

Mississippi Trial, 1955 Study Guide

Mississippi Trial, 1955 by Chris Crowe

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Plot Summary

Murder Trial, 1955 is the story of a white teenage male named Hiram Hillburn who has returned to his hometown of Greenwood, Mississippi in the summer of 1955. Hiram finds that although the town has not changed in appearance, not everything is as it seems. As a youth, he was unaware of the rampant prejudice that the town has, especially towards blacks. The meeting of Emmett Till helped Hiram to see this and even Hiram begins to have a change of heart. Emmett's kidnapping and murder for alleged inappropriate actions towards a white woman have a deep effect on Hiram, and Hiram feels that it is now his duty to seek the truth of what really happened to Emmett. This tale takes him into the courtroom of the suspected killers and brings him face-to-face with his own feelings and an awful revelation that changes the way he thinks about those he loves the most.

As a 7-year-old boy in 1948, Hiram Hillburn lives in Greenwood, Mississippi with his grandparents as his parents live and work in Oxford. Although Hiram and his grandfather share a harmonious relationship, there is a considerable conflict between Grampa Hillburn and Hiram's father, Harlan. Grampa's views are of the stereotypical, racist South, which is first demonstrated to Hiram after an African American worker is berated simply for taking a small break and showing Hiram one of his tools.

Hiram, Grampa, and Grandma Hillburn enjoy a nice quiet life that is filled with the same routines. The mornings are spent following Grampa to the courthouse so that Grampa can "talk business" with friends, afternoons in the family fields talking to the overseer, then evenings filled with a good dinner. Sometimes in the evenings, Hiram goes outside to relax or to interact with R.C. Wiley, a poor boy who is often loud and mean. One night, R.C. is spying on Hiram's neighbors, the Remingtons, two mentally deficient brothers. Later, R.C. and Hiram go fishing at Hiram's favorite fishing spot. While there, R.C. tortures and kills a catfish, just because it stung him, causing Hiram to start being very wary of R.C.'s dangerous outbursts.

After Grandma Hillburn's death, Harlan accepts a job offer in Arizona, making Grampa furious that Harlan is taking Hiram away. Over the years, Grampa has asked for Hiram to spend the summer with him, only for Harlan to forbid it, causing years' worth of tension between Hiram and Harlan. After Grampa has a stroke in 1955, Hiram is finally allowed to return to Greenwood. At the station he is met by Grampa's housekeeper, Ruthanne and her cousin, Emmett "Bobo" Till. At first, Emmett is reluctant to do as Ruthanne asks when she tells him to carry Hiram's bags, but he does only long enough to trick Hiram into carrying his own bags. The next time Hiram sees Emmett is at a fishing hole one afternoon when Hiram is out by himself. He hears yelling in the river and comes across Emmett who has fallen in the river after trying to get a snapping turtle. After Hiram saves Emmett from drowning, the pair talk and find that they have more in common than Hiram originally thought, leading him to wonder why such a thing as racism exists.



Hiram spends much of his time reconnecting with Grampa but with others in the community as well. He in particular wants to see Naomi Rydell again, but instead runs into R.C. first. R.C.'s manners have not changed and he is quick to continue his "playful" bullying of Hiram. R.C. wants to reconnect with Hiram by going fishing like they did when they were younger and Hiram reluctantly agrees. After being at the fishing hole for a while, R.C. falls asleep and Hiram sits by himself. He hears others playing in the river and comes across Emmett playing with his cousins. After a bit of conversation, Hiram accidentally mentions his large lunch, which Emmett asks if he could have some of. Hiram says yes, but when he goes to get the bag, Emmett follows him. R.C. wakes up just as Emmett grabs the lunch, enraging R.C. R.C. proceeds to assault Emmett then torture him by shoving a dead fish in his mouth. Hiram, sickened by this scene, goes home feeling ashamed that he did not stop R.C.

Later that evening, Hiram finally sees Naomi at her spot along the Fulton Street Bridge. She is happy to see him and they begin talking as they used to and he tells Naomi about R.C.'s actions. A few nights later, R.C. comes to Hiram saying that the sheriff had been around to ask about an incident along the river. He wants Hiram to say that nothing went on out of the ordinary that day, but Hiram insists that he will tell the truth. R.C. laughs at him and says that it does not matter. He also informs Hiram that he is going with some other white men to the nearby village to talk to a young African American man that has insulted a white woman. Hiram is scared about this and calls the police after R.C. leaves. The police refuse to do anything about the situation and says that the young African American male is from Chicago and needs a lesson in manners, causing Hiram to know that the male is Emmett.

Unable to do anything, Hiram waits for any sort of news about the situation. Shortly after that evening, Emmett is reported missing, making Hiram's worries worse. A few days later, his body is found in the river, badly mangled and with a cotton gin pulley around his neck. Two men are arrested for kidnapping and are also charged with Emmett's murder. Hiram is called to be a witness based on what he told the police about R.C. going with the men. Grampa is adamant that he wants Hiram to stay out of this drama, but Hiram insists that it is his duty to bring Emmett's killers to justice. This causes slight problems between the two as they both believe they are right.

During the trial, Grampa becomes more agitated at Hiram for his desire to do what he feels is right. The trial goes on with the defense constantly discrediting the witnesses. Hiram is never called to be a witness, but he stays for the entire trial. After the two men are acquitted of murder, Grampa is relieved and happy that Hiram will get to go back to Arizona. This is suspicious behavior to Hiram and Hiram's suspicions worsen when he sees Grampa selling his blue truck to some unknown men. After Hiram asks about it, Grampa gets mad at Hiram telling him to mind his own business. On the way to get fishing gear in the shed, Hiram runs into one of the Remington brothers. After a circular conversation, Hiram finds out that the other brother spotted Grampa with the accused murderers on the night Emmett went missing. Once Hiram goes back in the house, he confronts Grampa with this information, which Grampa admits but is unapologetic for being a part of Emmett's kidnapping.



Thoroughly disgusted with Grampa's actions and attitude, Hiram goes out that night to see Naomi. He runs into R.C. instead, who has been missing since the night he told Hiram about going with Emmett's killers. He admits that he had thought about going, but decided that he wanted a better life and left for Jackson, where he has been living and working ever since. He only comes home on occasion and on this particular evening, he and his father have gotten into an extremely violent fight. R.C. says that he is only in town to inform the sheriff what he has done and is going back to Jackson. The next day, Hiram goes looking for Naomi, but cannot find her as she has been taken somewhere else to live. Tensions between Grampa and Hiram are at an all time high and Hiram prepares to leave for Arizona. Before he leaves, he looks for some sort of apology from Grampa, but Grampa still feels that he has been correct in his behavior, causing permanent damage to their relationship. Hiram sees Naomi at the train station before he leaves. She tells him not to worry about her and that since she no longer lives with her abusive father, she will get the life she has always wanted.

Once Hiram arrives back in Arizona, his father meets him at the railway station. On the way home, father and son finally get to talk about how they feel. Hiram begins to understand his father for the first time in his life and they are able to start repairing their own relationship.



Chapters 1 - 3

Summary

In Chapter 1, Hiram Hillburn recounts how his father hates the word "hate". As Hiram remembers these things he also remembers that it is because of hate that a young boy named Emmett Till was murdered in 1955. In the small town of Greenwood, Mississippi, Hiram lives with his grandparents, Earl and Florence Hillburn. Hiram's parents live in Oxford as Hiram's father Harlan and mother Dee study at the local university. Harlan wants to pursue an education as he has come home from World War II and has decided that he wants to become educated in hopes of finding a good job so he can take his family away from the South. This causes many arguments between Harlan and Grampa and their relationship is rocky at best.

As Hiram lives peacefully with his grandparents, he and his grandfather have a set routine. On most days, Hiram and Grampa head to the local courthouse so that Grampa can talk business with the people working inside. Grampa gives Hiram a nickel to take to Mr. Paul to buy a treat before heading on to the Hillburn's cotton fields. On one occasion, Hiram follows an African American worker while Grampa chats with the overseer. The boy picks up the worker's hoe as the man stretches at the end of the field, causing Grampa to come over and yell at the worker for being lazy. In private, Grampa tells Hiram that African Americans were created to do all of the hard labor in the heat and that whites were created to be their bosses. Hiram quickly puts this out of his mind as they head home.

Chapter 2 shows Hiram's home life as a comfortable one with Gramma always in the kitchen making things and in the evenings Grampa comes in to read his paper. One evening, Grampa reads a section of the Greenwood Commonwealth, the local newspaper, and is upset about the changes that the government wants to make to the South. He continues to carry on about this, until Gramma says that dinner is ready and they sit down to eat dinner together. Afterwards, Hiram wants to help Gramma with the dishes, but she says that he should go outside to see if R.C. Rydell, a neighborhood boy, is outside. Hiram finds R.C. hiding in an azalea bush spying on the Remingtons, two brothers who are mentally deficient. Hiram feels uncomfortable doing this, but R.C. will not stop. Instead, he calls the Remingtons' attention when he begins taunting them loud enough to be heard. Hiram wants R.C. to stop, but R.C. continues, calling Hiram a "sisbaby". The Remingtons eventually hear R.C. and are frightened, causing Hiram to go back inside feeling sorry for them.

A month or so later, Hiram decides that he wants to go fishing with R.C. for an afternoon. Gramma packs a lunch for him and some cookies to take to R.C.'s sister, Naomi. R.C. teases Hiram about being Naomi's boyfriend, but he does not tease Naomi about this when Hiram gives her the cookies. Naomi and Hiram do not talk long, as she has to get back inside to cook lunch for her sleeping father. R.C. and Hiram leave for the fishing bank, eating most of Gramma's lunch along the way. As they fish, R.C.



boasts about many things, from having an expensive fishing reel to trying tobacco and having a girlfriend. Hiram mentions that he does not do tobacco and has no interest in girls at that point, causing R.C. to tease Hiram some more. R.C. also talks about the Remingtons and about how odd they are, speculating that they could be homosexual, but Hiram does not want to discuss this any further. R.C. eventually catches a catfish, but instead of adding it to the string of fish he has already caught he decides to torment it by stabbing it in the eyes with a nail. The catfish tries to struggle away, causing R.C. to get stung on its whiskers and enraging him. R.C. take his anger out on the fish by repeatedly stabbing it as Hiram watches. Hiram questions why R.C. would do that to a defenseless fish, and R.C.'s reply is that it needed to be taught a lesson. In fear of the situation escalating, Hiram drops the subject, but afterwards, he goes fishing with R.C. as little as possible.

Hiram wakes up alone in the house in Chapter 3. He looks around for his grandparents but he cannot find them. Their bedroom looks as if they got up and left in a hurry, but Hiram does not know where they are. Hiram looks in the kitchen for them, but the kitchen is empty. Since no one is there to make breakfast, Hiram starts to eat a cookie just as Grampa walks in. Grampa hugs Hiram and informs him that Gramma has passed away. Hiram's parents come home for the funeral and the tension is slightly eased between Grampa and Harlan.

At the wake, the Remington brothers come to pay their respects as Gramma usually brought them food and was one of the few people in town that were nice to them. The other guests do not want them talking to Grampa or Harlan, leaving the brothers to converse with Hiram. After a few minutes of uncomfortable dialogue between Ronnie and Hiram, Ralph decides that it is time to go. The funeral the next day is quick, but Hiram wants to be by himself as the mourners stand around and talk. He runs into Naomi Rydell who shows him where her mother is buried. Overcome with emotion, Hiram cries in front of Naomi although he tries hard not to. Naomi tells him that whenever he gets to missing anyone, he can go to the spot she likes to go to when she is grieving, the Fulton Street Bridge. This makes Hiram feel slightly better.

Some time after the funeral, Hiram's dad says that he and Hiram's mother will be returning to Oxford soon. Hiram wants his parents to stay, but Harlan says that he has to get back to finishing his studies. He also reveals that once his studying is finished, he will be applying to places to work out West. Hiram is angered by this, but Harlan says that he can no longer allow his family to live in the South and live with all of the prejudice in the area. Hiram's parents both agree that Hiram can stay a while longer with Grampa so Harlan can complete his studies. Grampa hires a new housekeeper, an African American lady named Ruthanne, to take Gramma's place in the kitchen. Harlan graduates from college and he immediately finds a position teaching at a university in Tempe, Arizona. He tells Hiram that the family will be moving there in August, but Hiram is angry over this. He runs off to the Fulton Street Bridge to sit for awhile, and he promises himself that he will come back to Greenwood as soon as possible.



Analysis

Chapter 1 introduces the protagonist, Hiram Hillburn, as he reflects on the word "hate". Although Hiram's father is extremely against the use of this word, this word is important within the novel as it sets the focus of Hiram's memory. From Hiram's brief recollection of being punished for using that particular word, Hiram begins his narrative, forming the actual narrative as the memory of the 1955 murder of Emmett Till. There is a brief admission that due to this crime, his viewpoints about the world around him has changed and that he can never think of even the smallest parts of his life the same way again.

The narrative flashes back to offer some of Hiram's back story as he explains his family dynamic, introducing other characters especially Hiram's grandfather, Earl Hillburn. This also highlights the conflicting relationship between Hiram's father and his grandfather, which is referred to with the metaphor that the relationship is like Hitler and Roosevelt. This conflict is crucial as it heavily dependent on the fact that ever since coming home from World War II, Hiram's father has viewed his hometown of Greenwood, Mississippi and much of the southern United States as extremely prejudiced. He also views the close knit relationship between his own father and Hiram as something negative. His use of his veteran's benefits enables him to study at a college further away, but it also establishes Greenwood as the main setting of the novel, as Hiram lives with his grandparents while his parents work and study in Oxford, Mississippi.

The narrative further digresses into one of Hiram's earliest memories of his daily summer routine with his grandfather. This routine sets up the relationship between Hiram and his grandfather as one of complete devotion between the pair. Trips to the county courthouse so that Grampa can talk to friends introduces Mr. Paul, a minor character in this section of the novel who alludes to the fact that Grampa is extremely rich and well respected within the county. The scene switches to Hiram and Grampa being in the Hillburn fields to talk with the overseer. There is an indicative statement made in the fact that only the overseer of the farm is white, the rest of the workers are African American. It is here that the theme of prejudice is introduced as a dialogue between Hiram and one of the African American worker takes place. This is caused not by the conversation itself, but by the fact that the worker has stopped for a brief moment to stretch and also has allowed Hiram to touch his cotton hoe. Grampa's views on the difference between whites and African Americans is made clear at this point as he finds African Americans to be inferior and therefore are destined to only be laborers with whites like himself and Hiram as the leaders. At such a young age, Hiram does not understand these words, but they are something that Hiram will consider later in the course of the novel.

Chapter 2 presents another major setting as Grampa and Granma Hillburn's home and the amount of comfort Hiram feels within it. Gramma Hillburn is also introduced in this chapter as the theme of traditional roles regarding men and women is personified in her character. Gramma is the keeper of the home, with her primary domain being the kitchen. There is a distinct division in how Grampa and Gramma Hillburn operate that



creates a peaceful and loving home for Hiram. As Gramma gives Hiram treats from the kitchen while cooking, Grampa spends most of his time reading the newspaper in the living room.

Prejudice is still a heavy motivator in Grampa's character as he reads the Greenwood Commonwealth, the local newspaper and the only news he cares to read. Grampa has no desire to hear about or try to understand the workings of the world outside of Greenwood and is vocal about this. Grampa's reading of the paper also highlights one of the main issues he has with his son, Harlan. Grampa's prejudice encompasses not only African Americans, but anything that is not considered within the perimeters of the typical South and its lifestyle. Grampa does not like the fact that Harlan went to fight in the war and thinks that the genocide should be ignored as it is not happening in the United States. To Grampa, way of life that he is used to is the only way to live life, but Hiram is at this point too young to understand what his statement about this means. There is an abrupt halt to Grampa's views on this as the family sits down at the dinner table. Gramma dislikes political talk at the dinner table. Afterwards, the traditional roles of men and women during the 1950's is on display again as Gramma clears the table and cleans from dinner with Grampa going immediately going back to his newspaper. Gramma is thankful for Hiram's offer to help, but Gramma feels that she does not need it and prefers to do the housework by herself.

