

Intruder in the Dust Study Guide

Intruder in the Dust by William Faulkner

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Plot Summary

Intruder in the Dust by William Faulkner is a classic novel that is part mystery and part social commentary on the racial situation in the southern United States of the late 1940's. It begins with our narrator, Charles Mallison, watching a black man being escorted from the sheriff's car into the city jail. From here, the reader learns how Charles met this man, Lucas Beauchamp, 4 years earlier.

Charles is rabbit hunting with his family servant, Aleck Sander and another young black boy when he falls into the creek. A stranger comes along, helps him from the water and takes him home. Charles eventually remembers a story about this man and figures out that he is Lucas Beauchamp, a local landowner. Charles accepts a warm meal from Lucas and the chance to dry his clothes by the fire. Charles tries to pay Lucas after the meal, but Lucas refuses to take the money.

Charles becomes obsessed by this debt he feels he owes Lucas Beauchamp. He sends gifts to Lucas and his wife only to have Lucas send him one in return. Charles runs into Lucas in town and Lucas reminds him not to fall into any more creeks. It is only when Lucas walks past him without acknowledging him that Charles feels as though his debt is no longer owed. That is, until Lucas is arrested for killing a white man and calls out to Charles in a crowd.

Charles's uncle is a lawyer. Charles takes Uncle Gavin to the jail to meet Lucas. Uncle Gavin assumes Lucas is guilty and already has a legal plan in mind that will, with luck, send Lucas to jail, but not to the gallows. Lucas, however, knows more about the murder than he is willing to tell the lawyer. He asks Charles to go to the cemetery and dig up the body of Vinson Gowrie, the man he supposedly killed.

Charles immediately goes to his uncle for help, but Uncle Gavin does not believe that Lucas is telling the truth. "What else would an accused murderer say?" he reasons. Yet, waiting in Uncle Gavin's office at the time Charles arrives is an old woman by the name of Miss Eunice Habersham, who happens to be a good friend of Lucas's deceased wife. She believes Charles and is willing to go with him to the cemetery.

At the cemetery, Charles and Aleck Sander dig up the grave of Vinson Gowrie to see whether the bullet that killed him was really fired from a Colt .41. When they open the pine coffin, however, they find another man inside. Charles goes back to his uncle and this time he convinces him. Charles, Uncle Gavin, Miss Habersham and Aleck Sander go to Sheriff Hampton and tell him what they have found. The sheriff obtains a legal order to exhume Vinson's body. Then the men leave Miss Habersham and Charles's mother at the jail and they go back to the cemetery.

Vinson Gowrie's father meets them at the cemetery and has his two boys dig up the grave. Inside, they discover an empty coffin. After some hypothesizing, the group searches the woods that run alongside the road. First, they find a man named Jake Montgomery buried in a ditch deep in the woods. Then, they find Vinson Gowrie buried



in the quicksand under a bridge. The sheriff takes one look at Vinson and he knows Lucas's gun did not kill him. The man who killed Vinson Gowrie is his own brother.

Both the sheriff and Uncle Gavin go to Lucas and little by little, Lucas tells them what really happened. Apparently, the two brothers had a scheme with their uncle to sell lumber cut from their uncle's land, but the older Gowrie brother began stealing the lumber under the cover of darkness. When he learned that Lucas knew what was going on, he shot Vinson in the back and made it look like Lucas did it. Later, before Charles and Miss Habersham get to the cemetery to exhume Vinson's body, Crawford Gowrie catches his business partner doing that exact thing. He kills Jake Montgomery and puts his body in the grave. When he realizes what Charles and Miss Habersham are up to, he goes back and steals Jake's body, too.

After developing a scheme to catch Crawford, the sheriff releases Lucas. Crawford then kills himself in his jail cell shortly after his arrest. Everything returns to normal, including Lucas, who shows up at Uncle Gavin's office to gloat in his own way. He pays Uncle Gavin what he owes him, only he pays him in pennies.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Intruder in the Dust begins with our narrator, Charles Mallison, standing under the shed in front of the closed blacksmith's shop watching the sheriff bring Lucas Beauchamp to the jail, a local black man who has been accused of shooting a white man. While Charles watches Lucas and the crowd that has gathered to also watch, he remembers how he met the man 4 years before.

A friend of Charles's uncle, Mr. Carothers Edmonds, came to dinner to visit with Charles's uncle, Gavin Stevens. Mr. Edmonds invites Charles to go rabbit hunting on his property the following afternoon. Charles, then only 12 years old, along with his servant, a young black boy named Aleck Sander and another young man, one of Edmonds' tenant's sons, start out across a field for the hunt. While crossing a creek, Charles falls off the footbridge and into the river. Charles struggles to find his way out until he remembers his rifle, which he dropped when he fell into the water. Afraid to lose the rifle, Charles dives down to get it and hands it up to the Edmonds boy. Aleck Sander pokes a stick down at him to help him climb out. Out of nowhere, Charles hears a new voice tell Aleck Sander to get the pole out of the way so the boy can climb out.

Charles manages to pull himself out of the water and finds a strange black man standing before him. The man tells Charles to follow him. The four of them make their way down the road past the Edmonds place despite Charles's assumption that this is where the man should have taken him. Charles considers arguing with this man, but when he looks at the man's face, he realizes he is a man like Charles's own grandfather, a man who is not to be disobeyed.

Charles sees a cabin on a hill and remembers a story he once heard. Edmonds' father had deeded to his black first cousin and his heirs a house and 10 acres in the center of his own land. It is a simple little farm, with a path lined by tin cans, empty bottles, shards of china and earthenware. Someone's old kitchen hot water tank sits split in two before the porch with last summer's flowers, wilted and dead, inside. It is unpainted, as though above the need for paint, weathered and stern, regal in its own way, just like its owner.

The inside of the cabin is even simpler than the outside. There is very little furniture, a bed and a small dresser, a bare floor and a mantel that holds a kerosene lamp and a vase filled with twisted newspaper. Sitting in a rocking chair before the fire is a tiny woman, darker than the man Charles now knows is Lucas Beauchamp, an old woman who at first resembles a child.

Lucas demands that Charles remove his clothing and warm himself beside the fire. Charles sits in a chair wrapped in a quilt, his mind running over the unique occasion to be invited into a black man's home. The smell is all around him, a smell that surprises and yet comforts him. Charles thinks about this smell, about its possible causes and



why it is so different from what is familiar to him. Charles also takes this time to study the man who rescued him. Lucas Beauchamp is different from any other black man Charles has ever known. Lucas wears a pocket watch with a heavy gold chain that drapes across the bib of his overalls and he uses a gold toothpick like those Charles's grandfather had used. Lucas also wears a handmade beaver hat like one for which his grandfather paid quite a large amount of money.

Charles also notices that Lucas's face is dark like a black man's, but his nose is high in the bridge and hooked a little. The look in his eyes is like nothing Charles has ever seen from a black man before. Lucas appears not arrogant or scornful, only intolerant and inflexible.

Aleck Sanders soon comes back with Charles's clothing. Charles dresses and is invited to eat. Charles knows it is Lucas Beauchamp's dinner he has been invited to eat. Although he wants to protest, Lucas does not give him the opportunity.

After the meal, Charles has another chance to look around the small cabin. There is a portrait in the living room that is framed in gold and sits on an easel, also painted gold. In the portrait is Lucas in a fancy suit with the same gold chain looped across his vest. Beside him sits the same lady who now sits in the rocking chair. Lucas sees Charles staring at the portrait and tells him that Molly does not like the painting. The artist took off Molly's head rag at Lucas's request. Molly, Charles assumes, is Lucas's wife.

During a lull in conversation, Charles takes 70 cents from his pocket, all the money he has and offers it to Lucas with an outstretched hand to repay his kindness and for the meal he shared. Lucas acts as if he does not see it. Charles continues to hold it out until Lucas asks what it is for without looking at Charles. Struck dumb with embarrassment, Charles throws the money onto the floor.

Lucas, again refusing to look at the boy or the money, orders the two black boys who had accompanied Charles on his ill-fated hunting trip to pick up the money and give it back to him.

