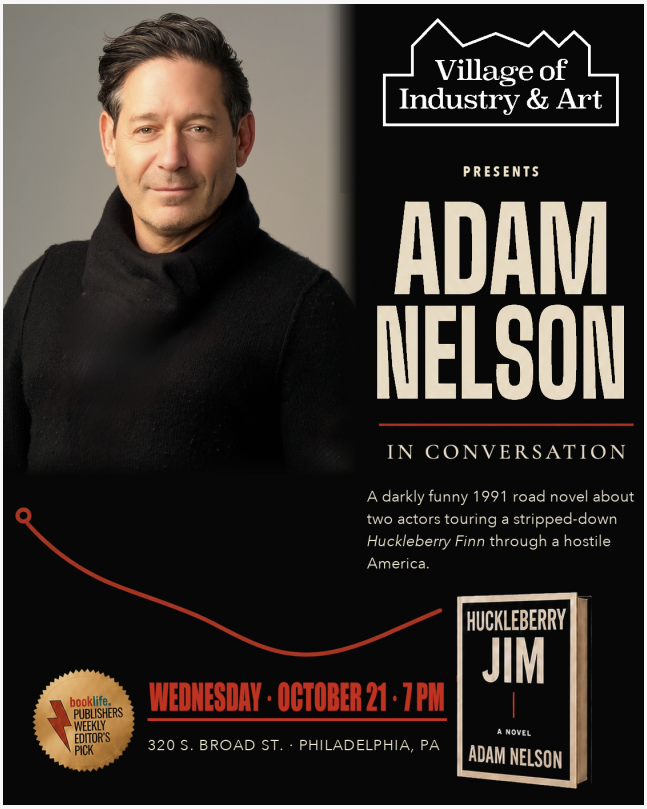
Adam Nelson Brings 'Huckleberry Jim' To Philadelphia — And The Former Grounds of His Alma Mater

Thirty-five years after graduating from UArts, Nelson returns to South Broad Street for a celebration of his acclaimed novel at The Village of Industry & Art





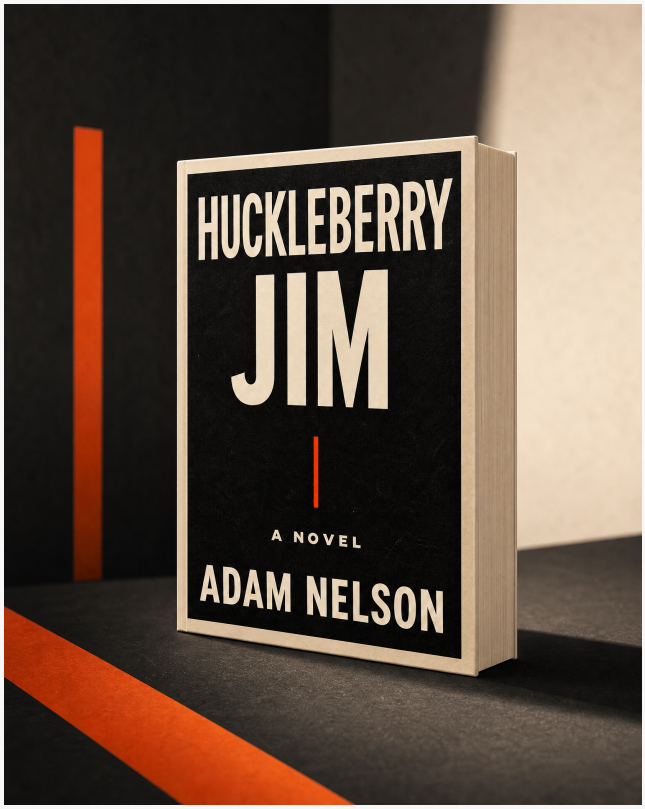
PHILADELPHIA, PA, UNITED STATES, September 25, 2026 / EINPresswire.com/ -- Thirty-five years after leaving Philadelphia with a theater degree and setting out on the journey that would eventually become "Huckleberry Jim," author Adam Nelson is coming back to where it began.

On Wednesday, Oct 21, 2026, from 7–9 p.m., Nelson will return to the former campus of the University of the Arts for a special Philadelphia celebration of "Huckleberry Jim" at the Village of Industry & Art, 320 S. Broad Street.

It is more than another stop on a book tour.

Nelson earned his BFA in Theater from the University of the Arts in 1991. The people he encountered there and the creative life he discovered in Philadelphia became part of the personal history from which "Huckleberry Jim" would eventually emerge. The novel looks back at precisely that year—and at a twenty-

two-year-old actor stepping out of school and into an America he does not yet understand.



Now Nelson returns to the same historic S. Broad Street grounds, transformed following the University's abrupt closure in 2024 into the Village of Industry & Art, a new creative community conceived to keep artists and cultural workers at the center of the site.