At Gramma's insistence, Hiram goes outside to seek one of the local boys, therefore introducing another key character to the narrative. R.C. Rydell. R.C. is a polar opposite - also known as the literary tool called a foil - of Hiram, although R.C. is two years older than Hiram. Hiram is often uneasy socializing with R.C., but there are not many other young boys in the area. R.C. is regarded as always bragging about the things he supposedly has, but the fact that R.C. lives in a run down home by the river makes Hiram suspicious of R.C.'s ability to tell the truth. In this scene, R.C. has been hiding in the bushes spying on the Hillburn's neighbors. This also introduces two brothers, Ronnie and Ralph Remington, at this point minor characters. The brief description given about them shows that they are regarded by the community as mentally challenged yet harmless. The actual relationship between the two men is questionable as R.C. spies on them as they waltz in the living room wearing nothing but their underwear. This is a comical scene to R.C. but Hiram wants to respect the Remington's privacy. This is one example of how R.C. and Hiram differ in terms of how they both view other people around them. R.C. instantly mocks Hiram for wanting to leave the brothers alone, calling him "sisbaby", a term that is meant to show that Hiram is a coward. R.C. elevates Hiram's sense of shame and guilt as R.C. throws a rock at the Remington's window to further mock the pair. This has become a frustrating and embarrassing situation for the Remingtons as they do not know who threw the rock and they are instantly afraid that their privacy has been ruined.

Hiram's reluctance to interact with R.C. continues as it is highlighted in another occasion that Hiram remembers taking place shortly after his 8th birthday. This situation happens during a break in the usual routine involving Hiram and his grandfather. It should be noted that Hiram does not consider himself to be someone who enjoys the outdoors, but he does like to go fishing in the nearby Yazoo River. When he does go fishing, it is



always with R.C., who Hiram regards as an excellent fisherman but dishonest as R.C. gloats about the expensive fishing rod that he has but is not allowed to use.

The narrative takes a sharp deviation to briefly interject with a note about R.C.'s family, specifically his younger sister Naomi. Naomi is another personification of the traditional roles of males and females during this time period. Although she is still a young girl, Naomi has been forced to assume the feminine role of caretaker of the Rydell home since the death of her mother. It is obvious that because she is forced to take on this role that she is isolated and does not have the ability to have the same freedom that R.C. has. Her situation is pitied, especially by Gramma Hillburn as she knows how hard life must be for Naomi to have to take care of an entire household by herself. The interaction between Naomi and Hiram is limited at this point, as Naomi's attitude is shy and cautious, creating a sense of mystery for her character. As she goes inside, Hiram is pensive about Naomi's welfare, but this is interrupted by R.C.'s impatience. This knowledge aids the narrative in making the transition back to the memory that Hiram is trying to recall about the incident that occurs during a fishing outing.

The scene reverts back to the main action of this section as Hiram and R.C. fish. It is to be noted that R.C. is an excellent fisher with just a cane pole but Hiram is not although he has a considerably better pole. The importance of this particular scene is to highlight the distinct differences between Hiram and R.C.. There is a further mention of the Remingtons as R.C. finds their behavior despicable and has labeled them as homosexual due to their previous dancing. This commentary is offensive to Hiram, but it gradually worsens as R.C. talks about doing things such as chewing tobacco and having a girlfriend.

The ultimate action that sets R.C. apart from Hiram and distinguishes R.C. as a hateful individual, and in many ways Hiram's antagonist, occurs as R.C. has caught a catfish. R.C. finds it comical to torture the fish by stabbing it in the eyes. His disappointment at the lack of blood flowing from the fish frustrates R.C., but he is further angered as the fish inadvertently stings him. This turns his frustration to rage as he gruesomely kills the fish with a nail by stabbing it several times. This is a horrifying sight to Hiram, who is unable to stop R.C. from doing this. There is a sense that R.C. could possibly turn on Hiram as Hiram is vocal with his disgust at the situation. R.C. feels that the fish has no feelings and he justifies killing the fish as needing to "teach it a lesson". This scene is very tense for Hiram who wonders how much more dangerous could R.C. be after witnessing this. Hiram also acknowledges to himself that should he show any signs of not wanting to associate with R.C. after his could result in dire consequences as R.C. could become extremely offended if Hiram refuses. There is a small conflict however as Hiram also takes pleasure in being on the river to fish, no matter who keeps him company although it is apparent that Hiram is at this point scared of R.C.

Chapter 3 jumps forward a few weeks to a very significant event that shapes the course of the novel. The action begins slowly as Hiram wakes up to find himself alone in the house, which is highly unusual as Gramma Hillburn is often in the kitchen in the mornings making a large breakfast. The clues that something is wrong continue as Hiram notices that the kitchen is dark and quiet as if no one has been in the kitchen at



any point in the morning. Once Grampa comes into the scene, there is an unusual change to Grampa's demeanor as he is much quieter, a definite change from his normal interactions with Hiram. Grampa appears to be worn down and extremely upset as he looks for comfort by giving Hiram a hug. It is here that there is a revelation as to the death of Gramma Hillburn. There is no cause of death or further details in this event, but it is a catalyst that is very important to the flow of the novel as it temporarily calms the tension between Grampa and Harlan as the two mourn Gramma's loss together.

With this tragedy, the reader is given a closer deeper introduction to the Remington brothers, Ralph and Ronnie. It is evident that the pair have some sort of mental deficiency, but they are trying to keep up with the normal points of interacting with society as they come to the Hillburn home along with other mourning guests. The author points out their mental deficiencies by illustrating how they look in their suits that seem oddly out of place on them. There is a certain amount of tension as the brothers are unsure of who to talk to as the Hillburns' other guests make it clear to the Remingtons that their company is not needed as the guests block them from speaking to Grampa and Harlan. This shows that although the Remingtons are white, prejudice is a key theme as the brothers are not considered a normal part of Greenwood society. Hiram is cornered into talking to them and he is unsure of what to say to them. It is obvious that Ronnie is the more outgoing of the brothers as he does the speaking for both of them. Ronnie's manner of speech is formal as he addresses Hiram as "Young Mr. Hilburn". The mental deficiencies of the brothers is also on display here as Ronnie cannot remember that Hiram is not his father, Harlan. The scene is uncomfortable for Hiram as he does not know these two brothers well mixed with the fact that Ronnie is rambling about things that are not pertinent to the situation at hand. The only things that are of importance in this conversation is that Gramma was one of the few people in the community who liked the Remingtons as she was always giving them food and was kind to them. The other important piece of information during this exchange is that although Ronnie is the outspoken of the brothers, it is actually Ralph who is handling the affair calmly and quietly. Ralph does not engage in the conversation, but he notices Hiram's discomfort causing his own discomfort. He is quick to understand that not only are he and his brother not wanted at this gathering, but also the more Ronnie talks the more upset he is becoming. The encounter is quickly over as Ralph leads Ronnie out, without having spoken to the elder Hillburns.

The scene jumps forward to the burial of Gramma Hillburn. There is no actual detail of the event, but the scene carries a sense of grief as Hiram wants to be alone. As he walks back towards the car, he is able to have a private conversation with Naomi Rydell, who has been in the back of the group. The reader is able to learn more about Naomi's struggles as she is not only oppressed by her father but she is also still grieving over her mother. Her father's character is highlighted in a simple statement regarding the fact that he did not show up at the mother's funeral, causing R.C. and Naomi to bury their mother with no one else around. This fact adds to Naomi's character as it highlights the fact that she has to be strong no matter the circumstance. Hiram is trying to remain strong himself as he does not want to appear weak in front of Naomi by crying as Naomi takes him to her mother's grave. As they look at the grave, Hiram becomes emotional and cries, but Naomi is understanding of his feelings and does not think less of him for



it. The Fulton Street Bridge is introduced as a place where Naomi goes when she misses her mother. Naomi offers to share the place with Hiram to be used when he feels lonely as well, which Hiram is grateful for.

The conflict between Grampa and Harlan is demonstrated in the next segment of the narrative. Although Grampa and Harlan have been getting along due to Gramma's death, this is a short lived truce. During a conversation between Harlan and Hiram, Harlan understands that it will only be a matter of time before he and Grampa are arguing again. The main conflict between Grampa and Harlan is their views on the South, but Hiram does not understand this. Hiram believes that after Harlan gets out of school in Oxford, then he should be able to move back to Greenwood and maintain a happy life there. Harlan disagrees with this, as he has seen the prejudice that is prevalent in the area and he does not want to live this way. This establishes a major shift in the course of the narrative as Harlan announces that once school is over, the family will be moving. It is agreed that Hiram can stay in Greenwood, but Harlan makes it clear that this will only be a temporary arrangement. In the meantime, a new character is introduced as the new housekeeper for the Hillburn house. Ruthanne is an African American lady who is now in charge of the cooking and cleaning.

The end of the chapter highlights Harlan's final decision as he has finished school and is ready to move his family to Tempe, Arizona. This angers not only Hiram but Grampa as well as he feels that Harlan is making a major mistake. Hiram is angry, for Greenwood is the only home that he has ever known. Hiram uses his anger as an opportunity to go to the Fulton Street Bridge to ponder these things, but he is also hopeful that he can see Naomi once more as he does not know when he will ever see her again. The chapter closes with Hiram's promise to return to Greenwood as a plot device used to ensure the further development of the narrative.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Grampa's treatment of the African American man in the fields. Would Grampa had spoken to a white man the same way? How does this define Grampa's views on race?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Hiram associate with R.C. Rydell? What are the differences between the two boys?

Discussion Question 3

What is the conflict between Harlan and Grampa Hillburn? How does this affect how Hiram is raised?

Vocabulary

slathering, furrowed, transom, harebrained, dilapidated, insignia, stifle, skittish, unseemly, demise, abode



Chapters 4 - 6

Summary

In Chapter 4, Harlan informs Grampa that they will be leaving for Tempe, Arizona at the end of the school year. Grampa is furious with this decision and does nothing to help Harlan get ready to move. The pair does not say goodbye to one another on the day of the move, causing Hiram to feel bad. Grampa offers for Hiram to come back anytime he wants to visit, but Harlan ignores him. The family successfully settles into Tempe and Harlan and Dee have four more children. Each year, Grampa offers Hiram a chance to visit Greenwood, but Harlan refuses to let Hiram go. As the years go by, Hiram begins to dislike his father more and more because of Harlan's dislike for Grampa. In 1955, Grampa sends his yearly invitation, but this time it is different as Grampa needs help after having a stroke. Harlan does not want to let Hiram go, but Dee reminds Harlan that Grampa once helped them and it is only fair to help Grampa. With this, Harlan reluctantly agrees to send Hiram to Greenwood. Noticing Hiram's happiness at getting his way, Harlan gives him a hint that when he gets to Greenwood, he may not like what he will see. With this, Hiram sets off to go back to where he considers home.

Hiram arrives in Greenwood in Chapter 5. He is met by Grampa's housekeeper Ruthanne. She instructs a young African American male she calls Bobo to pick up Hiram's luggage. Bobo does not want to do this, causing Ruthanne to call him by his real name, Emmett Till. This causes him to pick up Hiram's luggage, but he soon tricks Hiram into carrying his own luggage once Ruthanne's back is turned. Along the way, Hiram tries to talk to Emmett about baseball since Emmett is from Chicago, but Emmett is not interested in any sort of conversation. He leaves without saying anything else once he puts Hiram's luggage in the truck and Ruthanne takes Hiram home. Hiram sees Naomi walking down the street and Ruthanne tells him that Naomi is still taking care of the Rydell house and that R.C. is known as a troublemaker. Hiram wishes that eventually he will get to see Naomi and talk to her again.

Hiram arrives home and he sees Grampa in the living room sitting with a wheelchair and crutches. Grampa is happy to see him and they have a pleasant conversation over tea and cookies. Grampa gets frustrated that Ruthanne will not put any sugar in his tea and when her back is turned, he has a few cookies even though he is not supposed to due to his diabetes. Hiram goes to bed later that night feeling happy that he has finally returned home.

Hiram wakes up in Chapter 6, but Grampa is not in the kitchen for breakfast. Ruthanne tells him that Grampa is sleeping in as a lot of nights he spends up late going to White Citizens Council meetings. She also tells him that he can borrow Grampa's truck if it is still there since people borrow it from time to time. Hiram decides to go fishing and heads outside to the shed to get his gear. He runs into Ralph Remington who rambles on and often mistakes Hiram for Harlan. Hiram uses this confusion to quickly get away from Ralph and he sets out toward the fishing hole he used to share with Grampa. He



drives past the small village of Money, but since he cannot find the actual spot, he decides to stop at a random spot along the Tallahatchie River. Instead of doing much fishing, Hiram falls asleep but is awakened to the sounds of someone needing help in the water. Hiram rescues the person, and comes to find out that it is Emmett. He explains that he was bored at home and came to the river although he cannot swim. He was picking up rocks to throw in the water but he mistakenly picked up a snapping turtle and he fell in. After a couple more minutes of talk, Emmett leaves to go home for lunch and Hiram leaves as well. At home, he does not tell of his incident with Emmett as he knows that Grampa will not like it. Instead he lies about his line getting caught, but Grampa is quick to dismiss this as he wants to go out to lunch. As Hiram drives Grampa to the cafe, Grampa goes on a tirade about how desegregation is ruining the South and that the White Citizens Council has been meeting on what they can do to stop it.

Analysis

Chapter 4 begins with Grampa's negative reaction to Harlan's news that he is moving to Tempe, Arizona. This reaction is not only due to the fact that Harlan is abandoning his Southern roots, but Harlan is taking Hiram away from him. The details of the arguments are not given, but Hiram recollects that the arguments were continuous until the day they move. Grampa's negativity does not sway Harlan and the two leave each other not in the best of terms as Grampa refuses to help with any of the preparations. Hiram feels bad about leaving Grampa and he struggles not to show any emotion as Hiram tells Grampa goodbye. Grampa makes an offer for Hiram to return anytime he wants, but Harlan does not want to hear this and dives off without saying another word to his own father, showing that the relationship between the two is severely damaged.

The narrative jumps ahead, to the point where Hiram and his family are settled in Tempe and have comfortably settled into their lives there, although Hiram makes the admission that it took over a year for him to get over leaving Mississippi. There is a significant change in the Hillburn household as Hiram's parents have four more children over the course of four years. The conflict between Harlan and Hiram grows as Hiram continues to miss Mississippi. The theme of relationships is displayed within the arguments over why Hiram cannot go to Mississippi to visit Grampa. Harlan feels that Hiram should forget about being there and any confrontation about the subject ends with Harlan becoming extremely angry with Hiram. The narrative continues to jump further ahead with no tangible details given as to the Hillburn's daily lives or any sort of real descriptions of Hiram's siblings. Grampa's yearly invitation for Hiram to spend the summer with him is the usual cause of the arguments between Harlan and Hiram. There is a difference of opinion between the pair as Harlan believes that he is in the right for keeping Hiram away from the South and Grampa's prejudicial influence. Hiram feels that Harlan is being selfish and uncaring towards Grampa and that Harlan should want to see Grampa, given that he is Harlan's father. This does nothing but infuriate Harlan even more, and the conflict between Harlan and Hiram grows.

Once again, the narrative swiftly transitions with this section showing Hiram as a 16 year old boy in the spring of 1955. There is another invitation to come visit from



Grampa, but this time the invitation is different and shows a change in Grampa as he has recently suffered a minor stroke. There is a new sense of urgency about Grampa as he needs help in moving around and taking care of the farm. This pleading does not soften Harlan's attitude, but it invigorates Hiram's desire to go back to be with Grampa. Hiram's mother is used as a voice of reason and a mediator in this scene to resolve this minor conflict, which in turn gives Hiram the ability to return to Greenwood and the novel the ability to continue onward. Harlan sees Hiram's happiness at this and provides an ominous statement about being careful not to get too happy with this. This is a foreboding comment on how Hiram will be able to notice things that he once could not in the past and that there will be things that may cause Hiram to regret being there. There is an added tone of sadness to this statement as Harlan is defeated in trying to shield Hiram from what Harlan perceives as the harshness of the South. When it is finally time for Hiram to leave, his father does not say goodbye, which is a parallel of what he did to Grampa several years prior. Although this does nothing to improve or hinder the already strained relationship, this serves to show Harlan's true feelings about Hiram going to Mississippi while Hiram sets off.