Chapter 1 Analysis

When the book first opens, the reader assumes the prisoner Charles awaits is a friend. The story of his rescue from the creek appears to support this until Charles offers Lucas money. Again, perhaps it is earlier that the assumption changes. If the reader keeps in mind the time in which this novel is written, it would be safe to think it is a black man's duty to help out this boy even though the two young black men with him do very little to help. When Charles describes Lucas's way of dressing, his attitude and the look in his eyes, the reader quickly gets the idea that Lucas is not an ordinary black man. Lucas believes himself to be better than an ordinary black man. This is underscored when he tells Charles about the portrait of himself and his wife. Lucas says, "I didn't want no field nigger picture in the house." (pg. 15) Lucas thinks of himself as more than a black man. He thinks of himself as a man. This clearly speaks to the attitude the reader might have



only suspected until this point. So for Charles to offer this man money for his kind act and for giving up half his dinner, it seems almost an insult to Lucas. The money is not a gift as one would expect a man of Lucas's station in life to think, but to him it is charity, a symbol of the separation of the classes. Lucas tries to show this fact to the young boy, but Charles is much too young to see what the older man is attempting to do and is instead so flabbergasted at being ignored, he adds insult to injury by throwing the money onto the floor like scraps to a dog.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Charles, Aleck Sanders and the Edmonds boy go back to their hunting, but Charles's heart is no longer in it. Charles takes the coins from his pocket and throws them into the creek. That night in bed he has trouble sleeping. Charles keeps thinking about the scene at Lucas's house. The fact that Lucas had the two black boys pick up the money feels like a deeper insult to Charles. Lucas beat him and he knows it. Charles is furious about the incident.

Charles is aware of what the people in the county think of Lucas. He behaves in a way he shouldn't, talking to people like any white person would do. In fact, Charles hears of an incident once at the local store where Lucas went to buy himself a box of gingersnaps. Another customer made a rude comment to Lucas and he responded calmly, with detachment, answering the insult with one of his own. The white man threatened to beat up Lucas, but the store owner's son jumped over the counter and stood between the two men. The store owner's son told Lucas to leave, but still Lucas stood there as though he had all the right in the world to remain where he was. Finally, Lucas left, calmly popping another gingersnap into his mouth as if nothing had happened.

Charles has become obsessed by the incident with the change. He feels as if he owes something to Lucas for the insult. Charles buys Christmas presents for Lucas and his wife and has Edmonds deliver it to them. That should make them even. However, Charles's conscience continues to plague him. In May, he takes money he has been saving from his allowance and the job he has with his uncle to buy Molly Beauchamp a flowered imitation silk dress. Again, Charles thinks this should make them even until one day he comes home from school and finds that Lucas Beauchamp has sent him a gallon of fresh, homemade sorghum molasses. Charles decides now that his opportunity to make himself even with Lucas Beauchamp would be something for which he would have to wait.

One Saturday the following year, Charles runs into Lucas in the town square. Lucas stops to talk to him, allowing Charles to thank him for the molasses and suggesting the boy not fall into any more creeks. The following year, Charles sees him again. Lucas is dressed in the same fine suit from the portrait both times Charles sees him because he has come to pay the taxes on his land. The second time, though, Lucas looks at him but does not stop to talk. Charles later finds out this is probably because his wife died that year. Charles sees him a year later and this time Lucas again ignores the boy's presence. Charles believes this means he is free from the debt he feels he owes the older man.

One day, Charles is walking across the town square and hears that Lucas has shot a man. Apparently, Lucas was found standing over the body of a local man with a gun



tucked into the waistband of his pants a few feet from the same store where he got into the altercation years before. The shooting has taken place in a bad part of town and it is only because of the intervention of the store owner's son that Lucas is saved from a lynching right there and then. Instead, the constable arrives, takes Lucas to his home and chains him to a bedpost.

Charles knows that if it were not a Saturday night and if the constable did not take custody of Lucas, the relatives of the man Lucas killed would lynch him in a second. The next day is Sunday, so Charles hopes that because of that fact and because they are to bury the dead man that day, Lucas will be safe. The sheriff has been called and he will have custody of Lucas before noon. Charles is afraid the relatives of the dead man will try to lynch Lucas during the transfer.

At first, Charles considers leaving town, just climbing on his small pony and riding out of town so he does not have to be around to see what happens to Lucas. Charles's conscience will not allow him to leave the man to his fate unobserved. Charles experiences an inner struggle and tries to convince himself he no longer owes this man a thing, except he never quite makes himself believe it. This is how he finds himself standing across the street from the jail when the sheriff brings Lucas in.

A crowd gathers, not a large crowd but big enough to cause a person trouble if they wanted to. Many of these men are people Charles knows. Then a car appears. The sheriff steps out and a minute later, he escorts Lucas from the car. Lucas wears his suit as he always has in town, a little rumpled and dirty this time. His head is bare, probably the first time anyone besides his wife has ever seen it bare. The sheriff takes his hat out of the car and props it on his head. Lucas fixes his hat despite calls from the crowd for the sheriff to knock it off his head again.

Charles watches Lucas, his guilt soothed when Lucas looks right past him. A minute later, though, Lucas focuses on Charles. "Tell your uncle I need to speak to him," Lucas calls to the boy. So Lucas does know who Charles is. Charles realizes this means he still owes the man a debt.

Chapter 2 Analysis

During the time that this novel depicts, there were certain codes of behavior people were expected to follow. One of those codes included the idea that black persons fell below whites in social standing and were, therefore, supposed to behave accordingly. A black man was not supposed to look a white man in the eye, he was not supposed to address a white woman in any fashion and he was supposed to back down whenever faced with a conflict between himself and a white person. However, Lucas Beauchamp refuses to act in this way. By offering Lucas money in exchange for the meal he gave Charles, Charles insults the older man. The money symbolizes class distinction and payment for services rendered. The money is an insult to Lucas's standing as a land-owning gentleman. Charles understands this after the fact and that is why he is so obsessed with this wrong he perpetrated on the man who saved his life.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Charles immediately finds his uncle and the two of them ride into town to see Lucas. Charles notes how few black people they encounter on their way into town even though there are normally a lot of them around. They do see a white store owner who comments that the sheriff should have let the people of their little community have Lucas to spare the town the cost of housing and feeding him. Uncle Gavin explains to Charles that this is the way of the South. A black man is expected to lose his temper and kill a white man. It is also expected that the family and friends of the dead man should be allowed to take the black man and hang him. It is an unwritten code and it is their way of life.

At the jail, Charles notes how quiet the black prisoners are that night. Normally, they would be standing at the windows calling down to the people passing by. Tonight, Charles knows, they are concerned that when the lynch mob comes they might mistake one of them for Lucas or simply decide to lynch all the black prisoners as a matter of principal. The sheriff has hired a man, Will Legate, to stand guard outside the door, but he does not seem well prepared. The man sits in a chair with the funny papers, the door opened behind him and a single-shot shotgun at his side. When the jailer comes out to greet Charles and Uncle Gavin, he complains about the lack of security. The jailer does not want to die to protect a black prisoner, but he does not want to lose a prisoner on his watch, either.

Charles and his uncle are allowed in the cell where they are keeping Lucas. Normally, they would not put a black man in the cell; however, the sheriff thought Lucas would be safer there. Lucas is lying on newspapers he spread on the bare cots; the cots are bare because the jailer removed the mattress for the sake of the next white man to occupy the cell. Lucas sits up stiffly and faces Charles and his uncle.

Uncle Gavin tells Lucas he will be his lawyer. Lucas asks if he can hire him for another job and Uncle Gavin refuses. Then Uncle Gavin asks what happened. Lucas tells a story of how he knows Vinson Gowrie and another man had been buying lumber and selling it. Only Gowrie's partner had been stealing a load of lumber nearly every night. Uncle Gavin takes over the story then and says Lucas tried to tell Gowrie he was being robbed and Gowrie was rude to him, so Lucas shot him in the back. Lucas does nothing to discourage this version of the story since it is clear Gavin believes he is guilty.

Uncle Gavin says they will go before the grand jury the next day and Lucas will be indicted. Then Uncle Gavin will ask the judge to move him out of the county to protect him from the Gowries and the Beat Four people. After that, they will plead guilty and because Lucas has never been in trouble before, he will probably be sent to the penitentiary instead of hanged. Uncle Gavin then offers to stay the night with Lucas to



help protect him should the Gowries and the Beat Four people come to lynch him, but Lucas says he would rather be alone so he can sleep.

