't take his aunt's attempts at discipline seriously. When Aunt Polly gently laughs, Twain shows us that she sees Tom's antics as innocent and we should also see him that way.

Do you see how while Twain doesn't come right out and *tell* us these things about Tom and Aunt Polly, we can figure them out by reading more deeply into the text? If you were working in small groups, you would share this passage with the group as you all look at it in the book. You would then discuss its importance to our understanding of the text.