Upon Hiram's arrival in Chapter 5 and meeting Ruthanne at the train station, Ruthanne makes comments about how similar he is to Harlan, which is slightly offensive to Hiram, once again touching on the dysfunctional father/son relationship. This scene introduces a new character as Ruthanne directs a young African American male she calls "Bobo" to pick up Hiram's luggage to be taken to the truck. "Bobo" is significantly different from the other African American males in the area as his dress and his tone in responding to Ruthanne suggest that he is not from the Greenwood area. It is here that Ruthanne makes a formal introduction of her cousin's nephew, Emmett "Bobo" Till from Chicago. It should be noted that Emmett's attitude is that he should have been treated equally and someone should have carried his luggage for him when Ruthanne tells him to carry Hiram's luggage. Hiram tries to diffuse the tension by trying to get to know Emmett by asking about baseball, but it is a useless ploy. Emmett is shown in this scene to be arrogant and conniving as he does not really want to converse with Hiram and tricks Hiram into carrying his own bags when Ruthanne is not looking. It should also be noted that the author shows Emmett to have a slight stutter to his speech. Emmett's introduction into the novel is cut short as Hiram sees a girl who looks vaguely familiar walking down the street, but she looks fairly miserable. It is revealed to be Naomi Rydell, but Ruthanne makes this admission with a tone of pity. Without going into too many details, Ruthanne explains that Naomi has not had a good life as she continues to take care of her family as a central feminine authority. Ruthanne also gives a subtle hint that things are not right in the Rydell home as R.C. is constantly in and out of trouble and that the father drinks more, leaving Naomi to handle life by herself. Hiram is glad to see her, but she does not notice him leading him to question when he will see her again.

The narrative shifts forward to the reunion of Grampa and Hiram. It is a happy one, but Hiram is quick to notice some of the changes that have occurred since he has been away. The most interesting things he notices are the wheelchair and the crutches that are beside Grampa in the living room. Grampa admits that the stroke has taken more of a toll on him than he thought, but he is quick to say that he is alright. Hiram also notices that the stroke has aged Grampa considerably as he looks much older and his skin is



gray. A conversation ensues to get each other caught up on their lives, but it should be noted that neither one of them discuss Hiram's father. This is also one of the few times that Hiram's siblings are mentioned. The banter continues for quite some time with an interval in which Grampa complains about his dietary needs changing due to his diabetes, making him irritable about the restrictions Ruthanne has placed on him. The chapter is able to close with Hiram sleeping and waking up the next morning, feeling finally at peace that he has come home.

The beginning of Chapter 6 highlights a few items. The first being that Grampa spends much of his time in the evening attending White Citizens Council meetings, which leave him tired and sleeping in most mornings. The second thing she tells him is that he may borrow Grampa's truck, but she mentions that it may have been borrowed already as many people come to borrow it occasionally. After breakfast, Hiram goes outside where he encounters Ralph Remington for the first time since Gramma's death. The conversation is jumbled for the most part as he is confused not only to who Hiram is but his age as well, trying to say that Hiram is passing himself off for 32 years old. This is frustrating for Hiram as he is trying to get to the shed to get his fishing gear. Hiram is able to successfully dodge any further questions by pretending to be Harlan the next time Ralph gets confused. This helps the scene advance so that Hiram can get on with his main purpose of going fishing.

There is a brief description of the scenery as Hiram drives past the small village of Money but becomes lost on the way to the fishing spot he shared as a boy with Grampa. Hiram does not mind being lost, he is more excited about being on the river more than anything. The solitude of Hiram's afternoon is soon broken as he hears a young male in the river. This scene reunites Hiram with Emmett in an unconventional setting where Hiram has to work quickly to save Emmett from drowning by grabbing him. The situation is briefly tense as Emmett tries to drag Hiram underwater with him, but Hiram is able to punch Emmett and bring him to safety.

Hiram addresses him as Bobo as that is what Ruthanne called him at the train station, but it is clear that Emmett does not like this nickname. It is used by his family but he feels that he needs to get rid of the nickname altogether. The conversation between the two establishes the motive for Emmett to be on the river as he became bored with the slow paced lifestyle that his uncle's home and the area provides. It is useful for the reader to also note that Emmett cannot swim and should not have been near the river in the first place. The reader should also note that once again, Emmett has a slight stutter to his talk, but it is only occasional. The cause of his fall in the river comes from accidentally picking up a snapping turtle instead of a rock to throw in the river. Emmett is appreciative of Hiram's rescue and it is clear that there is no prejudice occurring between them and there is a hint that a friendship could be possible. The conversation draws to a close quickly as Emmett must return home before lunch.

Hiram is careful not to mention the afternoon's events to his grandfather as Grampa's prejudice would cause him to get angry that Hiram had any interaction with an African American, no matter the reason. Instead, Hiram chooses to lie to cover up his wet clothing, which Grampa notices as soon as Hiram gets home. Grampa is clueless as to



the real reason, but the topic is quickly disregarded after a Grampa lightly berates Hiram for being careless. This leads into a change of topic as well as a change of location as Grampa wants to go out for lunch. The chapter closing discussion touches on minor things at first, but then shifts into a much darker conversation as Grampa expresses his dislike of the movement to desegregate schools in the South. Here, his prejudice is once again on display as he talks of the White Citizens' Council, a political group that is based on the principles of keeping African Americans from mixing and having the same opportunities as whites. The notion of equal rights is infuriating to Grampa and he continues to ramble on about this. Hiram does not want to hear anymore as he drives to the local cafe. This is showing that Hiram's ways of thinking are changing and that Hiram is starting to disagree with Grampa's views.

Discussion Question 1

How does the move to Tempe, Arizona affect Hiram and Grampa? Why is it so important that Harlan makes this move?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Harlan allow Hiram to return to Greenwood? How does Hiram see that things are different? How are things the same?

Discussion Question 3

How does Hiram come into contact with Emmett again? Is the interaction more friendly than Hiram's first interaction with Emmett? Why does Hiram not tell Grampa about this?

Vocabulary

barren, sass, stubble, libations, rummaged, shanties, garbled, conniptions, rabble



Chapters 7 - 9

Summary

Hiram drives Grampa out to the Hillburn fields in Chapter 7. Grampa feels sorry for himself briefly as he cannot move the way he used to and he also reminisces about the relationship between himself and Harlan. Grampa begins to cry at this, making Hiram uncomfortable, but Grampa changes the subject to happier things to distract Hiram. Grampa takes Hiram to their fishing spot and next wants to visit the courthouse, making things like old times again. Grampa gives Hiram a dime so that he can visit Mr. Paul and get a root beer. Mr. Paul is surprised to see Hiram again and they begin a conversation about what is happening in Greenwood. Mr. Paul explains that many people are against desegregating the schools and Hiram questions whether people should just leave things alone. Hiram's nonchalant attitude towards this angers Mr. Paul and he talks about how he had to fix an African American school once and that he saw how badly those schools are. Mr. Paul also states that maybe God intended different races to be together to learn from them. Before Mr. Paul can go any further Grampa comes out of one of the offices and he and Hiram head home to dinner. As soon as dinner is finished, Grampa goes to bed, as being so busy during the day with Hiram has worn him out. As Hiram lays in bed that evening, he thinks of everything that has been said to him as well as his meeting with Emmett before switching his thoughts to seeing Naomi again.

Hiram sees R.C. for the first time in years in Chapter 8. R.C. is happy to see him and wants to resume their friendship by going fishing. He offers to bring beer but Hiram does not want any, causing R.C. to tease him. Hiram does not want to go fishing, but he figures this may be a way to get closer to Naomi, so Hiram accepts R.C.'s invitation. The next day, R.C. comes to Grampa's house, saying that he has been out all night. Hiram asks about Naomi and is once again teased about his relationship with her and R.C. tells Hiram that she is okay but he does not allow for many suitors. R.C. sees the lunch on the truck seat and says he does not want it as Ruthanne has made it and he does not like anything African Americans do. He also makes a mention of Hiram preferring African Americans, causing Hiram to start to regret his decision to go fishing with R.C. Hiram's regret gets worse when they see Ronnie Remington coming out of his house and R.C. tells Hiram of how he played a cruel prank on Ronnie that left him out in the country naked and afraid.

Once at the river a few miles away from Money, Hiram gets out to fish while R.C. stays in the truck to sleep. Hiram is able to think about his family and of how Grampa and Harlan would come fishing there. Hiram knows that Grampa loves to spend time with him, but he wonders if it is just to replace the feelings Grampa had for Harlan. He is disturbed from his musings by R.C. who is awake and has returned to drinking beer. R.C. sits down to lunch, forgetting who made it and Hiram eats with him. Afterwards, both R.C. and Hiram take a nap, but Hiram is awakened to the sounds of people playing nearby.



It is four African American males and Emmett is one of them. Once they see Hiram they stop, but Emmett acts as if he and Hiram are friends. Hiram mentions that lunch had recently made him drowsy and Emmett asks if there is any left. His cousins try to persuade him to leave the area, but Emmett continues. Hiram wants to end the encounter quickly so they can leave before R.C. wakes up, but Emmett wants to eat on the river bank beside Hiram. As soon as Emmett is on dry ground and about to take the lunch bag, R.C. wakes up. Emmett tries to explain that Hiram promised him the lunch, but R.C. becomes furious and pushes Emmett to the ground. R.C. then takes a fish, cuts out its guts and holds it over Emmett's face until Emmett chokes for air, allowing R.C. to shove the guts in Emmett's mouth. The entire time, Hiram and Emmett's cousins stand there powerless to stop R.C. As Emmett is carried away by the cousins, Hiram wants to say something but he cannot, as he is too ashamed of himself for allowing this to happen.

Hiram seeks Grampa's advice in Chapter 9, but Grampa tells him not to worry about what happened at the river. He also says that it is possible Emmett deserved to be mistreated as whites and African Americans should not be friends. This gets Hiram to thinking that maybe his father was right about his own views. The following days Grampa attends more White Citizens Council meetings causing him to look and act more worn out. Hiram also notices that he also his truck out to others who are in need of it more often. On one evening, Hiram is restless and wants to go out since Grampa is at another meeting. Hiram decides not to use the truck that has been recently returned and instead walks down to the Fulton Street Bridge. He finds Naomi there and they are both happy to see each other. During their conversation, Naomi vents her fears and frustrations to Hiram and he expresses some of his concerns about his family relationships before hugging her.

The next day, R.C. comes to visit Hiram in an attempt to keep Hiram from talking about what happened at the Tallahatchie River. Hiram is disgusted by R.C.'s behavior and warns him not to do it again plus he has no intention of lying for R.C. who says that Emmett's family complained to the local sheriff about him. Hiram says he will tell the truth if asked but R.C. says that the sheriff will not believe him as Hiram is not a local boy and that the matter is of no consequence anyways. R.C. also says that there has been trouble with at the Bryant General Store as an unnamed African American male has harassed a white lady. He plans on going with a group of men to talk to the male as he feels it is his duty to keep white women safe. Hiram is alarmed by this and threatens to call the law if anything should happen. R.C. assures him that the only thing that will happen is just talk, but Hiram is not so sure of this. When Hiram reenters the house, he considers waking Grampa up to tell him about what is happening, but he decides not to. Instead, he calls the local sheriff's office but he is told by one of the deputies that they do not have the time or the inclination to investigate this as the African American male is from Chicago and does not know the ways of the South. This alarms Hiram because he has figured out that the person in question is Emmett.



Analysis

Chapter 7 shows an intimate moment between Hiram and Grampa as Hiram drives out to the fields. Grampa feels remorse at not being able to get out and farm like he used to. There is a change in Grampa at this point as he seems remorseful that the relationship between himself and Harlan has deteriorated. This look at the relationship theme continues as Grampa goes on to question where he went wrong with Harlan as he does not understand what happened between them that Harlan had to leave the South. As Grampa thinks about this he is saddened and makes the admission that he does not like being without his family. This is significant as it shows that there is a desire to reconcile with Harlan and to change their relationship dynamic. Hiram is slightly uncomfortable at the sight of Grampa crying as it takes away from Grampa's usual upbeat attitude. This causes a silence between them momentarily, but Grampa is quick to deviate attention from this topic so that they can move on.

There is a brief trip close to Money, Mississippi to visit their old fishing area, but there is no specific details about this but it helps to shift Grampa's attitude back to his usual self. There is a suggestion made to do as he and Hiram have done in the past as he wants to stop by the courthouse to talk once again with the people working there. It is unknown how long it has been since he was last there, but once there he makes a pun to one of the people working there about his "stroke" of bad luck. The nostalgic action continues as Hiram is asked to go to Mr. Paul's concession stand for a bit. Mr. Paul is surprised to hear from Hiram again, beginning a conversation that starts out pleasantly about smaller topics, but it grows into a discussion on the theme of prejudice as Mr. Paul remembers going to an African American school before he went blind and of all the deteriorated conditions that are not found in "whites only" schools. This is the first time that Hiram's thoughts on segregation and civil rights are highlighted as he feels that African Americans should want to stay separate from whites. His feelings toward the subject suggest that he shares Grampa's viewpoints on God making the African Americans inferior to whites for a purpose. This infuriates Mr. Paul who goes on to suggest that the true purpose of different races is to teach one another about equality. Before anything else can be said, the conversation is cut short as Grampa emerges from one of the offices. This suggests that Mr. Paul is reluctant to speak about his views on equality as he knows that he and Grampa's views are opposite of one another.

Back at home a quiet dinner and Grampa's hurrying off to bed showcase the physical changes that have occurred to him; he can no longer travel around the county with Hiram as he once had when Hiram was younger. This physical toll is worrisome to Hiram who feels that he is powerless to do anything about it. Hiram has also picked up on Grampa's loneliness, but he also realizes that the relationship between Harlan and Grampa may be irrevocably damaged.

With thoughts of his father in mind, Hiram shifts to analyze the conversation he had with Mr. Paul earlier in the day. Hiram is beginning to make a transition of his own as he comes to realize that maybe there is a problem with segregation as African Americans have been oppressed and left with no hope of having better lives. This in turn begins a



spiral of thoughts as he considers his meeting with Emmett and how they are similar. The spiral continues to suggest that at this point, Hiram is now at a crossroads between believing his grandfather's message of prejudice or his father's message of equality. This is unsettling to him, but at the same time, he figures that segregation is bad but is not as bad as the recent events of the Holocaust making a brief comparison between the two. Since segregation is nothing like this, Hiram cannot fathom why people like his father are so upset. The chapter ends abruptly as his mind sharply deviates without any specific purpose from this to Naomi Rydell, hoping to see her again.

R.C. Rydell's interaction with Hiram is the focus of Chapter 8. The author portrays R.C. as having grown considerably, but with the same arrogant attitude. He is proud of the fact that he has quit school and is sarcastic towards Hiram for still being in school. Hiram is reluctant to interact with R.C. and tries to avoid more conversation, but R.C. is persistent in trying to resume what he feels is a friendship. R.C. wants to go fishing with Hiram again as they did when they were younger. It is clear that Hiram would rather have nothing to do with R.C. but he has continued feelings for Naomi, making this trip necessary. R.C. is elated to hear that Hiram will come with him and there an offering of beer, but Hiram's preference to not drink beer only causes R.C. to taunt Hiram more for his conservative habits.

At home, Grampa fully condones an outing with R.C.; knowing that R.C. has been a troublemaker recently, he feels that Hiram will be a more positive influence on him. The scene shifts to the next day, with Ruthanne preparing Hiram a lunch like the one Gramma made in a previous chapter. Hiram at this point is optimistic that he and R.C. will have a good time like the ones they have had before. When R.C. arrives, it is obvious that he has not slept during the previous night and it is possible that he is suffering from a hangover. At Hiram's mention of Naomi, R.C.'s past jokes about Hiram being in love with Naomi come back, but this time with a more ominous tone as he playfully warns that he likes to keep potential suitors away from her. This is possibly because R.C. is protective of his sister, but he makes it clear that Naomi has been made strong enough over the years to look out for herself.

The conversation shifts as he spots Ruthanne's lunch on the seat and R.C. shows his disdain for anything made by African Americans, clearly showing that R.C. is extremely prejudiced. His use of the derogatory term "nigger" is first seen here. It is upsetting to Hiram and even more so when R.C. accuses him of being favoring African Americans. R.C.'s further hatred of anyone who isn't like him is evident as Ronnie Remington comes out of his home just as Hiram is backing the truck out of the driveway. R.C. recounts what he considers to be a comical encounter with Ronnie as he sadistically plays a prank on Ronnie by driving him out in the country, forcing him to strip and leaving him naked. This memory shows that R.C.'s maniacal nature does not just pertain to African Americans, he uses it on anyone he does not like. This causes Hiram to question whether he has made a mistake in trying to befriend him again.

Hiram is successful this time in getting to Grampa's fishing spot outside of Money. Due to R.C. not having slept the night before, Hiram takes this opportunity to enjoy the solitude of the area while R.C. sleeps in the truck. This begins a progression of thoughts



about the relationship between himself and his father. He tries to imagine that Grampa and Harlan were once in this spot and that their relationship at one time may have been better than it is currently. At this point, Hiram begins to question whether Hiram has only been a substitute for Harlan even though Grampa has enjoyed spending a great deal of time with Hiram himself. This in turn provides another turning point for Hiram as he wishes to talk to his father about these things once he returns to Tempe at the end of summer.