On the way out, Charles asks his uncle if it would be alright for him to take some tobacco to Lucas. His uncle agrees. Instead of going to the pharmacy for the tobacco, however, Charles returns to the jail. Charles knows this job Lucas asked his uncle to do really had been meant for his ears. Charles asks Lucas what he wants. Lucas says he wants Charles to dig up the body of Vinson Gowrie to find out what caliber of bullet killed him. His gun is a Colt .41, but Gowrie was not shot with a .41-caliber bullet.

Charles knows he owes Lucas for the dinner Lucas gave him, but he also knows it will take him most of the night to travel the 9 miles to the cemetery to dig up the body. Then he will have to take the body to Sheriff Hampton, so he can send for someone to look at the bullet and tell them what caliber it is. Charles believes if he does not do all this before midnight, it will not make any difference because Lucas will be lynched as soon as Sunday has passed. Lucas is insistent and Charles cannot refuse him.

Chapter 3 Analysis

There is a lot of reference to the code of the south in this chapter. Again, the reader must remember the time in which this story takes place. Not a single black person can be seen in the county despite the fact that the weekend is a time of relaxation for the hard-working farm hands and landowners. On most weekends, the bachelors around the county come into Jefferson and enjoy a weekend of drinking and socializing, but Charles notes again and again how few persons of color there are around town. Fear runs deep in this county for everyone except the one person who should be the most afraid, Lucas Beauchamp. Lucas himself is more concerned about the sleep he lost the night before than he is about the lynch mob that could at any moment drag him out of his cell and hang him or burn him. This could be a sign of his courage, a sign of his belief that he is better than the regular black man, or it could be his confidence that Charles and his uncle will save him from this charge.

Lucas's insistence that the bullet that killed Vinson Gowrie was not a Colt .41 round also provides a little foreshadowing. Lucas seems to know more than the reader or what he has already told Gavin Stevens, his lawyer. This leads the reader to wonder what kind of bullet did kill Vinson and how does Lucas know it is not a .41.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Charles rushes home to speak to his uncle. Uncle Gavin is sequestered in his office with someone Charles assumes is a farmer with a minor grievance. Charles bursts through the door and finds his uncle with a Miss Habersham. Charles ignores his uncle's guest and begins telling his uncle what it is Lucas wants from him. Uncle Gavin refuses to listen. He says it is normal for an accused murderer to lie about his part in a murder and it would be foolish to try to talk the Gowries into permission to dig up their dead family member only to prove a black man innocent. Then Uncle Gavin sends Charles out of the room.

Charles considers what to do next. He would like to take a car up to the cemetery, but his father has the keys to the family car in his pocket and Charles cannot come up with a reasonable way to ask for them. Charles goes outside and calls for Aleck Sander and sends him to saddle his horse. Miss Habersham comes out of the house then and asks Charles what exactly it is Lucas told him. Charles explains and Miss Habersham decides she will go with him. They load up the truck with the supplies they will need and Aleck Sander drives Miss Habersham while Charles rides his horse. Charles has decided to take the horse because they will need it when they arrive. They must hide the truck about a mile back in case any of the Gowries are waiting near the cemetery; consequently, they will need the horse to transport the body back to the truck.

During the ride to the cemetery, Charles keeps an eye out for any signs of a lynch mob. Charles believes the people from Beat Four and the Gowrie family will go after Lucas after midnight. Charles never sees anyone, not even the black people who would normally be walking these roads back to their homes after a weekend in town. When Charles catches up to Aleck Sander and Miss Habersham, he insists Miss Habersham rides the horse while the two boys walk behind. They have barely started on their way when Aleck Sander hears a mule coming toward them. Charles quickly pulls the horse off the road, even though he and Miss Habersham cannot hear anything. Soon, however, Charles can hear the soft creak of leather and see a shadow of movement pass by them. Aleck Sander asks what the rider had on his horse with him, but neither Charles nor Miss Habersham could see anything.

They arrive at the cemetery a little bit later and everyone is aware of how little time they have left. They locate the grave quickly since it is the first grave dug in the cemetery all winter. Aleck Sander notices how the flowers on the grave appear to have been simply flung onto it. This is a curious thing, but not curious enough to keep them from their task. Aleck Sander and Charles dig as Miss Habersham watches over them. Before long, they come to the plain pine box Vinson Gowrie was buried in and are able to open it quickly because it is not latched. However, it is not Vinson Gowrie inside, but a man named Montgomery, who is a timber buyer from Crossman County.



Chapter 4 Analysis

Here the reader is introduced to Miss Habersham. In the time that the novel depicts, it was very unusual for a white woman to go out of her way to become involved in an incident such as this, let alone become involved in a scheme to save a black man who is accused of murdering a white man. However, Miss Habersham was raised with Molly Beauchamp, Lucas's deceased wife; therefore, she feels it is her duty to help the man and the child who feels his own debt to Lucas Beauchamp. This represents the way the legal system should work.

There is quite a bit of foreshadowing in this chapter. The reader sees a man sneak down the hill on a mule at a time when no one else is around. Then the flowers on the grave are disturbed and the grave holds a body that is not the one who is supposed to be buried there. The reader has to wonder where the body of Vinson Gowrie really is and why there is another man in his grave.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Miss Habersham, Charles and Aleck Sander quickly rebury the pine box, careful to cover it with the flowers and rush back into town. Charles wakes his uncle and drags him out of bed, waking his mother at the same time. Uncle Gavin intervenes with Charles's mother when she insists her son go back to bed and instead takes him over to Sheriff Hampton's house. Though it is barely 4 in the morning, Sheriff Hampton is up making himself some breakfast. Uncle Gavin walks right into the house with Charles, Miss Habersham and Aleck Sander in tow.

When the story is relayed to him, Sheriff Hampton is reluctant to do anything because they do not know who the person on the mule was or whether it was a mule at all. Finally, he calls the district attorney in the next county and has him arrange an exhumation order through a local judge to dig up Vinson Gowrie's body legally. Miss Habersham is ready to go the second the sheriff has what he needs to do the digging, but Uncle Gavin insists they must wait until daylight. Charles remembers something Paralee's father told him: "Anything you need doing, you ask a child or a woman because men concentrate on facts more than circumstance."

Uncle Gavin, Sheriff Hampton, Charles and Miss Habersham sit down to breakfast in the dining room while Aleck Sander eats his breakfast in the kitchen. Will Legate joins them at dawn when he believes it is safe to leave the jail unguarded. Sheriff Hampton says nobody will do a lynching during the day where they can see each other's faces. Charles falls asleep over his breakfast as he listens to the men plan out exactly what they will do next.

Uncle Gavin wakes Charles. After breakfast, Aleck Sander, Charles and Miss Habersham climb into Uncle Gavin's car with him. They all want to go with the sheriff to the cemetery so they can be there when the body is dug up again, but Uncle Gavin and Sheriff Hampton have other plans. They want the boys to go to school. They also want Miss Habersham to sit out in front of the jail. They know no southern gentleman will lynch a black man with a white woman standing guard.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Charles is very concerned about his mother's reaction to his nocturnal absence. He does not want to upset the woman but is very pleased when his uncle tells him she simply is not happy at the evidence that he is nearly a grown man now. Uncle Gavin tells him he must act as a grown man and not let his mother's worry stop him. This is one of the themes of the novel, a young man's coming of age.

Will Legate joins the group for dinner even though it has been his job to guard Lucas at the jail. This might make the reader believe Lucas is safe for the time being, which is a

little foreshadowing of what might happen next. Then Uncle Gavin has Miss Habersham go to the jail to stand guard in Will Legate's place. This seems a little curious though the reasoning is sound. Again, this is a foreshadowing of events in the next chapter.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

The group goes to Miss Habersham's so she can pick up some sewing to do while she is standing guard at the jail. After they drop her off, Uncle Gavin changes his mind and decides Charles and Aleck Sander should go home to sleep and stay out of danger. Charles is hesitant because he knows his mother will be angry with him. However, she seems quite calm when they arrive home, allowing her son to drink coffee, a thing she swore she wouldn't do until he was 18. Then Mrs. Mallison announces she plans to go to the jail to sit watch with Miss Habersham.