"There is a beautiful circularity to this," said Nelson. "I came to Philadelphia to learn how to become an actor. I left in '91 and almost immediately began accumulating the experiences that would eventually become "Huckleberry Jim." Thirty-five years later, I'm coming back with the book. The University may no longer exist as we knew it, but the ground is still here. The history is still here. And, wonderfully, artists are here again."

The Philadelphia homecoming follows the novel's Oct 6 publication during Banned Books Week and its official Oct 10 launch at the Mark Twain Boyhood Home & Museum in Hannibal, Missouri.

> This place mattered. To come back carrying something that began, in ways I couldn't possibly have understood at twenty-two, on this ground—means everything to me."
>
> *Adam Nelson, Author, "Huckleberry Jim"*

The timing places "Huckleberry Jim" at an unusual intersection: America's 250th year, the 150th anniversary of "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer," and thirty-five years since the turbulent American moment in which Nelson has set his story.

Inspired by Nelson's own experience as a young actor touring a two-man production of "Huckleberry Finn" to American schoolchildren, "Huckleberry Jim" follows twenty-two-year-old Axel Emerson and fifty-five-year-old Black actor Moses Morton as they carry Twain's controversial American classic through schools in upstate New York and Appalachia.

Against the backdrop of Rodney King, Anita Hill, David Duke, Desert Storm and the emerging culture wars, the novel becomes a darkly funny reckoning with race, censorship, performance, inherited history and the stories America tells about itself.

Beneath the fictional journey lies another geography: the artistic world from which its young protagonist emerged. Philadelphia, theater school, teachers, actors, rehearsal rooms, friendships and the almost religious seriousness with which young artists regard the places where they first discover what they might become all reverberate through the novel.

Some of the people who populated Nelson's Philadelphia years would remain in his life; others would disappear into memory. Their presence—and the intensity of young artists learning, arguing, rehearsing, performing and imagining lives for themselves—became part of the emotional landscape from which the novel was eventually written.

The University of the Arts closed abruptly in June 2024. In March 2025, Philadelphia-based Scout acquired the historic Haviland and Furness buildings and began reimagining them as the Village of Industry & Art, preserving their creative purpose rather than severing it. Today, the Village of Industry & Art describes its mission as continuing the buildings as "a place for people to create and make," while honoring the creative generations that previously inhabited them.

For Nelson, one of those generations was his own.

"The school is gone," Nelson said. "But this place mattered. The people who filled it mattered. What happened in these rooms mattered. Some of them found their way, transformed, into the pages of this book. To come back here carrying something that began, in ways I couldn't possibly have understood at twenty-two, on this ground—means everything to me."

The homecoming arrives as "Huckleberry Jim" receives national recognition. The novel was named a Publishers Weekly BookLife Editor's Pick, with Publishers Weekly calling it:

"Adam Nelson's incisive, provocative, and robustly American debut... honors the fathoms-deep American divisions that Twain marked and urges us to look closer rather than away."

Full Review:
https://booklife.com/project/huckleberry-jim-108347

"Huckleberry Jim" was also named a Semi-Finalist in the Novel Category of the 2026 William Faulkner–William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition and longlisted for The Masters Review Novel Excerpt Prize, placing in the top three percent of submissions.

The 2026 BookLife Prize awarded the novel an 8.25/10 Critic's Report, including 9/10 for Originality, calling the story "emotional, funny, and compelling" and concluding, "Nelson has the chops to do it."

The Oct 21 evening will feature a conversation about the true 1991 journey behind the novel, Nelson's years at the University of the Arts, Twain, censorship and the transformation of lived experience into fiction, followed by a reading, audience Q&A and book signing.

EVENT INFORMATION

Adam Nelson — Huckleberry Jim: A Philadelphia Homecoming
Wednesday, October 21, 2026 | 7:00–9:00 p.m.
Village of Industry & Art
320 S. Broad Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102

ABOUT HUCKLEBERRY JIM

Set in 1991, "Huckleberry Jim" follows two actors touring American schools with a stripped-down production of Mark Twain's "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn." As the country outside their rental car convulses over race, language, censorship and identity, Twain's argument becomes increasingly difficult to separate from the argument taking place around them.

"Huckleberry Jim" publishes October 6 during Banned Books Week. Available at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Inc., Bookshop.org, and independent bookstores nationwide. Blackstone Publishing will simultaneously release the audiobook, narrated by Leon Nixon.

A limited first edition of only 200 individually numbered hardcover copies signed by Adam Nelson is also available. Visit https://www.huckleberryjimbook.com

ABOUT THE VILLAGE OF INDUSTRY & ART

The Village of Industry & Art reimagines the historic Haviland and Furness buildings on South Broad Street as a working community for artists and cultural workers, continuing nearly 200 years of education and creativity on the site.

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