These thoughts are dramatically interrupted by a rock flying by him. R.C. has awakened now and is in more of a pleasant mood. He seems to be happy as he fishes but it should be noted that he has had plenty of beer. By the time he gets into the lunch that Ruthanne has prepared, he is drunk and forgets that it was prepared by an African American. Hiram makes no movement to try to remind him of this, as he does not want R.C. to become enraged while in a drunken stupor.

The warmth of the day and the filling lunch cause Hiram to fall asleep himself. The amount of time Hiram sleeps is unknown, but he wakes up to the new sounds of others playing nearby. Hiram gets up and heads over to where four African American boys are playing. Not wanting to disturb them, Hiram observes them playing, but makes the quick recognition that Emmett is one of the boys. The boys are shocked to see Hiram sitting there, causing the play to immediately stop. Emmett feels that he has met up with a friend, causing him to be more at ease with Hiram sitting there. They resume what is considered to be traditional roles of how African Americans as they quit playing around and their demeanor changes. Only Emmett is brave enough to continue talking as he does not see why Hiram's presence should affect their playing. Hiram is cautious about this encounter, he does not want R.C. to wake up and see Emmett or his cousins interacting with him. Hiram makes the mention of eating Ruthanne's lunch and how it had caused him to take a nap, to which Emmett gets excited as he is hungry. It should be noted that the cousins are trying to get away from Hiram at this point, but Emmett is persistent. Hiram agrees to give Emmett the rest of his lunch but he insists on eating it up on the bank of the river with Hiram. Hiram knows that this is a dangerous situation. If R.C. should wake up, his actions at this point are unpredictable.

Emmett does not believe that R.C. could be mean, but as soon as Emmett takes a hold of the lunch bag R.C. is awake. This begins a frightening scene where R.C.'s prejudice causes him to act out in a particularly cruel and horrific manner. Emmett does not mean to make trouble but he is insistent that Hiram told him he could have Ruthanne's lunch. Hiram tries to diffuse the situation, knowing that R.C. could become violent at any moment, but it is unsuccessful, causing Hiram to back off in fear that he could be hurt. In retaliation for Emmett talking about wanting the bag, R.C. shoves him to the ground and pins him. He then cuts up a fish and shoves its guts in Emmett's face, suffocating him. Hiram is powerless to stop him. It is only when Emmett opens his mouth to breathe does R.C. relent after shoving the guts in Emmett's mouth. This disgusting display is meant to show the reader the full force of R.C.'s sadistic side. It should also be noted that the cousins have been watching the whole time but they have not been able to do anything about the situation either. They know that to try to get R.C. off of Emmett could mean further trouble at a later point. This entire scene causes Hiram a great deal of



humiliation, not only because someone he had hoped would become his friend had been hurt but that he was too scared to do anything about it.

Hiram is still feeling ashamed of himself upon his arrival at home in Chapter 9. This causes him to be noticeably different as he is quieter and less talkative. Grampa picks up on this immediately causing Hiram to tell of what happened and of the shame he now feels. Grampa is only sympathetic to a point towards the situation. On the one side, he understands Hiram's reluctance at doing anything to stop the situation, as he knows that R.C. could have easily hurt Hiram as well. On the other hand, Grampa just glosses over the incident saying that it was just a small bit of harassment that was pushed too far. Grampa also infers that Emmett got what he deserved, adding to his views of prejudice. Hiram questions whether he should inform the police, but Grampa quickly rejects this notion. This conversation is confusing and frustrating to Hiram. He cannot believe that Grampa has taken such a nonchalant attitude toward the incident. This triggers a wave of various thoughts within Hiram as he begins to question the validity of prejudice. The more he thinks about this the more he realizes that prejudice may be the wrong view to have of others. This also marks a significant change in Hiram as he realizes that his father may have been right about his views all along. Hiram's thought could also allude to the warning his father gave him in a previous chapter of not liking what he sees once he returns to Greenwood.

The narrative follows a slower pace as Hiram briefly discusses the slow moving days since the incident. He finds himself growing restless as Grampa is too tired to do much of anything during the day. It is to be especially noted that one of the reasons Grampa is so tired during the day is because he spends late evenings at White Citizens Council meetings. Hiram does not know who is included in these meetings or the subjects, nor is he inclined to ask. The segment shows that most days is spent in the routine of the old days, but with one noticeable addition that Grampa's truck is always being loaned out to others in the community. On one Thursday evening, after Grampa leaves for another White Citizens Council meetings, Hiram is restless as his thoughts return to Naomi. His desire to see her is overwhelming but he is unsure of what could happen between them.

The scene flows smoothly to show that Hiram has become so bored that he takes a walk in the late evening by the Fulton Street Bridge. It is here that he is finally reunited with Naomi and Hiram is overcome with emotion as he looks at her before saying anything. Naomi has visibly grown up, but there is still the same demeanor of sadness as she speaks. It is curious to note that Naomi has been hoping to see Hiram as much as he has been wanting to see her, making it possible to speculate that she has romantic feelings for him. After a small bit of talk, the topic of conversation focuses on R.C., giving more insight to his character as Naomi says that he is a troublemaker to get attention from anyone that will give it. The conversation touches lightly on the subject of their father, but Naomi's expression suggests that he is not a topic she would care to discuss. Instead, Naomi makes an allusion to running away from home, wondering if Hiram has ever felt this way. This feeling is a shared one as Hiram's relationship with his father has caused a great amount of tension. Upon knowing that it is one of the reasons Hiram has come to Greenwood, Naomi is satisfied with her question but she also wants



to know if fleeing from problem has helped Hiram. Hiram admits that while being in Greenwood he has had time to sort his feelings and there is another admission that now he is starting to reexamine his relationship with his father. Naomi is facing her own dilemmas with her role in the house as her father continues his alcoholism and because R.C., who has always been her protector, seems to be distancing himself from her for some unknown reason. The conversation ends quietly with Hiram hugging her as he can only say that he is sorry for her troubles.

The next scene involves another of the Rydell family. After dinner the next evening, Hiram continues to ponder the possibilities of communicating with his father when he arrives home. There is a brief examination of the connection between himself, Harlan, and Grampa and this gives Hiram hope that perhaps the damages done by constant arguing may be reversed. It is during this musing that R.C. unexpectedly pops in, full of the same arrogance as usual. Hiram is slightly disgusted to see him and uses the alibi that he has been spending too much time with Grampa to see R.C. He does not want to admit that he has been keeping his distance from R.C. ever since the incident with Emmett, but R.C. jokingly brings it up. Here, Hiram's attitude toward R.C. is noticeable as he gives the warning that R.C. is to never do anything like the past incident again. He is scared, but Hiram has finally changed to standing up for what he considers is right. R.C. dismisses that there was any previous wrongdoing by trying to establish that nothing happened that day other than catching fish along the river. Once Hiram assures R.C. that something negative did happen, R.C. uses this against Hiram in a manner which would suggest that Hiram is guilty by association. R.C. says this to possibly dissuade Hiram from making any statement to the local sheriff. R.C. proceeds to tell Hiram that Emmett filed a complaint with the sheriff's office after the fishing incident. Although Emmett does not know who exactly attacked him, he remembers R.C.. Due to R.C.'s nature, the sheriff checked in with R.C., but given the sheriff's own prejudicial nature is not really inclined to investigate more than asking where R.C. had been that day. This admission is the purpose of R.C.'s visit, which prompts Hiram to inform R.C. that he refuses to cover for him. R.C.'s reaction is typical by getting angry for Hiram's cowardly statement.

The situation quickly dies down as R.C.'s confidence in being believed more because he is considered a local boy and Hiram is not grows and R.C. quickly adds a new piece of information. R.C. is filled with glee to tell Hiram that an African American is in trouble as he supposedly harassed a white lady in a local store. He is excited about this because he has been invited to go with some of the other local men to sort this situation out. Given the prejudice of the area, it could be guessed that there is the possibility of violence ensuing against that African American, something that excites R.C.'s sadistic personality. Although R.C. assures Hiram that they are just going to "talk", Hiram understands that there is a potential for violence, making another warning to R.C. which is quickly dismissed. When Hiram reenters the house, he is faced with the dilemma of telling his grandfather and asking for advice. Hiram's decision to call Sheriff Smith backfires on him but the conversation illuminates the fact that even the law enforcement in the area is considerably prejudiced as one of the deputies' comments suggest that the African American in question comes from Chicago and that it is acceptable to teach people like him a lesson. This establishes a rising action that contributes to the



prejudice theme and to the course of the plot, especially when it is revealed that the African American in question is Emmett. This is alarming news for Hiram but he does not reveal Emmett's identity or how he knows him. The chapter closes with the deputy getting agitated with Hiram's desire to keep R.C. detained so there is no further trouble, worrying Hiram, causing a cliff hanging end.

Discussion Question 1

How does Mr. Paul feel about segregation? What happens to make him feel this way? How does this start to change Hiram's views?

Discussion Question 2

What happens when Emmett tries to get the lunch bag from Hiram? Why does R.C. treat Emmett so badly? Could this action have been stopped?

Discussion Question 3

What is Grampa's reaction to Hiram's fishing incident? Does this change how Hiram views his grandfather?

Vocabulary

cultivating, contrary, swig, integration, privies, rickety, smoldering, ricocheted, uppity, gumption, fretting



Chapters 10 - 12

Summary

Hiram dreams of his father in Chapter 10. In the dream, Hiram and his father are fishing and everything is perfect until Hiram walks away for a moment. When Hiram returns his father is gone leaving him to himself. When Hiram wakes up, he feels like he misses his father and he wants to talk to him. Hiram cannot stop thinking about Emmett and he asks Ruthanne about him at breakfast. She says that she has heard about what he has done and that hopefully he will be headed back to Chicago soon, thanking Hiram for being so concerned. Grampa sees that Hiram is preoccupied with something and takes him fishing but it does not work.. Afterwards, they go to the local cafe where they are greeted by many of the locals. At home, Grampa and Hiram are enjoying the evening together when some men knock on the door. Grampa goes outside to talk with them on the unlit porch before coming back in to tell Hiram he is going to a Council meeting. Hiram goes to bed without Grampa and wakes up not wanting to go anywhere in hopes of hearing from his parents although he does not call them himself. Another day passes and Grampa wants to go out to his fields and then to lunch. Along the way, Grampa and Hiram discuss how Grampa and Harlan's relationship deteriorated many years ago. Hiram thinks this is happening to him with his father as well, but he wants to change things and make them better. Grampa agrees that he should at least try to find some common ground to begin talking again. With this advice, Hiram states that he wishes that he has the same relationship with his dad that he does with Grampa.

When Hiram and Grampa get home later in the day, Ruthanne is not there. Instead, she has left a small note saying that she has been called away due to a family emergency. As Grampa goes to read the paper, he sees the front page which is a story about an African American male from Chicago being recently kidnapped by Roy Bryant and J.W. Milan. Hiram is shocked at this and believes that R.C. had something to do with this. He informs Grampa about what has been going on, but Grampa says that there is no way that R.C. could have been involved with this. As they are discussing this, Sheriff George Smith calls to talk to Hiram. He asks Hiram about his call the week before and then if he has seen R.C. anywhere. Sheriff Smith also asks Hiram when he is to return to Tempe and Hiram answers he is leaving on Wednesday but Sheriff Smith says that Hiram is not to leave town for a while.

Grampa calls Hiram's parents in Chapter 11 to tell them that Hiram will not be coming home for a while. Hiram's mother answers as his father is not home and Hiram tells her that he would like to talk to his father sometime to start mending their relationship. Soon after, Grampa contacts Sheriff Smith to ask why Hiram should be a part of the criminal investigation, but Sheriff Smith tells Grampa at this point it is a necessity. For a few days, nothing is found about Emmett's location until one Wednesday afternoon there is a full page article in the Greenwood Commonwealth that Emmett's body has been found in the Tallahatchie River. The article says that Emmett's body was found with a bullet hole in the head and a cotton gin pulley wrapped around his neck. Hiram is horrified to



learn that Emmett was brutally murdered and is convinced more than ever that R.C. has had a hand in this. Grampa is just as shocked as Hiram, if not more, but it is only because of the damage this crime could do to the community's reputation. Before Hiram can say anything to his Grampa about this, Naomi comes to give her condolences to Ruthanne and to talk to Hiram on the porch. Later, Grampa reads Hiram an article in the Greenwood Commonwealth about how the Northern people are the ones starting the trouble by placing the blame where it is not due, therefore they are spreading hate themselves. This causes Hiram to continue to be angry with Grampa, and even more so after Grampa says that after a great deal of thinking, Hiram should not involve himself in the criminal trial so that he can hurry up and go back to Arizona and put all of this behind him.

Hiram continues to worry about his circumstances in Chapter 12. He does not want to say anything against R.C. because R.C. might seek revenge against him. As he is thinking of these things, there is a knock at the door. Hiram answers it and a man gives him a court summons. Hiram takes the summons to Grampa who says that he would prefer if Hiram stays out of things, or at least not tell everything he knows about R.C. Hiram feels afraid as well, but he insists that he tell what he knows. This begins an argument between Grampa and Hiram. At first, Grampa seems to be concerned for Hiram's well being. As the argument wears on, Grampa finds other excuses for Hiram not to involve himself in the trial. Among those are the fact that Hiram did not actually witness any wrongdoing and that all he heard was just R.C. talking, then Grampa flips it to how Emmett got what he deserved, and finally to his reason of not wanting Hiram to be an embarrassment to the family. Grampa explains that when Harlan was younger people would look down on Grampa behind his back because Harlan did not go along with the ways of the South and that it caused Grampa a great deal of embarrassment. This news greatly upsets Hiram, but he is still determined to do what is necessary.

Hiram does not eat much at dinner and wants to go for a walk afterwards. He talks to Ruthanne for a moment before he goes, saying that he wishes he could have done more for Emmett. Ruthanne tells him that nothing can bring Emmett back but hopefully the ways of the South will change and it will finally start prosecuting white men for what they do to African Americans. When Hiram says he is going outside, Ruthanne tells him that she knows he is going to see Naomi and asks him to take out the trash as he goes. Once at the bridge, Naomi is waiting for him. The pair have a conversation about R.C. but Naomi does not believe that R.C. could have killed someone. Hiram tells her about what R.C. did at the river and about the possibilities of R.C. being an accomplice to Emmett's kidnapping and murder. He also tells Naomi that he has received a court summons to testify in the upcoming trial. This causes Naomi to worry about Hiram. She says that the potential for revenge will be too great if Hiram testifies and she wants him to do whatever it takes to stay away from the trial.

Analysis

Chapter 10 begins with a dream in which Hiram is fishing on the river with his father who suddenly disappears after Hiram walks around for a bit. This can be seen as a



metaphor on the relationship between Hiram and his father as Hiram feels that he loves his father, the damage caused by their constant arguing over the years may have made their relationship damaged beyond repair. This causes a lonely feeling in Hiram when he wakes up as he misses his father more than ever before. During the day, Hiram's thoughts are squarely on Emmett and what could have happened. The only thing he can do at this point is to ask Ruthanne. Her answer suggests that the incident at the Bryant General Store has become a topic of conversation in the Money community. She is more upset that Emmett could be so insulting but has little care for the consequences, thinking that Emmett will leave soon to go safely back to Chicago. She finds it kind of Hiram to be concerned with Emmett, but little else is said about the situation.

Grampa's attempts to cheer up Hiram's melancholy fail as Grampa takes him fishing, but the attempt is only a small one as afterwards Grampa brushes off any thought of sadness. His idea of going to dinner at the local cafe is the main thing on his mind at this moment, but it is more for his own good than Hiram's. The experience as a whole at the cafe is an uplifting moment for Grampa but not for Hiram. People that Hiram has never met before come over to their table to speak with Grampa. Hiram notes that this activity is slightly unusual as for the most part they are left to themselves any other time, but the outburst of communication with others has made Grampa seem healthier than he has been in a long time. Back at home, another unusual event happens when there is a knock at the door towards the later part of the evening. In a switch from the normal routine of having men come into the home to talk to Grampa, he goes outside to talk to them and it is even more so unusual that he prefers to do so with the porch light off. Grampa passes this off as "Council" business to Hiram. He suggests that Hiram go to bed and not wait up for him, this part is not unusual as Hiram has done this many times before. The next morning brings Grampa more tired than usual, but for an unknown reason, Hiram is as well. The most notable thing about this morning is that Hiram wishes to just stay home. The reader should see that he is greatly missing his parents, but due to the strained relationship with his father, Hiram decides not to call home. Instead, Hiram passes the time wishing that his father would call him, which is a change from how Hiram has felt about him at the beginning of his stay in Greenwood.