Charles's father is very upset by this whole situation. Charles believes his father's angst is caused by the fact that he has been given no control over the situation. His wife refuses to listen to his arguments against her going to the jail and Uncle Gavin will not allow him to refuse Charles's right to do what needs to be done.

Over his coffee, Charles remembers the trip home the night before. When they opened the grave and found another man in it, Charles and Miss Habersham realized the person on the mule might be out there still watching them. They quickly packed up their things and headed to the truck, the boys walking behind Miss Habersham at her demand. At the truck, Miss Habersham suggested that they simply leave the horse, so neither of the boys had to ride it home alone. Miss Habersham and Charles were deeply concerned about Aleck Sander's well being. However, Aleck Sander said that if there were someone out there wanting to hurt them, they would have seen him by now and he insisted on riding the horse home. The ride was nerve wracking, but they all made it home safely.

Charles drinks his cup of coffee and is ready to do what needs to be done. Instead of going to bed, he drives Miss Habersham's truck to the jail. Monday is stock auction day at the sales barns behind the square in town, so the traffic is very heavy. Charles notices as he drives to the square that the school buses are empty, there are no black people on the street just like there were none on the road to Beat Four last night and there were none in town the day before. The closer he gets to town, the better he understands. Across from the jail is a large crowd of men watching the jail like they are waiting for a parade.

Charles arrives at the jail and sees that the women are sitting quietly in the same place Will Legate sat the night before, quietly sewing. Sheriff Hampton sits in his car in front of the jail with two black prisoners and two shovels in the back seat. He tells the marshal to make the men in the street get back to let the cars pass. A few of the men make jokes, but the meaning of their remarks is very clear to Charles. Charles is afraid that they are there to lynch Lucas despite the sheriff's declaration that they wouldn't do it during the daylight hours.



Uncle Gavin tells Charles to get into his car, so they can follow the sheriff up to the cemetery. Charles refuses to go. He is afraid his mother and Miss Habersham will be hurt if the crowd rushes the jail. Uncle Gavin assures him the women will be fine. There is the marshal and a cop on duty to watch the jail and keep the crowd under control. When Charles still is not convinced, Uncle Gavin tells him Lucas isn't in the jail anyway. Sheriff Hampton had him brought to his own house. That is why Will Legate came to breakfast.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Charles has become quite perceptive regarding the people around him. It takes just a little caffeine to figure out why his father is annoyed by the whole situation. It is obvious to Charles that his father would like to have a say in what is going on in his family, but both his wife and his brother-in-law have taken all the decisions out of his hands. Maybe Charles is sympathetic because, in a way, the father has been taken out of the loop, much like a child too young to make his own decisions.

Again, the reader sees a snapshot of what it is like to have lived in this time period. If Miss Habersham, Charles and Aleck Sander had been caught by the other grave robber the night before, it is nearly certain that Aleck Sander would have been in danger. They believed they were not seen, however and Aleck Sander returned home safely. This is foreshadowing again. The people who have gathered across from the jail in anticipation of the lynching that Charles has expected from the moment he heard Lucas was accused of killing someone symbolizes both the morality of the time period and the unwritten code that people live by. This is normal to them and expected and is worth missing a day of work. There is foreshadowing when the reader feels the same expectation as the crowd and Charles himself must feel.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Uncle Gavin and Charles drive to the cemetery behind the sheriff. Charles watches the scenery go by, thinking of all that has happened. When they pass a small farm, Charles sees a black man out plowing his field. He asks his uncle about the man. Uncle Gavin explains how it is early May, it's cotton-planting season and someone has to stay home and do the work. However, this is the only black person Charles has seen besides those in his own home, Paralee and Aleck Sander. Uncle Gavin tells him that this man is from the North. In the North, things are different. Up there, there legislation that allows a black man to be free to come and go as he pleases, legislation that has been on the books since the War Between the States. However, in the South, the blacks have not yet earned that right from southern gentlemen. Uncle Gavin assures him that some day it will happen and black men will be just as free as white, but not until southern gentlemen give them that right.

They arrive at the cemetery where the sheriff and his two black prisoners are just unloading the tools from the car. The group walks over to the grave and finds that the flowers Charles and Aleck Sander carefully replaced the night before have been tossed around and trampled upon. The sheriff decides it is not important to discuss it at that moment and tells the black prisoners to begin digging. At that moment, a one-armed man, two young men and two hound dogs appear from behind the church.

The one-armed man is Mr. Gowrie, Vinson's father. He steps forward and tells the sheriff he cannot dig up his son. The sheriff tells him it is not up to him. Mr. Gowrie pulls a gun from under his shirt and aims it in the general direction of the black prisoners who had tried to run but whom the sheriff had grabbed and was now holding behind him. Mr. Gowrie wants to know why the sheriff is digging up his son. When the sheriff explains about the other body found in the grave, Mr. Gowrie calls his sons over to dig up the grave. He does not mind finding out the truth, but he does not want the black prisoners doing it, so the sheriff sends them back to the car.

While the Gowrie twins dig up the grave, Charles tells the reader about the rest of the Gowrie clan. There are six boys in all; the twins who are digging the grave; Vinson, the youngest; Crawford, a draft dodger who now lives in Beat Four dealing in lumber and cattle; Forrest, the oldest, who is a manager of a delta cotton plantation; and Bryan, the third child. Finally, the twins reach the pine coffin and carefully wrench it open. It is empty.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Uncle Gavin's take on the civil rights struggle in the South is fascinating. He thinks that the South did want to free the slaves; they simply did not like being forced into it. Since



they were forced, they are resistant to giving the black people the rights they should have. The South's hatred of blacks stems more from a hatred of the North and the government of the United States rather than a cultural or even a racial thing. It is interesting that Uncle Gavin holds this opinion but still automatically assumes Lucas is guilty.

The Gowrie clan is a fascinating bunch. The reader might take note how much information the writer gives on Crawford Gowrie when he offers barely a few sentences on the rest of the Gowrie clan. This is foreshadowing. The Gowrie clan's showing up just in time for the sheriff to exhume the body of their family member seems curious until the reader remembers Chapter 5 when the sheriff went into his bedroom to make a few phone calls. He must have called the Gowries to warn them. This is a strange thing to do when the sheriff has already stated that receiving permission from the Gowries would be impossible. This is more foreshadowing. Perhaps the sheriff already has an idea as to the real identity of Vinson Gowrie's killer. This is reinforced when they open the grave and find it empty.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

The sheriff thinks that the man who passed Charles, Miss Habersham and Aleck Sander on the road last night had been watching Jake Montgomery and caught him trying to dig up Vinson Gowrie. Sheriff Hampton figures this man killed Jake when he had Vinson out of the grave, threw him inside and refilled the grave. Now, he and Uncle Gavin discuss what a man might do with two bodies when he had to dig them both up and recover the grave all in one night. The sheriff guesses he would put them back into the ground somewhere nearby. He wonders where the easiest place to do it would be. Uncle Gavin thinks of the sandy soil in the woods not too far from the road they just traveled. The whole group drives down to take a look.

Charles shows them where they hid the truck the night before. Uncle Gavin and Sheriff Hampton figure the person who passed Charles, Miss Habersham and Aleck Sander the night before had to have been the person who took Vinson's body and replaced it with Jake Montgomery. They also figure that that person must have seen or heard the three of them and decided he had to go back for Jake's body. All the men, including the black prisoners and the hound dogs, climb down the side of the road and follow a path along the side of the river. The sheriff finds hoof prints and recognizes them as the same of the mule Mr. Gowrie's twin sons are at that moment riding. They follow these prints a ways more, noting there are only two sets, one heading away from them and one headed back. The prints end when they come to the edge of a ditch.

The sheriff finds a mound in the ditch about the same time the Gowrie's dogs show up and start digging at it. Mr. Gowrie becomes very agitated at his dogs when he realizes the mound is covering a dead body. The sheriff yells at him to settle down, the body is not his boy. This is the second body, that of Jake Montgomery. Whoever buried him there did not take much time to do it since it had probably been daylight when he did it and the killer took a shovel to the top edge of the ditch only until the body was covered enough to be out of sight. Gowrie turns the body over and ascertains that it is Jake Montgomery.

Now they have to figure out where Vinson Gowrie's body is. Uncle Gavin is the first to think of quicksand. Charles remembers how the night before he had taken his horse off the side of the bridge to get a drink of water, but the horse balked. Aleck Sander said the horse could smell quicksand. The group decides to look there. Mr. Gowrie runs off first and by the time the rest of the men reach the bridge, he has already found his son stuck in the sand. The Gowrie twins help Mr. Gowrie pull the body from the sand. Charles watches, suddenly very fearful they are being watched by the man who removed the body to this new resting place or someone who might want to lynch Lucas. He begs his uncle to hide the body quickly. Uncle Gavin assures him everyone is already in town so there is nothing to worry about.



Mr. Gowrie pulls his shirt tail up and tries to wipe the sand from his son's face. Charles watches this act of futility and realizes that this father is grieving. This is the first time Charles has an inkling of understanding as to why Lucas Beauchamp was not lynched while he stood over Vinson's dead body.

Mr. Gowrie asks the sheriff what will happen now. Sheriff Hampton looks at the wound on Vinson's back and says confidently that Lucas Beauchamp did not kill Vinson. Lucas's gun is a Colt .41 and it is clear that Vinson was killed with a different gun. The sheriff says the gun that killed Vinson is a German Luger automatic just like the one Buddy McCallum sold to Crawford Gowrie after the war for a pair of fox hounds. Mr. Gowrie takes this news with a nod and tells his boys to load up Vinson so they can take him home.

Chapter 8 Analysis

There is quite a lot going on in this chapter. It becomes more and more obvious that Charles, Miss Habersham and Aleck Sander were not alone in the cemetery the night before. It is also clear that whoever killed Vinson Gowrie is desperate not to allow his body to be looked at by the police. Jake Montgomery obviously wanted someone to know who the real killer was, for his own motives and is killed over it. All the foreshadowing in the earlier chapters is beginning to come together. By the end of the chapter, the reader even knows who the killer is. The rest of the story, the "why," is still missing, however.

Charles is struck by Mr. Gowrie's grief for his son. Somehow, Charles did not believe that people like the Gowries could experience grief the way everyone else does. The Gowries are barely a step above black people simply because they are not black. They are poor, they are ignorant and they are often operating outside the law. The sight of Gowrie's grief is a symbol of the humanity Charles is beginning to see in the people around him. It is also a foreshadowing because he says he now knows why the Gowries did not try harder to lynch Lucas.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

The Gowrie twins find the sheriff a truck to take Jake Montgomery's body into town. Charles rides with Uncle Gavin in his car to the undertaker's. The crowd is still in town standing across from the jail. They see the truck and come around to see who it carries. When they do, they all get into their cars and go home. Charles watches them go, confused at first and then angry.

Uncle Gavin collects Charles's mother and they join the traffic jam to drive home. Charles thinks all the way about Miss Habersham and all she did for this black man accused of murdering a white man and thinks of all the trouble she could have gotten into and how useless some people would think her time had been spent. They arrive home and Charles runs up to his room, making a realization he does not want to make. Charles knows now the reason Lucas was not lynched behind the store is because the Gowries already knew it was not Lucas who shot Vinson. They knew this and they did nothing to stop Lucas's arrest, but they did not attempt to hurt him either. Charles falls asleep and dreams about the crowd that seems to have one face and thinks about what has happened.

When Charles wakes, his uncle is waiting for him. Uncle Gavin understands how upset Charles is and maybe understands more than Charles does. They ran, Charles says. "No," his uncle corrects, "they did not run; they simply forgot." When they brought the body into town, it is clear to the people waiting to see Lucas lynched that Lucas had nothing to do with the murders. They go home and forget about Lucas because there will be no lynching even though there is also no proof that Lucas is innocent, so he might still hang. No one cares about clearing the man's name, but they will not lynch him themselves because then it will be murder, even though it will have been "justice" before.

Charles does not understand some of this. He is outraged by the behavior of his fellow townspeople. His uncle tells him it is okay to be outraged and that he should never stop fighting for what he believes to be right.

Chapter 9 Analysis

This chapter ties up a lot of loose ends. The reader knows now the "who" if not the "why." The crowd's simply picking up and leaving like they do is a symbol of the conclusion the mystery has reached. Everyone who sees or hears about Jake Montgomery's body now knows Lucas could not have committed either murder since Jake is killed after the funeral and after the point where Lucas is placed in custody. It is also a symbol of the time period in which the story takes place since none of these



people do anything to help free Lucas. Lucas may be innocent of the charges, but he is still a black man in the South.

Charles is greatly outraged by the behavior of the crowd. He has outgrown the unwritten code of the South and is intelligent enough to know the code is backward and unfair. Even though Charles may not understand Lucas, may call him a derogatory name and feel Lucas acts above his station, he is still willing to fight for what is right. This is the beginning of change in the South as symbolized by one young man.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Charles eats dinner and then he and his uncle go into town. The sheriff is there with Lucas in his car. Charles learns that while he was asleep, his uncle and Sheriff Hampton hatched a plot to save Lucas. Sheriff Hampton and Uncle Gavin let it get around town that the sheriff was going to transport Lucas to another town for the inquest into Jake Montgomery's death. The hope is that Crawford Gowrie will come after Lucas to stop him from testifying. Lucas is in the back seat of the car, happy to play out this little charade, only he wants his pistol while they do it. The sheriff refuses and they drive away.

Miss Habersham waits in Uncle Gavin's office. Uncle Gavin and Charles join her to keep her company. While they wait, Uncle Gavin explains how the sheriff has gotten Lucas to tell more of the story of what happened to Vinson than he told Uncle Gavin and how Uncle Gavin himself went to talk to him in the afternoon and got even more of the story.

Crawford and Vinson Gowrie had gone into business with their uncle, Sudley Workitt, cutting down the trees on Workitt's land and selling it for lumber. The deal was that they would cut all the wood at once and sell it only after they were done. Unfortunately, Lucas, who was out on a late-night walk, saw a truck loading the wood and driving away at night. Lucas went to Vinson, told him what he saw and Crawford offered to pay him to tell him who it was. Lucas said he was not sure, but he would try to figure it out. Vinson sent him a message and asked him to meet him at the local store to talk about what he saw. Lucas met Crawford in the woods on his way. Crawford bet him a half-dollar that his pistol would not shoot—Lucas always wore the pistol when he went into town just like his grandfather before him—and Lucas won the bet.

Crawford ran ahead to find Vinson and told Lucas to wait in the woods. Vinson came toward him from the store and fell. Lucas thought at first the man had tripped until he realized he heard a gunshot and knew what happened. Before he could run away, a crowd of men came from the store to see what happened. It also turned out that the reason Crawford killed Jake was not only because he was trying to show the sheriff Vinson's body, but also because Jake was the one to whom Crawford was selling the lumber. Jake knew who had a motive to kill Vinson. Uncle Gavin and the sheriff figure Crawford tried to pay him off, but Jake took the money and planned to turn him in anyway. Miss Habersham listens to all this quietly, attempting not to worry about Lucas, but they know she is. Charles makes them a pot of coffee and they wait because that is all they can do.



Chapter 10 Analysis

Now that we know the whole story, all the foreshadowing has come into play. It is odd that it took so long for Lucas to tell anyone the true story. Again, the reader must remember the time in which the story is set and realize that Lucas felt no one would believe him if he did tell the truth until they had the two dead bodies where they could examine them. All Lucas has is a young boy who feels he owes him for a meal he once gave up to him and an old woman who feels loyalty to the husband of her childhood friend. The symbolism here is important. There is a black man who society assumes is guilty and is not and a white man who is assumed innocent until proven guilty. It turns out society should have looked at each with a different eye. This is quite a commentary by the writer on the state of race relations during the time the story is set.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

This chapter picks up on the following Saturday. Everything has returned to normal in Jefferson. The people are all coming to town in their finest, driving their cars and playing the radios too loud. Lucas comes to the office a free man. Sheriff Hampton arrests Crawford Gowrie just as he planned it. Crawford Gowrie somehow smuggles a gun into the cell where he is being held and commits suicide the night he is arrested.