The concept of relationships is the most notable part of the next scene as Grampa takes Hiram to the fields and to lunch. Hiram is still preoccupied with Emmett's situation, but he also has questions regarding his father and Grampa's relationship and how it is a parallel to his own relationship with his father. As Hiram asks Grampa about the things he and Harlan used to do together, there is a small backstory, giving the reader the chance to see the deterioration between Grampa and Harlan's relationship. The relationship is described as being a good one until Harlan started getting older and questioning Grampa's way of life. In the past, Grampa figured that the only way to get Harlan to see and appreciate Southern ways is to immerse him into it completely. This made Harlan object to Grampa's way of life even more, eventually causing the current mistrust and lack of communication between them. Hiram is able to see the correlation of how he and his father are towards one another. This in turn causes Hiram to further feel that there is a necessity to patch things up with his father. Hiram vocalizes this, but he also has fears that the relationship cannot be fixed as they are both too alike to see each other's points of view. Grampa agrees to this, but he also offers the advice that



Hiram should at least try to see if they both come to some sort of compromise. The conversation comes to a close as Hiram makes the wish that the relationship he has with his father could be more like the one he shares with his grandfather.

Back at home the Hillburn men are faced with the unusual circumstance of Ruthanne being gone. The only clue to her being gone is a note that informs them of an undisclosed family tragedy. There is not thought or questioning of Ruthanne's whereabouts, and they try to move on with their evening. When Grampa starts to read his newspaper, there is a shocking discovery on the front page. The article is of a young African American man from Chicago who has been kidnapped for making inappropriate comments towards a white woman. This discovery is a plot device to advance the reader closer to the climax of the story. This also introduces 2 new characters, Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam as they are the men who have been arrested for this crime. There are many emotions that Hiram is feeling at this point which is vocalized as he tells his Grampa that he knows what is going on. Instantly he feels that R.C. has had a hand in this crime as the article states that there is a third person the police are searching for. Grampa's initial reaction to this is of shock as well but it quickly turns to trying to calm Hiram as Hiram finally gives Grampa the full story. Grampa is trying to provide some sort of excuse for R.C. as he does not believe that R.C. could have had a part in this, no matter his public reputation. Coincidentally, as Hiram and Grampa are deliberating this, Sheriff George Smith is introduced as he is calling Hiram with the follow up to Hiram's previous call to the department. The reader should remember in a previous chapter that Hiram's plea for help went unnoticed, but now it has the sheriff's full attention. There has been no contact with R.C. since the night he first announced he was going to Money, but the sheriff is looking for him. The need for Hiram to cancel his upcoming departure from Greenwood is delayed as Sheriff Smith requests that Hiram stay until this situation is resolved. This is another plot device to advance Hiram's involvement in the main action of the story.

Chapter 11 begins with the first contact that Hiram has had with his parents all summer long. Hiram and Grampa do not go into too many details on why Hiram has to stay in Greenwood as they talk to Hiram's mother. She shows concern about how Hiram's father will react to this news as it is known that he would not want Hiram to stay there, but Hiram assures her that he will be home soon. He also vocalizes an interesting point in that he wants to actually have a discussion with his father at some point to begin resolving some of their issues. Hiram has made the full conclusion that his father's ideas are not out of the ordinary and that perhaps Hiram was wrong in the past to think otherwise. The conversation ends soon after that and in minutes Grampa has contacted Sheriff Smith. Grampa is conflicted as to Hiram's involvement in this case. There is no way to circumvent the law, however it is apparent that Grampa would like for Hiram to stay out of this potentially to protect Hiram. At this point there is speculation that R.C. is the third man who has gone unnamed and he still has Emmett.

Some of the minor details in Emmett's kidnapping are given by Ruthanne once she comes in the house. The white men who came to her uncle's home refused to listen to reason or any sort of pleading as they came to collect him. There is nothing significant in this except for that they came in the middle of the night. There is no other new



information offered by the media outlets as the scene skips ahead two days later where the climax of the novel occurs. This climax is given in the form of a news article from the local newspaper. The article delves into the major details of the search and recovery efforts as well as a description of what had happened to Emmett's body, particularly the bullet hole in his head and the cotton gin pulley wrapped around his neck.

This news is sickening to Hiram, he harbors feelings of guilt that he could have done something stop this. Since there is no direct correlation to R.C. mentioned in the article, Hiram is left to question whether R.C. had any hand in this crime. The reader should be aware that a slight change has occurred in Grampa upon reading that Emmett is dead. There is a certain air of sadness around him as he says that he cannot believe the boy is dead. His actions suggest that he has remorse for the loss of Emmett's life. This feeling does not last for more than a few statements as Grampa becomes slightly arrogant in that he suggests that Hillburns have better class than to associate themselves with poor people like the Rydells. As Grampa continues to go on a monologue there is a strong hint that his focus is not on Emmett and never was, his reactions have more to do with the negative publicity that the town will receive. Before Hiram can give a proper reply, the scene is disrupted by the arrival of Naomi. After briefly giving Ruthanne her condolences, there is a small discussion between Hiram and Naomi. The conversation only serves as a slight distraction from the main course, but it adds to the romantic intrigue between Hiram and Naomi.

This crime has had a divisive effect on the community as there are those that support Bryant and Milam for their action but there are those that oppose them as well. The Greenwood Commonwealth is an outlet that presents itself as being the voice of the people, especially with an article a few nights later. It is a condemnation of what they consider Northern ideas and it serves the purpose of maintaining the prejudiced Southern lifestyle in a way that shifts the blame for what has happened to Emmett on African American groups and sympathizers. Grampa delights in this article and feels that it is the vocalization of what he and others in the community are thinking. There is a brief focus on R.C. again as Hiram wonders why R.C. has not been mentioned by the papers or anyone else in the area. Grampa once again is quick with a dismissive answer about this, but it is also curious that he once again maintains that Hiram should stay out of things so he can hurry up and get back to Arizona.

Chapter 12 highlights the beginning of a rift between Grampa and Hiram as they disagree on how to handle Emmett's murder. This is brought about by the summons Hiram receives from the court listing him as a witness in the upcoming trial of J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant. The evening begins as usual with Grampa and Hiram waiting for dinner to be served, but Hiram is thinking about his predicament with R.C. Hiram is not afraid to tell what he knows, but he is slightly scared of the consequences of having to deal with R.C.'s anger. Grampa at this point is adamant that Hiram keeps himself out of these proceedings. It begins out of concern for Hiram and his safety, using the excuse that R.C. could come after Hiram. Grampa makes the subtle suggestion that even if he does appear in court, Hiram does not have to give the court an account of everything that happened. The scene continues on a downward spiral as Grampa is clearly trying to shield Hiram from any sort of sort of repercussion, but Hiram feels that it is his moral



duty to help seek justice for Emmett. Hiram does not want to testify against R.C. but he cannot let him or the other men get away with murdering another human being.

The division between Hiram and Grampa is clear at this point. Hiram is choosing to do the right thing, no matter what the cost. This is in direct conflict with Grampa's feelings on the subject, but there is also more to Grampa's reasons for not wanting Hiram to testify. Grampa tries to employ logic into the conversation as he gives another excuse for Hiram to not testify. This time, Grampa states that there is no exclusive evidence to what Hiram will be testifying about. There is also a brief allusion to what R.C. told Hiram after the encounter R.C. had with Emmett, which is a reminder that Hiram is not a native to the area any longer and that his word will not carry the same weight as a local person's like R.C. At the end of this brief monologue is the ultimate excuse that is at the heart of Grampa's reasoning. Here the reader will see that Grampa is actually more worried about his own reputation than Hiram's safety. This comes from the conflict between himself and Harlan many years ago. There is a backstory given here that Grampa was once considered as a social outcast because of Harlan's ways. This finally hits the root of Grampa's character in terms of his relationship with Harlan.

Hiram is beyond shocked about this sudden revelation and it is noticeable that this has caused a conflict between himself and Grampa. He feels that he could have done more to protect Emmett and the theme of justice is introduced here as Ruthanne evaluates the situation. Her feeling is that while nothing can bring Emmett back, this is the catalyst that will hopefully bring about a change in Southern society that will properly prosecute men for their crimes, even if they are white. Hiram does not have much to say about Ruthanne's optimism and the scene changes direction as he announces he is going for a walk. Ruthanne's observant nature also allows her an omniscient knowledge of why Hiram really wants to get out of the house to see Naomi. She finds Hiram's desire to cover this up comical as she tells him to take out the trash on his way out.

The scene between Naomi and Hiram is short and offers a look at Naomi's feelings toward Hiram. She has evacuated from her home as her father is on a drunken rage from R.C. being wanted by the police. It is presumed that the Fulton Street Bridge is the only place that she comes to when her father has been drinking. The conversation between Naomi and Hiram begins with concern for R.C. and his new status as being wanted by the law. Naomi is clearly worried for her brother but she is unaware of why R.C. is wanted. This gives Hiram the opportunity to tell her what he knows of the situation and about the summons he has received. Naomi does not believe that R.C. could be a killer although there is the admission that R.C. can be violent. The ensuing conversation is worrisome to Naomi. Out of her feelings for Hiram, there is the request that Hiram stay away from the trial. She is concerned that Hiram could be possibly hurt if he reveals anything in the courtroom. Like Grampa, she is also worried about the possible repercussions that testifying against white men would bring, not only upon Hiram but his family as well.



Discussion Question 1

What does Hiram's dream about his father mean? How are some ways Hiram can begin to have a better relationship with his father?

Discussion Question 2

How does Grampa react to the news of Emmett's kidnapping and murder? Why does he want Hiram to stay out of this?

Discussion Question 3

What could possibly happen to Hiram if he testifies in court? Is this going to stop Hiram?

Vocabulary

Glum, quivered, deplorable, indignation, indiscriminate, fretted, subpoena, agitators, contrary, fugitive



Chapters 13 - 15

Summary

Hiram walks Naomi home in Chapter 13 where she tells him again to stay away from the trial but Hiram assures her that he probably will not testify. For the next few days, Hiram has been in constant contact with his mother, except for one instance where his father tells him that he will be there if Hiram needs him. Hiram is comforted by this, but promises his father that he will be fine. School starts for the year, but Hiram does not attend the local school. Instead, Hiram sticks around home every day listening to Grampa rant about the changing segregation laws and why he does not like them. In the meantime, J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant are indicted for Emmett's murder and a trial is announced to take place soon. During a visit to the courthouse, Hiram gets another opportunity to talk to Mr. Paul. Hiram asks for advice as to what to do about the trial and Mr. Paul tells him that he should do what is right even if he is scared. Later, Hiram wants to see Naomi at the but she does not come. As he stands on the bridge alone, Hiram thinks about his identity and what is the right thing for him to do. ONce he is finished with thinking of these things, Hiram comes to the conclusion that the only choice he has is to stay in Greenwood and testify.

The trial begins in Chapter 14. Hiram drives Grampa to the courthouse in Sumner county and the area is filled with people. Once inside the courtroom, deputies are waiting to seat people with people who have been summoned sitting first. The African Americans are seated last in the back of the room, including a prominent senator from Michigan. The jury selection is first and Hiram asks about African Americans being on the jury. Grampa says that there are none because they have to be registered voters first and many African Americans are not registered. J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant sit at their table listening to the jury selection but they are also acting as if this is just a social outing. The first part of the day wraps up and Grampa takes Hiram to a small cafe nearby. After lunch, Hiram notices a can that is sitting at the end of a table designated for Milam and Bryant's defense fund. Grampa puts a few dollars in himself, but the can is already overflowing with money.

The next day, Emmett's mother comes in but she too has to sit in the back of the room amidst hateful looks from others in the room. Jury selections continue until the afternoon when the full jury is selected. The trial is postponed until the next day as the prosecution would like to add more witnesses to their list. While at home, Hiram wants to go see Naomi and tell her about the trial, but Grampa persuades Hiram to stay inside as he does not know if anyone could try to hurt him because of the trial. During the next day, Emmett's uncle testifies that it was Milam that came to the door in the middle of the night to kidnap Emmett. The defense gets a chance to question Emmett's uncle but the attorney twists the testimony around to make it sound as if Emmett's uncle cannot properly identify Milam as one of the kidnappers. One of the local sheriff's is brought in to testify, but the jury is taken out of the courtroom first as the defense says that the sheriff does not have any testimony that is strictly about the murder trial although the



sheriff does say that Milam and Bryant admitted to the kidnapping part of the charges when they were arrested.

The undertaker for the African American community also provides testimony as he was the one who was among the first to identify Emmett's body after it had been found in the river. The undertaker describes what had been done to Emmett's body and the fact that the most identifiable thing about Emmett was the ring on his hand that belonged to his father. The defense discredits this testimony saying that the body had been so badly decomposed that it could have been anyone's and was probably planted in the river by Northern civil rights activists. Another sheriff also testifies that the body had been in the river for quite some time, so the body could not possibly be Emmett's. The next witness is Emmett's own mother who talks about how she instructed Emmett to mind his manners while in Mississippi and that she knew just by looking at the body that it was Emmett. One of the last witnesses for the prosecution is another young African American male who says that he saw Emmett in the back of a blue pickup truck with Milam and that he could hear someone yelling in a barn before seeing Milam come out of it. Once again, the defense is able to discredit this testimony, citing that the witness is confused as to actual distances and he could not possibly tell what was really going on at the time because the witness was far away from the barn. During this time, Grampa asks Hiram to make sure that he remembers that he and Grampa were at home during the day and that they were both too tired to go anywhere. Hiram agrees that this was the case and Grampa is slightly relieved.

The final witness is Mrs. Bryant, who is helped to the stand by the defense attorney. During the questioning she describes in detail what happened at the store when she was supposedly harassed. The jury is taken out of the room because the judge does not feel that this needs to be heard by the jury, it just needs to be in the court records. Mrs. Bryant goes on to tell of an African American man who made several inappropriate comments, causing disruption in the court by the white audience. At the end of the questioning, Mrs. Bryant makes the revelation that she actually does not know who Emmett is and that she does not know the name of any African American.

The trial ends in Chapter 15 after the defense calls character witnesses for Milam and Bryant who all say that the men are an asset to the community and are too nice to have done such a crime. The prosecutor lays out all of the witnesses' facts during his closing statements, but the defense attorney uses confusion and intimidation to tell the jury that civil right activists are to blame for this trial and that they should not convict Milam or Bryant as doing so would be offensive to their heritage. While Grampa is taking a nap, the jury deliberates its decision and Hiram is sure that the men will be convicted. An hour later, the jury comes back with its verdict. They find that Milam and Bryant are not guilty of murder, causing an explosion of celebration. Grampa is also happy that the trial is over but Hiram is disgusted by the happiness of the people in the room. As Hiram and Grampa get up to leave, Milam looks at Grampa, smiles and waves, but Grampa acts like he does not see him, causing Hiram to wonder why Grampa has done this. On the way out, Hiram overhears a newscaster ask one of the sheriffs about what is happening and the sheriff replies that anyone who wants to find trouble in his area will meet the same fate as Emmett, causing Hiram to want to get away as fast as he can.



Analysis

Chapter 13 begins right where Chapter 12 ends as Naomi and Hiram continue to talk as he walks her home. The exchange is short and it reiterates Naomi's desire for Hiram to keep himself away from the trial. Hiram is optimistic that he will not have to testify and that the summons is only a formality, but there is an unease as he says it.

The scene jumps forward by an unknown amount of days. During this time, Hiram's mother has been the primary contact between Hiram and the rest of his family. There is only one instance where Hiram talks to his father. This occasion is remarkable as Harlan expresses genuine concern for Hiram's safety as he tells Hiram that he will travel to Greenwood if it is necessary. This shows that there is a possibility that the relationship between Hiram and Harlan can be saved, especially as Hiram is comforted by his father's words.

The next scene is a brief description of how Hiram spends his days since school has started in Greenwood but Hiram does not attend. There is nothing truly special to note along the lines of plot development, but it does touch on the theme of change as Hiram discusses how Grampa is upset about the integration laws being enacted and the fact that masses of civil rights activists have come to the area, hoping to further enact equality rights for African Americans. There is also a major change in that J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant are indicted and are to stand trial for Emmett's murder. This is significant as no other white men have been convicted of violence against an African American. The possibility that the trial would not start until the following spring is a bother to Hiram, but he is quickly given the information that the trial would start in only a matter of days.

Hiram is still conflicted as to what he should do. For the most part, he keeps his thoughts on his conflict to himself, possibly to avoid another argument with Grampa or others who share Grampa's same views. It is only Mr. Paul, who Hiram visits while Grampa is visiting others in the courthouse, that offers any sort of logical reasoning that may help Hiram to come to any sort of resolution. The conversation shows Mr. Paul being sympathetic to Hiram's dilemma, but Mr. Paul also offers the wisdom that although Hiram is scared, he should not be intimidated by others and achieve his own goals. This conversation is useful in aiding Hiram remain satisfied with his decision to testify in court.

Hiram's desire to see Naomi after dinner is a ploy to continue to satisfy his fears and to ensure that he is doing the right thing. Unfortunately, Naomi does not show up at the bridge, although the reasons are not given, it can be assumed that Naomi is home caring for her father. Although there is no opportunity for interaction between Hiram and Naomi, this is an opportunity for Hiram to examine his options and to reflect on his identity and morality. Hiram ponders the possibility of running away from the trial, adding to his conflict over whether or not to testify. He wonders about what kind of person he would be if he did that and the consequences of his actions. Hiram makes his decision to skip the trial altogether, but he digresses back into a conflict over whether this is the



right thing to do. Again Hiram's morality is the motivation for making his decision as he cannot let Emmett's death be in vain. With finding new strength in his cause to seek justice for Emmett, however small, the chapter concludes with a powerful message that Hiram is bound and determined to testify in court.

Chapter 14 is the longest chapter of the novel and contains the bulk of the murder trial of J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant. The trial is located in the small village of Sumner at the Tallahatchie County courthouse. It is the morning of the trial start and a brief description of the village is given. There is also a side note given that Hiram and Grampa are very tired as they arrive in the area as the arguments over Hiram's involvement in the case lasted late into the previous evening. The argument concludes with Grampa making the sarcastic comparison of Hiram to Harlan, but Hiram is proud of this.

The scene at the courthouse is described as slightly chaotic as Hiram tries to park the truck nearby. There is also an awareness that Grampa is becoming more and more uncomfortable with actually being there and is continuing to try to talk Hiram out of this. It should also be noted that there are more people in the area, especially from around the nation crowding the streets. This trial has become a national event, but law enforcement is keeping a tight watch on everything and it should be noted that the African Americans are still sectioned off from the whites. This also includes the courtroom, but there is a clear difference in how African Americans are seated with just a few benches at the rear of the room. Even an African American senator from Michigan is treated poorly by the authorities, showing that there is no special treatment given to any African Americans no matter who they are.

The trial begins with selection of jurors by both the prosecuting attorney and the defense. It should be noted that Grampa highly approves of the defense counsel as a man who has the same beliefs as Grampa. The reader should note that only white men are considered eligible for jury duty. It is possible for an African American to vote, however it is improbable as the requirement for anyone to be on a jury is that they also have to be a registered voter in the area. This is quickly dismissed as the Southern way of life, although it is peculiar to Hiram that the jury will be so one sided. During this time, the nonchalant actions of Milam and Bryant suggest that they could care less about the trial as the men sat leisurely in their seats, something that is disconcerting to Hiram. The morning goes on with the selections, but no other detail is given, making the scene jump ahead to lunch. There is little in the lunch scene although Grampa is still trying to convince Hiram it would be in his best interest to forget about the trial and go home. The only significant item in this is the foreboding comment concerning Grampa's reasons for being there at the trial although he does not elaborate on this. A can reading "Bryant and Milam Defense Fund" is an item that Hiram finds curious as it is filled with money already from unknown supporters.

Skipping ahead to the next day, there is a slight diversion from the jury selection as Emmett Till's mother enters. The same mistreatment that other African Americans have endured applies to his mother in terms of law enforcement being rude, but the majority of the other whites in the courtroom also make their animosity towards her known. Hiram feels sorry for Emmett's mother and makes a comparison to his mother. There is



little detail about the day's proceedings, but the jury has been officially selected and the trial will take place on the next day. This is due to the surprise witnesses with new testimony that has been introduced to help convict Milam and Bryant.

The evening at home does not bring much conversation, but the fear of retaliation by any of the local people who support Milam and Bryant is enough to force Hiram to stay inside for the night. There is an uncertainty as to whether or not Hiram will actually testify in the trial, but Grampa remains adamant that Hiram is being too stubborn for his own good. Grampa's demeanor is changing with this as he becomes more angry that Hiram is sticking to his desire to testify. There is nothing more to the evening, allowing the narrative to jump right to the start of the trial the next morning. The prosecutor's main objective with the first witnesses is to identify Milam and Bryant as two of the men at the home of Emmett's uncle on the night in question. These are mostly African Americans, whose testimony is met with vocal disapproval from the white audience, especially as Emmett's uncle is able to positively point out the accused men. The defense's quick use of an objection to the uncle's testimony is questionable as there is no real grounds for it except to delay the proceedings. Emmett's uncle describes the action on the night Emmett was kidnapped and shows that Milam and Bryant not only kidnapped Emmett but threatened Emmett's family with violence after the family tried to negotiate with them. Along with this testimony, there is the addition of more people involved, including a woman and another man. The testimony does not cover the search for Emmett, only the initial kidnapping and the discovery in the Tallahatchie River. The ring belonging to Emmett's father is a crucial item in identifying Emmett's body according to his uncle's testimony.

It should be noted that the defense's attitude toward the witnesses is very coarse especially toward Emmett's uncle and the other African American witnesses. There is not the same amount of respect given and the defense attorney is extremely condescending. This tactic shows not only the attorney's own prejudice but is successful in making Emmett's uncle nervous enough to admit that he could not see clearly in the dark to make absolutely sure that the large bald man at his door was in fact J.W. Milam. For some reason, this is amusing to the defense as his questions are finished, but this admission also is able to provide a certain amount of doubt to the jury. The local sheriff is called upon to testify next, but a strange occurrence ensues as the jury is excused from hearing this testimony on behalf of the defense. It is questionable as to why the judge allows this action, but the defense feels that this sheriff has nothing to add to the murder charges and the testimony will not be of any use. There is very little questioning that takes place, other than the sheriff saying that the two accused men actually admitted to the kidnapping. Although this provides the motive and the ability to kill Emmett, this testimony is quickly thrown out as both the judge and the defense feel it does not establish the fact that Emmett is actually dead.

The next witness is subject to the same harsh questioning by the defense after only a short period of questioning by the prosecutor. This witness is the funeral director for the African American community but since he has had no formal education in funerals or body identification, he too is deemed as having unreliable information. The defense lawyer finds this comical and is extremely sarcastic concerning this witness. For the



reader, this information is highly credible to establish the fact that the body that was found is in fact Emmett's, but the defense is distorting this information in a way to make it seem that the body is an unknown person who could have easily been planted to cause a media frenzy on the behalf of the civil rights movement. This speculation is made more believable by another sheriff's testimony. The comparison between this sheriff and the previous one is not only that this testimony has been admitted and the jury has remained but by the fact that this sheriff claims the body has been in the water for over two weeks instead of the three days it took to find Emmett.

When Emmett's own mother takes the stand the Hiram has an immense feeling of remorse for this situation. The reaction in the courtroom is similar as to when she walked in, looks of fury and hatred from the white audience. The prosecution is shown as the only ones to ask her any questions, mainly relating to the reason why Emmett was in Money in the first place and how she was properly able to identify his body. In the first question, the theme of stereotypical roles makes an appearance as she testifies that she warned Emmett that he should not act like he normally does in Chicago, according to the traditional role of African Americans in this area. She also mentions the ring on his hand as a way to truly identify his body, but she knew just by looking at the body that it was Emmett.

With Emmett's mother completing her testimony comes another African American witness whose main purpose is to identify Emmett riding in the back of a blue pickup truck. This is curious to the reader as it is known that Grampa also has a blue pickup truck. There is slight interruption in the narrative of the trial as well as a subtle hint that Grampa's discomfort is growing as he asks Hiram to reassure him that Hiram had seen him all day on Sunday. Hiram is confused as to why Grampa needs this assurance during this particular time, but he dismisses any speculation as Grampa is just becoming bored and hot in the room. The testimony given here is the longest part of the testimony as the witness identifies Milam as one of the men in the truck with Emmett and the fact that they go to a nearby barn. The defense is quick to argue that the witness has no sense of distance or actual facts as the witness was so far away from where the truck actually was. This is met with the same sarcasm and bullying that the other African American witnesses faced but the witness's rattled nerves is successful in ensuring that the people now have to speculate whether the witness truly knows the identity of the people in the truck and barn. Without including Hiram, the prosecutor's witness list is completed, with the hopes that there is enough evidence to fully convict Milam and Bryant.

It is noted that there is no defense testimony from the accused men themselves. There is no reason given for this, and the defense has only one person that they call to the stand. The final witness in the trial is Mrs. Bryant herself. The author makes use of the overly grand gesture by the defense attorney to help her get to the stand shows his arrogance to the reader but it is really a fake show to the public about what a considerate gentleman he is. Again, the jury is excused under the guise of the Mrs. Bryant's testimony being unrelated to the actual murder. This causes the question of why this individual has been called to testify, except for court records. Mrs. Bryant seems nervous on the stand until she looks at her husband for support, and although no



visible sign is given, she automatically composes herself. She gives a verbal account of what happened on the day she was allegedly harassed by a young African American. This testimony gives Hiram a moment to think about previous testimony and there is a recollection that there was a woman in the car on the night Emmett was kidnapped. The testimony is met with loud reactions which show the prejudice of the people in the room. The testimony continues but it is unclear whether or not the actual person who harassed Mrs. Bryant was Emmett himself. This is further enhanced as the chapter closes with Mrs. Bryant making the revelation that she does not actually know who Emmett is or the actual identity of any African American, but it should be considered as a possible cover for her husband as she looks at him before making this statement.

Chapter 15 sees the end of the trial as the attorneys make their final remarks after the defense attorneys bring in several character witnesses to attest to the fact that Milam and Bryant are honorable men. They do not add to the actual case at hand but are used to show that Bryant and Milam are upstanding members of the community. The final remarks by both men are completely different as the prosecutor tries to maintain that Emmett was a child that Milam and Bryant murdered in cold blood and gave a small list of facts that were presented in the previous testimonies. The defense's remarks are more scattered. They range from Milam and Bryant being too honest of men to do any such thing to once again claiming that civil rights activists from the north planted the body in the river to make the South look bad. The defense attorney also insinuates that convicting the two men would be the jury's way of turning their backs on the traditions they grew up with. This is used as a possible way to exploit the prejudiced jury into ensuring that Milam and Bryant go free. This concludes the trial, much to Hiram's relief.

There is a brief pause in the flow of the court proceedings to allow for the jury to deliberate and during this time Grampa is asleep. Hiram uses this time to consider the facts that have been presented and to Hiram the evidence and testimony should guarantee a conviction. The jury does not take long, it is only an hour before they come back with a verdict. The acquittal given to Bryant and Milam is met with celebration by the white audience, but no reaction by the African Americans in the room is given. The media has the ability at this point to take pictures and interviews and Milam and Bryant are happy as they receive cigars, handshakes and other happy comments from the people around. Only Hiram and Grampa do not share in this moment. There is no visible reaction from Hiram, although the first person point of view allows the reader to see Hiram's disgust and confusion as to how this has happened. Grampa is relieved, possibly due to the fact that this is over without Hiram having to testify, but there is also a sort of relief that the entire process is over. An odd occurrence happens as Milam looks directly at Grampa and he makes a happy gesture towards him. There is a certain mystique to this as it is unknown if Grampa actually knows Milam, but Hiram makes note that Grampa pretends not to see Milam do this. On the way out, there is a hint that these men truly were guilty as a reporter asks one of the sheriffs about these recent events with the answer by the sheriff being a threatening one about what happened to Emmett will happen to anyone who has been sending hate mail about the trial. The chapter closes with Hiram overhearing this, and due to his disappointment with how the trial ended, he is ready to leave and put this behind him.



Discussion Question 1

What is so significant about the trial of J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant? How will it affect the civil rights movement?

Discussion Question 2

How does the defense attorney act toward the African American witnesses? Is his behavior different towards the white ones?

Discussion Question 3

Why are Milam and Bryant acquitted of murder? What is the courtroom's reaction? How do Grampa and Hiram's reactions differ?

Vocabulary

Bailiff, impartial, prospective, knobby, mortuary, snickered, relevance, brogue, accosted, foyer



Chapters 16 - 17

Summary

In Chapter 16, Grampa and Hiram argue once they return home from the trial as Grampa wants Hiram to forget about the whole ordeal. Grampa wants Hiram to never speak about this again, but Hiram continues to analyze why the men were acquitted. At dinner they are silent with one another and Hiram leaves to go for a walk afterwards. He wants to see if Naomi is at the bridge, but instead of seeing Naomi, R.C. is standing there. R.C. has recently been in a fight and he reveals that he and his father had a vicious fight once he returned home from Jackson, where he has been working and living for the last month. R.C. says that his father was upset that R.C. is no longer around to give him money for alcohol and he started to beat R.C., but R.C. finally found the courage to fight back. Hiram asks about Naomi and he says that he left her with their father as she wanted to stay behind to help him. R.C. also says that he knows she and Hiram have been seeing each other, but she may not want to see him right now because of the current situation. R.C. then tells Hiram that he is in town as he has been to the sheriff's office to get help for his father and to admit what he has done. He also says that he was asked about being involved with Emmett's kidnapping but R.C. tells the sheriff that he left for Jackson shortly after visiting Hiram, therefore he is no longer a suspect in any crime. R.C. knows that it was Hiram who mentioned R.C.'s possible involvement, but he does not say anything further about this. R.C. says that he is hopeful life will get better for him in Jackson and that Naomi can make up her own mind if she wants to join him there or not later. As R.C. finishes this, he tells Hiram goodbye and he leaves for the bus station.

Hiram wants to see Naomi but she does not come to the bridge that night. He goes home to sleep, but he does not do much of this. In the morning, he lies dozing in bed when he hears Grampa and another man discussing the sale of his truck. Hiram listens in as the man tells Grampa that he will make sure the truck is taken out of town to be sold. When Hiram comes downstairs for breakfast, he asks about the truck, but the only thing that Grampa will say is that he is selling the truck to get a new car. Hiram is suspicious about this, but Grampa becomes angry again, telling Hiram that he should not interfere. The subject is changed to Hiram needing to prepare to go home, but Grampa does not mention Hiram staying any longer or coming back next summer, which slightly hurts Hiram's feelings.

After breakfast, Hiram goes outside to walk to Naomi's house, but he runs into Ralph Remington. He is surprised to see Hiram and begins to babble about keeping secrets and Hiram finds himself wanting to know what Ralph is talking about. After a considerable amount of trying to get Ralph to speak plainly, Ralph finally tells Hiram that he and his brother Ronnie saw Grampa with Milam and Bryant on the night Emmett was kidnapped. They also saw the men borrowing Grampa's truck after they bring Grampa back later in the evening. Hiram is shocked by this and he goes back into the house, and after a moment or two of thought, he confronts Grampa with this allegation. Grampa



admits to this, but he insists that Milam and Bryant promised that Emmett would be alive as he had been when Grampa last saw him.

Hiram spends his last full day in Greenwood avoiding his grandfather but wanting to see Naomi in Chapter 17. Hiram does not find her and instead spends the entire day avoiding contact with Grampa. In the morning before he prepares to leave on the afternoon train, he goes to the sheriff's office to say goodbye and to find out about Naomi. The sheriff tells Hiram that Naomi will be fine and that the years of abuse are finally over. He informs Hiram that Naomi has been placed with a family who will take care of her but she did not leave any sort of message for Hiram. Next, he goes to see Mr. Paul in the courthouse and they talk about the hope for changes in the South. This reaffirms Hiram's belief that he did the right thing in wanting to testify and he feels better about staying to partake in the trial. Back at home, Grampa is outside with a brand new car. Grampa wants Hiram to be happy and act like old times, but Hiram cannot and goes upstairs to finish packing. During lunch, Grampa tries to continue acting as if nothing has happened although there is a short mention of the trial. With having nothing else to talk to each other about, the conversation shifts to smaller topics like the weather, crops, and family. When Hiram leaves, Grampa hugs him goodbye, but he does not take Hiram to the train station.

After Ruthanne gets Hiram to the train station, he finds Naomi standing there waiting for him. She wants to tell Hiram goodbye before it is too late and to let him know that she is with a new family. Naomi is happier than she has ever been and she knows that she will have a good life now that she is no longer with her father. The two hug and say goodbye without Hiram knowing if he will ever see her again. Hiram returns to Arizona to find his father instead of his mother waiting to take Hiram home. Along the way, Harlan discusses his own relationship with Grampa and what happened between them many years before. Hiram understands this and admits that his relationship with Grampa has changed as well and he also has a new view of the world. He admits that he was blind to what his father was trying to tell him for many years, but since he has grown and seen firsthand how racism and hatred affect people, he now understands his father a lot better. Harlan talks about his love for his father changing and in the end, he asks Hiram if Hiram feels the same way about Harlan in an attempt to begin to heal their own relationship.