Uncle Gavin insists that Lucas go out to Miss Habersham's and give her flowers as a way of saying thanks. He even insists that Charles drive Lucas because he knows Lucas will throw out the flowers before he goes and might even "chicken out." Uncle Gavin knows Lucas owes his freedom, in part, to Miss Habersham. It also seems Uncle Gavin is a little concerned that Lucas's life might still be in danger when he continues to insist Charles escort him all the way to Miss Habersham's.

Lucas wants to pay Uncle Gavin for his time. Uncle Gavin tells him he does not owe him anything. Lucas offers to pay Charles then, but Uncle Gavin won't allow it. Finally, he charges Lucas \$2 for a pen he ruined writing a summary of the case, so the sheriff could release Lucas. Lucas pays Uncle Gavin with pennies and a wrinkled dollar bill. Then he insists on a receipt.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Uncle Gavin nearly refuses payment from Lucas, though he is quite willing to offer up free advice. Lucas has come to gloat and Uncle Gavin knows it. Lucas knew he was innocent all along and knew he would be found so. This whole experience has not changed Lucas in the least despite the fact that a little boy has grown up quite a bit in the 7 days since this whole thing started. Again, we have some role reversal here. Also, the reader sees Uncle Gavin nearly scold Lucas for not going to see Miss Habersham to thank her. It is almost as if Lucas has become the child Uncle Gavin never had, yet Lucas shows up at the office in his same suit minus his tie, collar and boiled shirt. Instead he is wearing a stained white waistcoat under his black suit coat. Perhaps Lucas has learned a little.

There also symbolism regarding payment of debts. Lucas pays Uncle Gavin \$2. At the beginning, Charles attempts to pay Lucas 70¢. The fact that the novel begins and ends with payment from one to the other is symbolic of the full circle in which these two characters have traveled. Charles has finally paid his debt to Lucas by beginning the scenario that eventually freed him. The story that began with Charles's debt has ended with Lucas's payment to Charles's uncle, which in a symbolic way is really payment to Charles for all he did to save Lucas.



Characters

Charles "Chick" Mallison

Charles is an independent, 16-year-old-boy when the book opens. He is only 12 when he meets Lucas Beauchamp, however and becomes obsessed with a perceived debt he owes the older man for sharing his supper with him after he fell into his creek. Charles is very much a product of the South and of the time in which he lives. Charles believes everyone has a place in society and that everyone should behave accordingly. Charles feels he slighted Lucas Beauchamp when he offered him the money and he is very ashamed of his behavior. Therefore, when the opportunity comes for him to help Lucas, he does not jump at it, but he does stand up to it.

Charles behaves very bravely throughout the novel, working diligently to save a man the rest of his fellow citizens would like to see hanged. That is not to say that it does not cross his mind to run. On the contrary, he spends quite a bit of time considering how easy it would be to ride his horse out of town and stay until what will happen has happened. Charles does not give in to this whim, however, no matter how strong it is. He remains fully convinced that he is doing the right thing and he would have done it even without the unexpected help he finds.

Lucas Beauchamp

Lucas Beauchamp is a landowner, a southern gentleman and a black man. During the time period of this novel, he is considered less than a man by the people around him. Lucas, however, acts as if he is not a black man but is simply a man. Lucas does not back down from a fight; he addresses the people around him with the same respect any white man would show a white neighbor and he holds himself in a class above the other black people around him. This behavior has a habit of getting Lucas into trouble, but he does not seem to mind. He has no friends, a fact he reveals to Gavin Stevens with something like pride in his voice. Lucas has no close relations, his wife is dead and his daughter has moved away. This does not stop Lucas from acting in the way he feels it is his right as the grandson of a white man.

At the time the novel is written, Lucas is considered an oddity. Many people remark, including Charles Mallison, that Lucas should behave like a black man rather than in the manner in which he does. Lucas does not come to town when other black people come to socialize. He always wears a suit when he does come to town, with a gold toothpick in his mouth, a hat on his head and a gold watch strung across his breast. Lucas is also not a man to be argued with and he is not above treating other black persons imperiously. This odd behavior, though, does not stop his neighbors from treating him like a black man, nor does it stop the friends he does not realize he has from coming forward and helping him in a time of crisis.



Gavin Stevens

Gavin Stevens, or Uncle Gavin, is Charles's uncle, his mother's brother. Gavin is a 50-something lawyer who has been a bachelor all his life. Gavin is also Charles's employer, giving the boy a quarter a week to run errands in his law office. The moment Gavin hears of Lucas's predicament, just like any other southern gentleman, he assumes Lucas is guilty. It is expected that a black man will eventually lose his temper and injure or kill a white man. It is simply part of the unwritten code of the South, just like the expectation that the family of the dead man will lynch the perpetrator. This does not make Gavin a bad man. Eventually, he does put himself on the line to help prove Lucas's innocence. When he does, he refuses payment for his services for the simple fact that he did not believe Lucas.

Miss Eunice Habersham

Miss Habersham is the last living member of a very old family that has lived in this county for many years. Miss Habersham was raised with Molly Beauchamp, the two were born within weeks of each other and they were raised by the same woman. Miss Habersham still employs Molly's brother and his wife on her property where she grows vegetables to sell to her neighbors. It is this loyalty she feels for Molly that causes her to go to Gavin Stevens and ask him to help her free Lucas Beauchamp. When she hears the story Charles has to tell about Lucas being sure it was not his gun that killed Vinson Gowrie, she is determined to help Charles exhume Vinson's body. Later, when Charles wonders whether he would have gone through with his mission if it had not been for Miss Habersham, he is sure he would have. That conclusion, of course, is left to the reader's imagination. However, if it were not for Miss Habersham and the use of her truck, Charles might not have been able to remain safe that evening or been able to convince the adults of what he had seen.

Sheriff Hope Hampton

Sheriff Hampton is another deeply rooted southern gentleman. It was also his first impression that Lucas must be guilty. However, he is also a good lawman, who agrees to see through the case when Gavin and Charles come to him with evidence that someone is trying to hide Vinson Gowrie's body. Not only does he follow through, but he concocts the scheme to catch Crawford Gowrie. He protects Lucas above and beyond what was necessary by hiding him in his own house.

Vinson Gowrie

Vinson Gowrie is the son of a very poor man who lives in the poorer section of the county. Vinson is the youngest of six boys. When Vinson is found dead at the beginning of the novel, Lucas is standing over him, a recently fired pistol stuck in the waistband of his pants. Lucas might have been lynched as he stood there if not for the intervention of



a store owner's son who once before saved Lucas from a fight with another white man. The men in this part of town are strong believers in the unwritten code of the South that says a white man can kill any black man who has killed one of their family members. Vinson Gowrie's family also believes strongly in this code. Charles spends a good portion of the novel worrying about this lynching and the other wondering why it does not happen. The reader also spends a great deal of the novel wondering to where in the world Vinson Gowrie's body has disappeared.

Molly Beauchamp

Molly is Lucas's wife. Molly dies in the second chapter of the book; however, she makes a big impression on the young Charles. Charles meets her in Lucas's house as he sits to warm himself in front of the fire after he falls into the creek. At first he believes her to be a child because she is so small and her face is hidden from him. However, when he does see her face, he realizes she must be quite old. The reader also finds out later in the novel that Molly was born within weeks of Miss Habersham and that the two girls were raised together. Molly's brother is also an employee of Miss Habersham's. If not for Molly, it is possible Miss Habersham might not have involved herself in Lucas's plight and Lucas might not have gotten the freedom he deserved. Molly is a minor character, but she is hugely important to the plot.

Carothers Edmonds

Carothers Edmonds is an old-school chum of Gavin Stevens. Mr. Edmonds is also a cousin of Lucas's. Lucas owns a piece of land on Edmonds' plantation that was given to his family by Edmonds' father. Carothers does not play a large part in the novel; however, he is important because if it were not for his decision to allow a 12-year-old Charles to go rabbit hunting on his land, young Charles might never have met Lucas or missed paying for a meal he ate, consequently never feeling the responsibility to help Lucas.

Aleck Sander

Aleck Sander is a black boy who works for the Mallison family. Aleck Sander is the same age as Charles, give or take a few months. Like Molly and Miss Habersham, the two boys have been raised together. Aleck Sander accompanies Charles when he helps to exhume Vinson Gowrie's body and it is Aleck Sander's amazing sense of sight and hearing that alerts them to the mule that surprises them on the road as they are traveling to the cemetery. If not for Aleck Sander, Miss Habersham and Charles might have found themselves in trouble with a man who had already killed two people. Aleck Sander also is the first to point out that the flowers had been disturbed on the grave and to suggest that there might be quicksand under the bridge. Aleck Sander proves to be a very valuable asset to Charles and Miss Habersham.

Mrs. Mallison

Mrs. Mallison is Charles's mother and Gavin's sister. Mrs. Mallison is a strong southern woman who is not very happy her son is growing up. She would like to coddle young Charles, but her brother will not allow it. However, it becomes apparent there is more to Mrs. Mallison than the need to mother her only child. Mrs. Mallison stands up beside Miss Habersham when the sheriff decides the women would be of more use standing guard outside the jail than standing in a cemetery while the men dig up dead bodies.



Objects/Places

Yoknapatawpha County; Jackson, Mississippi

The location in the South where this novel is set.

Jail

This is where Lucas is kept briefly during his incarceration and where Miss Habersham and Mrs. Mallison stand guard while the men go to exhume Vinson Gowrie's body.

Lucas's House

This is a small cabin in the center of Edmonds' plantation. It is where Lucas takes Charles after he falls into the creek.

Gold Toothpick

This is an old-fashioned toothpick that Lucas probably inherited from his grandfather, which he carries with him everywhere, except while he is in jail and then the sheriff held onto it.

Colt .41 Gun

This is Lucas's gun, the one he bought from his grandfather.

German Luger Automatic

This is the gun that actually killed Vinson Gowrie.

Beat Four

This is a poorer section of the county. It is the last place in the world where a black man could kill a white man and not expect to be lynched.

Caledonia Chapel Cemetery

This is the cemetery where Vinson Gowrie is buried and the site of the many exhumations.



Highboy

This is Charles's horse, a Shetland pony that someone taught to take 18- and 24- inch jumps.

Gavin Stevens' Office

This is Gavin's legal office in town, where Charles works. It is also where Miss Habersham waits for word on the outcome of the sheriff's scheme to arrest Crawford Gowrie and where Lucas comes to pay his final bill after he is freed.



Themes

Racism in the South

As with many novels written at this time, this novel is full of references to lawless actions committed by individuals who today would probably be severely punished and looked down upon by society. However, it is William Faulkner's purpose to show what life was really like in the South during this time and also to suggest how people have to change for things to get any better. This is a novel that was written at the very beginning of the civil rights movement and Faulkner sees into the near future and tells a story of how he hopes things will someday be. He describes in a unique and plausible way why racial tensions are the way they are. In his theory, the southern gentleman will not allow the black man the freedoms the United States government has offered because they have been forced into it. Faulkner theorizes through the voice of Charles's uncle that the U.S. government during the Civil War forced the emancipation of the slaves before the southern gentleman is prepared to do so himself. According to Faulkner, if given time, the South would have freed the slaves and perhaps race relations would not have deteriorated the way they did. In a fashion similar to the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, this novel pinpoints the terrible inequality that was rampant in the South at the time, but it also expresses hope that with a change in thinking of one person, or one group of people, that equality and justice would be possible. However, unlike *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Intruder in the Dust* has a more encouraging and upbeat ending.

Relationships, Friendship and Respect

A strong theme in this novel involves the idea of people going beyond what they've learned and doing what is right. Charles goes out of his way to help Lucas despite his desire to leave town and not see what the town's people do to Lucas. At first, it appears that he must be doing this because he feels he owes the man a debt for not only helping him when he fell in the creek and for feeding him, but also because Charles insulted the man by offering him payment. This is exactly the reason Charles goes back and asks Lucas what it is he needs someone to do for him. However, Charles goes so far above and beyond what most people would do, the reader must assume there Charles feels respect for Lucas, if not for his simple humanity, then for his innocence.

There is also a strong theme regarding the importance of friendship in this novel. There is Miss Habersham and her friendship with Molly Beauchamp that brings her to a cemetery in the middle of the night in an attempt to save Molly's widower. The idea of a genteel white woman standing up for a black man during the period of racial tension depicted in this novel is preposterous and yet Miss Habersham not only stands up for Lucas, she puts herself in danger by standing guard outside the prison to protect a man who is not even inside the building any longer.



Also, there is the friendship between Charles and Aleck Sander that echoes the friendship between Molly and Miss Habersham. The two boys were born a few months apart, were raised on the same property and remain constant companions. Charles takes Aleck Sander with him everywhere he goes, either to hunt rabbits or to exhume dead bodies. It is Aleck Sander's acute sense of sight and sound that saves Charles.

Another interesting friendship in this novel is the one between Charles and his uncle. Gavin is a childless bachelor who is content to live his life the way he sees fit. Charles obviously looks up to the man, working for him and going to him when his friend is in trouble. Charles learns a lot from Gavin's speeches about race relations and integrity. The reader might even see over the course of the novel how Charles looks up to and respects, his uncle as a knowledgeable adult. Charles becomes concerned more about Uncle Gavin's opinion than his own mother's and father's at times.

Justice

Justice is a word the reader does not see often in this novel; however, it is a strong theme that runs throughout its pages. There is the legal system and the charges that Lucas faces for the murder of Vinson Gowrie. It is quite possible that if Lucas survives the legal system, he will be hanged by the state for this crime. It can be debated whether any trial Lucas might have endured would have been a fair one since the jury would not have had a single black person on it, certainly not a jury of his peers as guaranteed by the Constitution. However, he would have had a lawyer and could have plea bargained to spend his life in the penitentiary as Gavin Stevens had wanted to discuss with the district attorney.

There is also southern justice as it was described in this novel. In the South during this time, it was not unusual for mobs of men to drag a black man from his own home or a jail cell and hang him in the town square or perhaps burn him. Charles expects this very thing to happen and often wonders why the Gowrie family did not lynch Lucas before the county marshal could arrive at the scene of the crime to take Lucas into custody. The town obviously expects this lynching to happen as well, which is underscored by the fact that no black people come into town for their normal weekend socializing and many white people from the farms around the county do come into town and stand in front of the jail as if waiting for a parade. To them, it is only justice to allow the wronged family to settle the matter their own way.

Justice is defined as fairness or reasonableness, especially in the way people are treated or decisions are made. This is an interesting word to apply to a black man wrongly accused of killing a white man in 1948. Perhaps that is why the writer does not mention it often. However, Lucas Beauchamp does find justice, at least in the sense that he is cleared of the charge of murder at the end of this novel thanks in large part to a 16-year-old boy and an old white woman, an ironic situation, surely.



Style

Point of View

Intruder in the Dust is written in the third person. The entire story is seen through the eyes of the young man, Charles Mallison. This is a limited third person in that the narrator is confined to this single character.

This novel is also written in a stream-of-consciousness style. "Stream of consciousness" is writing that jumps from the character's thoughts to his dreams to his perceptions in a seemingly disorganized way. This kind of writing can be difficult to comprehend because there is often minimal punctuation. *Intruder in the Dust* contains page after page of Charles's thoughts, sometimes jumping in time, while others jump from one conclusion to another.

Setting

This novel is set in Mississippi in 1948 at the beginning of the civil rights movement. The racial climate of the time period is very important to the plot of the novel. Had this novel taken place in any other time, it would not have the rich meaning or the tension that this novel displays. There are also two distinct sections of the county in which this novel is told. There is the city proper, Jackson, Mississippi, where our narrator, Charles Mallison lives with his parents and his uncle. This is a small southern town with a jail, a town square and several businesses. This town appears to be the center of the county where many of the farmers in the outlying areas come to buy supplies and to socialize. Then there is Beat Four. Beat Four is a smaller section of the county where there are many farms and where a majority of the residents are either black or poor whites. Beat Four is where Lucas lives, as well as where Vinson Gowrie and his family live. It is also where Vinson Gowrie is shot and killed. The differences between these two towns are symbolic of the differences between the white people of the novel and the black.

Language and Meaning

The language in this novel is may be somewhat antiquated to the modern reader. William Faulkner uses many words and spellings that were popular in the South of his day, but with which the modern reader might not be familiar. The reader might feel as though he has stepped back in time because some of the dialog can sound like a poem read aloud by someone with a cultured southern accent. There is also language in this novel that today might be offensive to some people. Faulkner employs idiomatic language of the mid-20th Century to describe black people that was common usage then and that today would be considered vulgar and insulting. The use of this language is not meant to offend; it is simply a representation of the time period in which the novel takes place, a sampling of language that gives the plot more power and authenticity.