Analysis

With the trial over, the focus of Chapter 16 is the reactions of Hiram and Grampa as they arrive at home. Grampa wants to put the whole ordeal behind him but his attitude suggests that he is angry at Hiram for continuing to discuss the trial. This is perhaps one of few times that Hiram has ever seen his grandfather so angry. Grampa is extremely adamant that the trial is over and there is to be no more discussion about it. As Hiram continues to question this, Grampa makes an allusion to Harlan's constant talking about things of this nature adding to his frustration. This causes a definite fracture in the relationship between Hiram and Grampa as Grampa tells Hiram that he needs to get over this and never to mention the trial or what he thinks to anyone in the



community. The anger between the two is visible as they do not speak to one another during dinner, unlike in the past where they always talked about their day at the table.

The next segment shows Hiram as hopeful that he will see Naomi at the bridge. Along the way, there is a considerable change to Hiram as he admits that he no longer thinks of Greenwood as home and he is ready to go back to Arizona and leave everyone, including Grampa behind which shows that the new strain on their relationship is permanent. The only person that he is going to miss will be Naomi, but there is an uncertainty of how he will ever contact her once he goes back to Arizona. At the bridge, Hiram does not see Naomi but an unexpected surprise greets him instead. There is an instant sense of fear in Hiram as R.C. makes his presence known. The first thing that is very noticeable about R.C. is the fact that he is unarmed but he is covered in blood and looks ragged. There is an admission that R.C. has known all along that Hiram and Naomi have been meeting each other on a nightly basis. The reason R.C. has come in place of Naomi is to tell Hiram that she will not be meeting him this evening. With this comes several revelations given. The physical abuse in the Rydell home has reached a boiling point. Normally R.C. is able to handle this, but the father is extremely angry that R.C. has been in Jackson for quite some time and with this the father is no longer able to take R.C.'s money for alcohol. Since R.C. has been in Jackson for over a month, this provides an alibi as to his whereabouts during Emmett's kidnapping and murder, so there is no possibility that he could have been involved.

R.C. then goes on to detail the vicious fight between himself and his father. For the first time in his life, R.C. has felt empowered enough, probably because of his new life in Jackson, to fight back when his father assaults him. The fight is given in detail, with the father being defeated and left on the floor with Naomi crying over top of him. Her stereotypical role as caregiver is seen here as she covers her father and tries to help him although he has been so abusive. R.C. attests to Naomi's strong nature and assures Hiram that she will be fine no matter what the circumstance, but gives the warning that she is not to be bothered at the moment. R.C. knows Naomi and Hiram's feelings but with the current situation, R.C. does not want Hiram pressuring anyone to see her as R.C. feels that Naomi will let Hiram know if or when she wants to see him.

R.C.'s main purpose for actually being in the town and winding up on the bridge is because he has told the sheriff about his actions, so that they are informed and so that they can get his father help. There is also the admission that the local police have known all along that R.C.'s father is an abusive alcoholic, but they never did anything to stop him. At this point, R.C. also mentions that he has spoken to the sheriff about the possibility of being involved with Emmett's kidnapping and murder. R.C. is not surprised that Hiram told the police about R.C. possibly being involved. There is no malice in R.C.'s words which calms Hiram's slightly, but R.C. does not outright mention that it was Hiram, only that "someone" had talked to the police. R.C. is not remorseful of what happened to Emmett, but maintains that he left that night to go to Jackson to begin a new life. He is optimistic that for once he will have the ability to have a better life, but he does not intend to take Naomi with him. R.C. is confident that Naomi is mature enough to handle her own decisions but also maintains that Hiram should keep his distance until



she makes the first move towards him. With this and a casual goodbye, R.C.'s character development is resolved as he heads toward the bus to go back to Jackson.

After a sleepless night, Hiram's main concern is for Naomi and how she will be able to handle life on her own. These thoughts provide little calming effect for Hiram as he dozes through the morning. He is awakened by a mysterious conversation between Grampa and an unknown man concerning the sale of Grampa's pickup. This plot device is considered to be suspicious as Hiram hears the man saying he will take it someplace else to be sold so that there is no trouble or questions. This statement provides an element of mystery as to why Grampa would need to do this sale so secretly. There is no great explanation for the sale given when Hiram confronts Grampa about this. The only thing this does is to make Grampa angry at Hiram for continuing to ask questions about his affairs. In an effort to somehow smooth the situation over, Hiram mentions his conversation with R.C. Grampa is able to calm down but he also intimates that he also knew that R.C.'s father was an abusive man and did nothing to stop him. Upon Hiram's mention of R.C. not being involved with Emmett's kidnapping, Grampa's temper flares again, not wanting to open up discussion of the trial any further. Hiram takes notice of this but the conversation once again shifts as they talk of Hiram's return to Arizona. Grampa is almost gleeful in talking about Hiram going back to Arizona, which is curious as Grampa has wanted Hiram to stay in Greenwood up to this point. There is no mention of being allowed to permanently stay or to come back next summer, which slightly hurts Hiram's feelings, but he brushes this off. Hiram takes note of this as well as it shows the change in their relationship.

With the interaction between himself and Grampa completed for the morning, leaving Grampa to carry on with his daily routine without Hiram, Hiram sets out to see Naomi. There is a major deviation that occurs here as Hiram runs into Ralph Remington as he is going to his home. Ralph speaks in circular sentences, with nothing truly informative until Ralph makes mention of keeping Hillburn secrets. With Hiram's curiosity now beginning, Hiram tries to use tactics of acting like he knows what is going on to try and lure Ralph into slowing down and making his information clearer. It takes some effort for Hiram to do this, but he is successful in getting a major plot twist from Ralph. The information is a revelation that after Emmett was kidnapped, Grampa came to the Remingtons as they had seen Grampa with Milam on the night Emmett was kidnapped as well as they witnessed Milam borrow the truck later in the evening when Grampa came home. This news is startling to Hiram, who has now been able to come to a conclusion that it was Grampa who was the third man on the night Emmett was kidnapped and that the truck one of the witnesses at the trial saw was his. The sale of the truck finally makes sense to Hiram as he now knows that the truck is actual evidence that Grampa is trying to dispose of.

With this new information, Hiram goes back into the house, sickened by what he has learned. Hiram finally accepts that Grampa is no longer the hero he once looked up to and is in fact, an accessory to murder. This is a horrifying thought to Hiram, and there is a slight mention of not wanting to bring the topic up to Grampa, but he does so anyways. Hiram goes straight to the point in his allegation that Grampa was there on the night of Emmett's kidnapping, drawing the reader straight to the main conflict that



will be forever between Grampa and Hiram. There is no denial from Grampa as he admits that he was there, but that Emmett was alive at the time. The chapter closes with this revelation before any further discussion about this can be made.

The resolution of the novel comes at Chapter 17. It does not pick up right where Chapter 16 ends and there is no further discussion made about Grampa's admission. Chapter 17 is a highlight of the last full day Hiram spends in Greenwood before he heads home to Arizona. Hiram is only looking for one person at this point, Naomi, as his relationship with his grandfather permanently ruined. Upon not finding her to say goodbye during the afternoon, Hiram is forced to return home, but the atmosphere of the home has changed. It is no longer the warm place that Hiram remembers and his grandfather does his best to avoid Hiram due to his own guilt. Ruthanne makes the assumption that Grampa's health is declining due to the trial, but she does not know Grampa's full involvement. Ruthanne is hopeful that Grampa is beginning to lose his prejudiced ways, but Hiram does not have the heart to tell her the truth.

On the morning of Hiram's departure, he is feeling nostalgic and wants to visit some of the town's more memorable places before he leaves. The first visit is to the local sheriff's office where a conversation ensues not just about the trial but of the Rydell family. The sheriff provides some insight as to the Rydell family dynamic and how Naomi's role of caregiver has been ongoing since she was very young, but he feels that Naomi will now be in a better place. Hiram is relieved to know that she is with a new family that will take care of her and she will never have to go back to her father again. There is no final note or message from Naomi to Hiram, which Hiram had been hoping for, but there is also an understanding in why she may not have done so. The next person Hiram visits is Mr. Paul who talks more about the trial with Hiram than anyone has recently. There is optimism about Mr. Paul as he too is hopeful for change in the South although he cannot outwardly say this for fear of retaliation. Mr. Paul's words give Hiram a moment to think about the recent events and how his own actions may have been different. The visit is short, but it also provides closure for Hiram in terms of whether he was right or wrong to want to testify in the trial.

Back at home, Grampa has a new vehicle in the driveway. It is curious that he has the same demeanor towards Hiram as if nothing has happened, although Hiram is wary of this. Hiram is speechless to Grampa's show of affection. The damage done to the relationship is visible here as Hiram hurries to pack the rest of his things without engaging in too much conversation. During their final lunch, only a small portion of conversation is given to the trial and its effects on how Hiram and Grampa view things afterwards. Hiram is proud of himself for standing up for what he believes in, but Grampa still maintains that Hiram had no business to be part of the trial and is eager to put this ordeal behind him. This is disappointing for Hiram as he had hoped that Grampa would feel some amount of remorse for his role to play in Emmett's kidnapping, but there is none. The final scene between Hiram and Grampa show a conversation of small talk about the weather, life in Arizona, and Hiram's siblings. The pair hug before Hiram leaves for the train station with Ruthanne, concluding not only the scene but their relationship.



In the final moments of Hiram's time in Greenwood, there is a resolution between the relationship between Hiram and Naomi as she stops him at the train station. She is visibly very different from previous times that Hiram has seen her. Naomi now looks happier since she is away from her care taking duties and seems ready to move on with her life. She assures Hiram that things will get better for her. Hiram is overcome with emotion and does not know what to say to her although he is happy to see that she will be alright. With Hiram telling Naomi goodbye, this is a falling action and a conclusion to the Hiram's stream of events in Greenwood.

The final scene in the novel is the reunification of Hiram and Harlan, as it is Harlan not Hiram's mother who meets Hiram at the train station. This is significant as it shows there is a desire on Harlan's part to assist his son with settling back in to life in Arizona and a possible reconciliation for their relationship. During the drive home, they are able to discuss not only their own relationship but Harlan is able to go into further depth about the deteriorated relationship between himself and his own father. This deterioration in many ways parallels the deterioration experienced between Harlan and Hiram's relationship. With this new ability to work on mending their relationship, Hiram is also able to pinpoint what Harlan had warned him about in the first place, showing the full evolution of Hiram's character. He realizes at this point that his father had only been trying to protect him from witnessing the harsh treatment of African Americans but also trying to instill in Hiram that their mistreatment is especially wrong. The novel itself concludes with Harlan making the ultimate effort in trying to rebuild his relationship with Hiram by cleverly using a statement concerning Harlan not loving his own father anymore to ask Hiram if Hiram stopped loving him.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Grampa so adamant that Hiram stop talking about the trial. How is Grampa actually connected with the trial?

Discussion Question 2

What information does Ralph Remington give Hiram? What is Grampa's reaction to Hiram's confrontation? How does this change their relationship?

Discussion Question 3

Where has R.C. been since he last saw Hiram? Would he have gone with Milam and Bryant?

Vocabulary

Justifiable, gingerly, prattle, circumstantial, lacquered, alibi



Characters

Hiram Hillburn

Hiram Hillburn is the protagonist and the narrator of the novel. He is first introduced as a 7-year-old boy living with his grandparents in Greenwood Mississippi as his parents are in Oxford. Hiram and Grampa have a special relationship while living with him and they do everything together. Grampa wants to raise him and instill in him the ways of the old South, much to his father's dismay. After the death of his grandmother, Hiram's father announces that the family is leaving for Tempe, Arizona, Hiram is extremely upset because he is being taken away from everything he has ever known and loved. Over the next seven years living in Tempe, Hiram's relationship with his father becomes more estranged as the two argue over going back to Greenwood. Hiram is determined to go back to what he considers his home, but his father is adamant that the cultural climate of the area is not good for him. When Grampa has a stroke in 1955, Hiram is allowed to go back to Greenwood, with a warning to be careful as things may not be as he remembered them.

When Hiram arrives, he is introduced to Emmett "Bobo" Till by Grampa's housekeeper. Hiram does his best to try to strike up a pleasant conversation with him, but is rejected quickly. Hiram is happy to be home with his Grampa. For him, things start out the same with time spent going through the county with his Grampa and enjoying the area, but as the summer wears on, Hiram begins to see that things are not quite right. R.C. Rydell, a boy that he associated with occasionally but finds him to be cruel and vulgar, has grown increasingly and is known as a troublemaker, causing Hiram to prefer not to want to associate with him. The more he hears about opposition by the local community to the governments ideas on desegregation, Hiram begins to wonder if his father was right about his warning. This especially occurs when Emmett is tortured by R.C. Rydell over wanting to share Hiram's lunch. He is powerless to stop R.C. but he is able to see that prejudice is a major component to R.C.'s character. He is also shocked by the nonchalant attitude of his grandfather who believes that in some ways Emmett brought this harassment upon himself.

As time continues to go by, Hiram finds himself thinking about his father more. There is a desire to reconnect with him, but he is unsure of how to do so. When Hiram finds that Emmett has been kidnapped and murdered, he needs his father more than ever but he is able to stand up for himself and for what he thinks is right when he tells Sheriff Smith everything that he knows about this. Although he feels he is doing the right thing, this is met with opposition by Grampa who feels that Hiram should just keep himself quiet. Hiram learns and is appalled by the truth that is discovered during the trial and after. This causes him to truly appreciate what his father has been saying all along but Hiram has been ignoring.



Emmett Till

Emmett Till is a 14-year-old African American boy from Chicago, Illinois. He is in Money, Mississippi visiting his relatives during the summer of 1955. Since Emmett is not a resident of the South, he does not fit into what is considered to be the traditional role of African Americans by the people in the area. He dresses differently and he does not see why white people should treat him differently. When he first meets Hiram, he does not like the idea of having to carry Hiram's luggage and eventually tricks Hiram into carrying his own for a while. He contends that no one carried his luggage for him when he arrived, so why should he have to carry Hiram's? This is met with a swift berating at the hands of his relative, Ruthanne who is also the Hillburn's housekeeper.

The next time Emmett is encountered happens when he has to be rescued by Hiram after falling into the Tallahatchee River. Emmett was bored with sitting around his uncle's house and came to the river although he cannot swim. He started throwing rocks in the river, but unbeknownst to him, he picked up a small snapping turtle. When it bit him, he threw it but then decided he wanted to keep it. The river's current was too strong for him and he is rescued by Hiram who is sitting nearby. After a small bit of talk that is rather inconsequential, Emmett leaves to go back to his uncle's house for lunch and before anyone can question where he has been.

Emmett last appears physically when Hiram and R.C. Rydell are fishing along the Tallahatchie River. Hiram is fishing while R.C. is asleep when he hears Emmett and his cousins playing in the water. He goes over to the group and Emmett recognizes Hiram immediately and a friendly conversation begins. When Hiram mentions the fact that he has just had lunch, Emmett makes a mistake of asking for the leftovers. His cousins know that trouble could come of this and try to pull Emmett away, but in his stubbornness Emmett refuses. The end result is that R.C. wakes up to find Emmett just as he is getting Hiram's bag. R.C. overpowers and tortures Emmett with fish guts.

After this incident, Emmett is only mentioned as a point of conversation, and topic of media reports and police investigation. Emmett is kidnapped, mutilated, and murdered for speaking in an inappropriate way to a white woman. When he is found in the Tallahatchie River, his body shows that it was weighted down with a cotton gin pulley and he had been castrated and shot in the head. The only way to identify that it is actually Emmett is his father's ring that he wears.

R.C. Rydell

R.C. Rydell is a sadistic young man who Hiram socializes and goes fishing frequently with. He is considered to be a polar opposite of Hiram, as he is loud, rude, and is extremely cruel. R.C. also has a distinct prejudiced personality that does not stop at race but goes on to anyone who has any kind of difference to himself. Hiram is reluctant to interact with him because of R.C.'s cruel nature that he witnesses, including the harassment of the Remington brothers and the torturous death of a catfish that accidentally stung him.



When Hiram returns to Greenwood, R.C. has grown considerably. He is more muscular and taller, with small scars around his face. He has gained the reputation of being a troublemaker around the community. Most people think it is because of his poor circumstances that he acts this way. R.C. quit school to work unloading boats along the river. R.C. has not changed his sadistic ways, especially when he tortures Emmett while out fishing. Some time after the incident, the police are called about this, but R.C. assures them he did nothing wrong and the police believe him. He tries to get Hiram to go along with his story, but Hiram refuses. During this conversation, he informs Hiram that he has been asked to go with some other men to teach an African American male a lesson for insulting a white lady. Hiram tries to call the police to keep R.C. from doing this, but the police do not want to help him.