Structure

This novel is divided into 11 chapters with minimal punctuation. The novel is written in a stream-of-consciousness style, which is a style of writing in which the writer remains in one person's mind the entire length of the work and tends to randomly connect his thoughts as would a real person. There are whole chapters in which the reader can read page after page without a paragraph break or a period. Whole chapters are devoted to the narrator's thoughts, such as Chapter 2 in which Charles explains how he met Lucas Beauchamp and the subsequent events that lead to him watching as Lucas is taken into the local jail. The chapters are sometimes 12 or 14 pages long.

The narration is generally linear with many flashbacks. Faulkner uses flashbacks in the middle of the narration that relate directly to a remembered thought or incident, e.g., the first and second chapters where Charles remembers how he met Lucas and the events leading up to Lucas's arrival at the jail. These flashbacks are generally told through Charles's own recollections. There is dialog in the novel as well, but the bulk of the novel is told through Charles's thoughts and interpretations of the situations in which he finds himself.



Quotes

"It was just noon that Sunday morning when the sheriff reached the jail with Lucas Beauchamp though the whole town (the whole county too for that matter) had known since the night before that Lucas had killed a white man." Chapter 1, pg. 3

"Edmonds' father had deeded to his Negro first cousin and his heirs in perpetuity the house and the ten acres of land it sat in—an oblong of earth set forever in the middle of the two-thousand acre plantation like a postage stamp in the center of an envelope..." Chapter 1, pg. 8

"...so Lucas had beat him, stood straddled in front of the hearth and without even moving his clasped hands from behind his back had taken his own seventy cents and beat him with them and writhing with impotent fury he was already thinking of the man whom he had never seen but once and that only twelve hours ago, as within the next year he was to learn every white man in that whole section of the country had been thinking about him for years: We got to make him be a Nigger first. He's got to admit he's a nigger. Then maybe we will accept him as he seems to intend to be accepted." Chapter 2, pg 17-18

"Because there was the half-dollar. The actual sum was seventy cents of course and in four coins but he had long since during that first few fractions of a second transposed translated them into the one coin one integer in mass and weight out of all proportion to its mere convertible value; there were times in fact when, the capacity of his spirit for regret or perhaps just simple writhing or whatever it was at last spent for a moment and ever quiescent, he would tell himself *At least I have the half-dollar, at least I have something* because now not only his mistake and its shame but its protagonist too—the man, the Negro, the room, the moment, the day—had annealed vanished into the round hard symbol of the coin..." Chapter 2, pgs. 20-21

"All he requires is that they act like niggers. Which is exactly what Lucas is doing: blew his top and murdered a white man—which Mr. Lilley is probably convinced all negroes want to do—and now the white people will take him out and burn him, all regular in order and themselves acting exactly as he is convinced Lucas would wish them to act: like white folks; both of them observing implicitly the rules: the nigger acting like a nigger and the white folks acting like white folks and no real hard feelings on either side..." Chapter 3, pgs. 48-49

"'My pistol is a fawty-one colt,' Lucas said. Which it would be; the only thing he hadn't actually known was the caliber—that weapon workable and efficient and well cared for yet as archaic peculiar and unique as the gold toothpick, which had probably (without doubt) been old Carothers McCaslin's pride a half century ago.

'All right,' he said. 'Then what?'

'He wasn't shot with no fawty-one colt.'



'What was he shot with?'" Chapter 3, pg. 69

"So they aint come for old Lucas yet,' aleck Sander said.

'Is that what your people think about it too?' he said.

'And so would you,' Aleck Sander said. 'It's the ones like Lucas makes trouble for everybody.'"

Chapter 4, pg. 85

"Hush.' They stopped, immobile in the long constant invisible flow of the pine. 'Mule coming down the hill,' aleck Sander said.

He began to turn the horse at once. 'I don't hear anything,' Miss Habersham said. 'Are you sure?'

'Yessum,' he said, turning Highboy back off the road: 'Aleck Sander's sure.' And standing at Highboy's head among the trees and undergrowth, his other hand lying on the horse's nostrils in case he decided to nicker at the other animal, he heard it too—the horse or mule coming steadily down the road from the crest. It was unshod probably; actually the only sound he really heard was the creak of leather and he wondered (without doubting for one second that he had) how Aleck Sander had heard it at all the two minutes and more it had taken the animal to reach them..." Chapter 4, pg. 99

"...and he looked at her too, straight, thin, almost shapeless in the straight cotton dress beneath the round exactitude of the hat and he thought *She's too old for this* and then corrected it: *No a woman a lady shouldn't have to do this* and then remembered last night when he had left the office and walked across the back yard and whistled for Aleck Sander and he knew he had believed—and he still believed it—that he would have gone alone even if Aleck Sander had stuck to his refusal..." Chapter 5, pg. 112

"...because it seemed to him now that he was responsible for having brought into the light and the glare of day something shocking and shameful out of the whole white foundation of the county which he himself must partake of too since he too was bred of it, which otherwise might have flared and blazed merely out of Beat Four and then vanished back into its darkness or at least invisibility with the fading embers of Lucas's crucifixion." Chapter 6, pg. 138

"That's why we must resist the North: not just to preserve ourselves nor even the two of us as one to remain one nation because that will be the inescapable by-product of what we will preserve: which is the very thing that three generations ago we lost a bloody war in our own back yards so that it remain intact: the postulate that Sambo is a human being living in a free country and hence must be free. That's what we are really defending: the privilege of setting him free ourselves: which we will have to do for the reason that nobody else can since going on a century ago now the North tried it and have been admitting for seventy-five years now that they failed..." Chapter 7, pg. 154



"What is it killed Vinson, Shurf?"

'A German Luger automatic, Mr. Gowrie,' the sheriff said. 'Like the one Buddy McCallum brought home from France in 1919 and traded that summer for a pair of fox hounds.'"

Chapter 8, pg. 179

"...not faces but a face, not a mass nor even a mosaic of them but a Face: not even ravening nor uninsatiate but just in motion, insensate, vacant of thought or even passion: an Expression significantless and without past like the one which materializes suddenly after seconds or even minutes of painful even frantic staring from the innocent juxtaposition of trees and clouds and landscape in the soap-advertisement puzzle-picture or on the severed head in the news photo of the Balkan or Chinese atrocity: without dignity and not even evocative of horror..."

Chapter 9, pg. 182

"So Lucas unknotted the sack and dumped the pennies on to the desk and counted them one by one moving each one with his forefinger into the first small mass of dimes and nickels, counting aloud, then snapped the purse shut and put it back inside his coat with the other hand shoved the whole mass of coins and the crumpled bill across the table until the desk blotter stopped them and took a bandana handkerchief from the side pocket of the coat and wiped his hands and put the handkerchief back and stood again intractable and calm and not looking at either of them now while the fixed blaring of the radios and the blating creep of the automobile horns and all the rest of the whole County's Saturday uproar came up on the bright afternoon.

'Now what?' his uncle said. 'What are you waiting for now?'

'My receipt,' Lucas said." Chapter 11, pg. 246-247



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the racial climate of novel as compared to modern times. Is it possible for a situation similar to Lucas's to take place now? How would the outcome be different? How would the outcome be the same?

Discuss how a different narrator would affect the plot. How would the story be different if it had been written through Lucas's point of view? What if it was written through Miss Habersham's point of view?

Discuss the use of language in this novel. How would the novel be different if it did not contain a derogatory term?

Discuss Charles's relationship with Lucas. Are they friends? Are they enemies? If the novel were to continue, would Lucas be a part of Charles's future?

Discuss Lucas's reaction to Charles's offer of payment for the meal. Was Charles disrespectful to offer the money? Why did Lucas refuse to take it? Why did Charles become obsessed with the episode?

What is the significance of the coins with which Lucas pays Gavin Stevens at the end of the novel as compared to the coins with which Charles attempts to pay Lucas at the beginning of the novel?

Why did Miss Habersham help Lucas? Would the outcome have been different had she not gotten involved?