After Emmett has been kidnapped and murdered, Hiram feels that it is his duty to testify against R.C., knowing what could happen to him if he does. During this time, R.C. is missing, presumably hiding from the police. After the trial concludes R.C. comes back to Greenwood. He has been working in Jackson as he could no longer take living at home with his father. He is only slightly upset about Hiram telling the police about their conversation and the incident at the river, but he is quickly able to dismiss his frustration with a sarcastic comment.

R.C. has lived a life of abuse at the hands of his alcoholic father, but he is also protective of Naomi. Naomi is the one person that he does not tease or make trouble for, although Naomi worries about how much trouble he is causing other people. He does not like other boys to come around Naomi, but he does not mind Hiram seeing Naomi due to their friendship. When R.C. returns from Jackson, his father gets into a drunken rage and a fight ensues. R.C. has had enough of his father's abuse at this point and beats his father nearly to death. The police do not arrest him for this, as they know that this fight was inevitable. R.C. ends up leaving Greenwood to permanently stay in Jackson, leaving Naomi to live with a family that will be able to take care of her.

Naomi Rydell

Naomi is the younger sister of R.C. Rydell. Their mother died when Naomi was very young, leaving Naomi to care for her abusive father and R.C. Throughout the novel she is portrayed as having a depressed personality as the weight of taking care of a dysfunctional home is bearing down on her. As a youth, Hiram brings her cookies on one fishing trip with R.C., who teases Hiram about her being Naomi's girlfriend but he does not tease Naomi.

When Gramma Hillburn dies, Naomi attends the funeral, but is not seen because she is in the back of the crowd at the funeral. Hiram only spots her as he is walking away from the burial site. Naomi takes Hiram to her mother's grave and also to the Fulton Street bridge, where she goes to sit when she is missing her mother. It is here where Hiram sees Naomi when he returns to Greenwood 7 years later. She has grown into a beautiful young lady, but she is still living a hard life of dealing with her father. She has a intense desire to get away from her family, especially since R.C. has been causing more



trouble and is beginning to distance himself from her as he has problems of his own. It is clear that Hiram has feelings for her and there is an implication that she has feelings for him as well.

After R.C. returns home after being in Jackson working, their father goes into a deep rage, causing a violent fight where he is badly beaten. Instead of condemning the father for his actions, Naomi tends to his wounds and goes with him to the hospital. The last time that Hiram sees Naomi is shortly before he leaves Greenwood. She looks happier as her burden of taking care of her father has been lifted. He is not dead but seriously injured and Naomi has been taken out of the home and sent to live with a different family. When she sees Hiram to tell him goodbye, she looks much happier and is finally at peace with herself.

Earl "Grampa" Hillburn

Grampa Hillburn is one of the leading figures in Greenwood society. He owns a vast amount of land used for cotton farming and is well off financially. The relationship between him and his grandson Hiram is extremely close, as Grampa has raised Hiram while Hiram's father served in World War II and studied at a distant university. Grampa's views are of the stereotypical, prejudiced Southern land owner. He feels that God made African Americans to do hard labor and that they are inferior in all other ways to whites. Grampa firmly believes in segregation and that the Southern ways must be upheld at all costs. Grampa is a member of the White Citizens Council, which meets frequently at night to discuss keeping their heritage intact.

During this time Grampa was raising Hiram, Hiram and Grampa develop a special relationship which is threatened when Harlan takes Hiram to live in Tempe, Arizona. Every year Grampa sends an invitation for Hiram to come back, but Harlan refuses to send his son saying that Grampa needs to come to Tempe if he wants to see Hiram. In 1955, Grampa has a stroke and sends the invitation again - and this time Harlan agrees. When Hiram arrives, he notices that Grampa looks considerably older and he is not able to move as well as he used to.

Grampa and Hiram settle back into their old routines for the most part, plus he is attending more White Citizen's council meetings. He is also loaning out his truck more frequently to others that need it. Grampa is firm in his beliefs that whites and African Americans should always be separate because African Americans are inferior. He feels that when R.C. tortured Emmett at the river, Emmett was the one in the wrong for interacting with Hiram. He admits that R.C. is a troublemaker and of a lower class due to the Rydell family's economic circumstances and demeanor.

After Emmett has been murdered, Grampa becomes more concerned about recent events. At first, this is out of concern for Hiram, but it evolves into something else. He does not want Hiram to testify in the court trial of Milam and Bryant because any implication to R.C.'s assistance in the crime could result in consequences for Hiram. As the trial begins, a new side of Grampa is shown as he is beginning to have less concern



for Hiram and more for the community's reputation as well as his own. Grampa feels that Hiram's testimony against white men will have him looked upon in disfavor among his friends and that he will become an outcast again. Grampa was once considered as such because of his son's views on equal rights and he is bound and determined not to have that happened again.

Another reason his concern is changing is that he could be implicated in the crime himself. After the trial, Grampa sells his pickup truck to some unknown men. Hiram sees this transaction, thinking nothing of it at first, until a conversation with Ronnie Remington, it is revealed that Ralph saw Grampa go with J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant on the evening that Emmett disappeared. This makes Grampa an accomplice to Emmett's kidnapping and murder. When Hiram confronts Grampa about this, he is adamant that he saw Emmett alive and that he was assured that Emmett would go home alive. This admission causes the final breakdown in the relationship between Grampa and Hiram.

Ruthanne

Ruthanne is the African American housekeeper who works for Grampa after his stroke. She is a cousin of Emmett Till's. Ruthanne first meets Hiram when she picks him up at the train station upon his return to Greenwood. She often chides Emmett, who she calls "Bobo", for his arrogant mannerisms. Ruthanne is articulate and an impeccable housekeeper. When Hiram and R.C go fishing, she packs a lunch for them, but R.C. initially says he will not eat it because it has been prepared by an African American. After the disappearance of Emmett, Ruthanne takes an evening off to help with the search, but other than that, she does not display much emotion or connection to her family.

J.W. Milam

J.W. Milam is the half brother of Roy Bryant. After Roy's wife is insulted by Emmett Till, J.W. goes to the home of Emmett's uncle to kidnap Emmett for which he is arrested. Once Emmett's body is found in the Tallahatchie River, murder charges are placed against him as well. His defense attorney is paid for through a defense fund set up in a local diner. J.W. and Roy admit to the kidnapping of Emmett but are acquitted of his murder and no other punishment is sought against them. Hiram learns later that Grampa went with Milam and Bryant to kidnap Emmett, but Milam and Bryant brought Grampa back home before killing Emmett.

Roy Bryant

Roy Bryant is the owner of Bryant General Store. He is also the husband of the lady who was allegedly harassed with indecent comments by Emmett Till. Roy and his half brother, along with an unknown third man and woman, are suspected of going to the home of Emmett's uncle and forced him out of the house and into a waiting vehicle. Roy and the others are also suspected of Emmett's murder once his body is found in the



Tallahatchie River. The trial acquits Bryant and Milam of murder and no charges are pressed against them for the kidnapping. Hiram is made aware that the third person with Bryant and Milam actually was Grampa but they dropped him off after the kidnapping and borrowed his truck. This shows that they went back to the scene of the kidnapping and murdered Emmett by themselves.

Ronnie Remington

Ronnie Remington is the brother of Ralph Remington and a close neighbor of the Hillburns. His mental illness is not specifically known, but both he and his brother are considered mentally deficient by the community. R.C. Rydell has a particular hatred of Ronnie and his brother and constantly pulls jokes on them which he finds funny but are actually cruel and malicious. Ronnie and his brother are harmless neighbors and have very little to do with the majority of the novel until after the trial. Ronnie encounters Hiram as he is on his way to visit Naomi. Ronnie rambles on incessantly but Hiram is able to pick out key information regarding the third person involved in Emmett's kidnapping as Ronnie divulges that Grampa was with Milam and Bryant.

Harlan Hillburn

Harlan is the father of Hiram and is Grampa's only son. At the beginning of the novel, Harlan is living in Oxford with Hiram's mother as he finishes school to become a teacher. His main desire is to leave the South and to get away from the prejudiced notions contained in it. His way of thinking is opposite what many in the Greenwood community accept as normal and is the cause for Grampa's embarrassment and past social status.

Harlan's views came about in his youth but expanded over time, especially after he served in World War II. Upon coming back to Mississippi, he finds that he can no longer be a part of such a prejudiced society and is very vocal about this. The relationship between Harlan and Grampa is very strained because of this and is further complicated when Harlan decides to move to Arizona, taking Hiram with him. Harlan does not want Hiram returning to Greenwood although Grampa invites Hiram to be there every year. This is the cause of many years of arguing between Hiram and Harlan.

It is only in 1955 when Grampa has a stroke that Harlan relents and sends Hiram to Greenwood. Before Hiram leaves, Harlan warns Hiram that what Hiram sees he may not like. Hiram finds that this is true as the summer wears on and ends up missing his father more than ever. Once Hiram acknowledges that Harlan was right Hiram is able to begin reconstructing his relationship with his father.



Symbols and Symbolism

Greenwood Commonwealth

The Greenwood Commonwealth is the local newspaper for the community. Grampa Hillburn reads this to keep up with news about the South but he does not like to read any national or foreign news. He is angered by news reports about the federal government trying to instill desegregation laws throughout the South and feels that anything that interferes with the Southern way of life.

Cookies

When Hiram goes to fish with R.C., Gramma packs him a lunch although Hiram says that he does not need that much to eat. Along with the lunch, Gramma gives Hiram a package of cookies to take to Naomi Rydell. Gramma figures that Naomi could use the treat to lift her spirits as Naomi has a hard life of taking care of her alcoholic father and her troublemaker brother ever since her mother died. When Hiram goes to the Rydell home R.C. momentarily picks on Hiram for delivering cookies to his "girlfriend", but it is interesting to note that R.C. does not pick on Naomi when she is given the cookies.

Catfish

While Hiram and R.C. go fishing shortly after Hiram's 8th birthday, R.C. catches a small catfish. He deems it too small to keep to take home and immediately begins to torture it by stabbing it in the eyes with a nail. R.C. jokes that the fish is now as blind as the courthouse concession stand owner, Mr. Paul, much to Hiram's dismay. The catfish struggles and in the process stings R.C.'s hand. In anger, R.C. stabs its body repeatedly to kill it, adding that the fish needed to be taught a lesson. This is one of the main examples of how R.C. is a very cruel person.

Hiram's Lunch

When Hiram returns to Greenwood, he runs into R.C. Rydell who wants to go fishing with Hiram for old time's sake. Ruthanne packs a large amount of lunch for Hiram to take with him. When R.C. sees the lunch, he wonders who made it and when he learns that Ruthanne has made this, he refuses to eat it as it was prepared by an African American. He quickly forgets this and eats a great deal of it after he takes a nap when they arrive at the river. Afterwards, R.C. goes to take another nap as he was up for most of the previous night.

As he sleeps, Hiram runs into Emmett and his cousins after a nap of his own. Hiram mentions falling asleep after such a large lunch causing Emmett to ask if there is any of the lunch left. His cousins try to stop Emmett from wanting the lunch, but Emmett



refuses to listen to them. He follows Hiram to the lunch bag and just as he is grabbing it, R.C. wakes up furious that an African American is near. Emmett says that he is just getting the lunch Hiram is giving him, but R.C. uses the opportunity to torture and humiliate Emmett by shoving fish guts in his face.

Granpa's Pickup Truck

Grampa owns a blue pickup truck that he uses to drive to the fields. When Hiram returns to Greenwood Hiram is allowed to use the truck whenever he wants, but it is often being loaned out to others in the community. After the murder trial, Grampa sends the truck off to be sold with Hiram overhearing the conversation. Grampa says that the truck is being sold to buy a newer car, but Hiram says he preferred the truck. Later it is learned that Milam and Bryant borrowed this truck after kidnapping Emmett and dropping Grampa off at home, therefore implicating Grampa in the crime.

White Citizens Council

The White Citizens Council is a political group that is intent on keeping the traditions and heritage of the South intact. They are squarely against desegregation and civil rights for African Americans, maintaining that African Americans are the inferior race. Grampa belongs to the White Citizens Council and is seen to go out late at night to attend these meetings. It is unknown how many other members of the community are members of this group.

Cotton Gin Pulley

The cotton gin pulley is a large item that is found wrapped around Emmett's head when he is found in the Tallahatchie River. It is used to keep the body submerged underwater so that it cannot be found.

Murder Trial

The murder trial of J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant takes place in the Tallahatchie County court house. The men are accused of kidnapping and murdering African American teen Emmett Till for making insulting comments towards Bryant's wife in their general store. This is the first time that white men have been put on trial for violence against an African American. Hiram is subpoenaed to testify during this trial, but his testimony is not needed as he has nothing pertinent to add to the investigation. During the trial, many of the African American witness' testimonies are discredited by the defense attorney as being unreliable due to their educations and other factors. In the end run, Milam and Bryant are acquitted of the crime and no other legal action is pursued against them. This causes the local area to rejoice in the favorable outcome, but it is one of the key items in the fight for civil rights.



Emmett's Ring

Emmett's body is so badly mutilated that facial recognition is virtually impossible. The one identifying piece that is recognizable to his uncle is the ring Emmett wears on his finger with the initials "L.T.". The ring belonged to Emmett's father and is identified by Emmett's uncle and the African American undertaker. Although the ring is used to positively identify Emmett, the defense attorneys claim that it could have been any random body that was thrown into the river by civil rights activists in order to make the South look bad.

Bryant and Milam Defense Fund

At the cafe across from the courthouse, Hiram and Grampa go to have lunch on the first day of the trial. As they are walking out, they notice a can stating that it is the Bryant and Milam Defense Fund and that all contributions would be welcome. Grampa donates an unknown amount of cash to this can, but it is already overflowing with money from supporters of the two men.



Settings

Greenwood, Mississippi

Greenwood, Mississippi is a small mostly farming community along the Yazoo River. It is the main setting of this novel as Hiram originally grows up there with his Grampa Earl Hillburn and his Gramma Florence Hillburn. After Gramma passes away, Hiram's father, Harlan announces that he is moving to Tempe, Arizona to teach at a local college and is taking Hiram with him. Harlan does not want to stay in Greenwood as it is an area filled with prejudice and Harlan does not approve of this. He especially does not want these views taught to Hiram. This causes resentment between Harlan and Hiram as Hiram does not ever want to leave Greenwood. 7 years later, Hiram is allowed to return as Grampa needs help after having a stroke.

When Hiram returns he finds that physically nothing has changed about the town. People are excited to see him and Hiram is happy to be there. As time goes by, Hiram finds that perhaps his father is right in saying that not everything will be as he remembers it. Hiram finds out for himself how prejudiced the area is after the disappearance and murder of Emmett Till. The people in the area believe the suspects are innocent and go as far as take up a large collection for their trial costs. This causes Hiram to change his mind not only about the joys of being in Greenwood, but about his grandfather and his racist views as well.

Tallahatchee River

The Tallahatchee River flows near Money, Mississippi. Grampa and Hiram share a fishing spot along this river that they used before Hiram moved to Tempe. On his return, Hiram meets Emmett Till for the second time somewhere along this river and Hiram saves Emmett from drowning. The next time Hiram goes out there, he is on a fishing trip with R.C. Rydell. During this trip, Hiram encounters Emmett and his cousins. Hiram talks about his lunch and goes to give the rest of it to Emmett, but R.C. wakes up from his afternoon nap and tortures Emmett with fish guts. After Emmett's kidnapping, his body is found badly mangled in this river.

Tempe, Arizona

After Harlan finishes his studies, he accepts a job at a local university as a teacher. The family moves to Tempe during the August after Hiram's 9th birthday. Hiram is not thrilled about this as it takes him away from Greenwood. After moving to Tempe, Hiram's parents have four other children and seem to be happy.



Fulton Street Bridge

After Gramma dies, Hiram runs into Naomi Rydell as he is leaving the funeral. First she takes him to her mother's grave, then to the Fulton Street Bridge. She explains that when she is missing her mother, she comes there to think about her. This is Naomi's private spot for when she is feeling sad, but she wants to share this spot with Hiram for when he is grieving. When he is told about the move to Tempe, he goes there hoping to see Naomi again before they leave, but he does not. Once he returns to Greenwood, Hiram is reunited with Naomi as she has been coming every night to the bridge to wait for Hiram.

Money, Mississippi

Money, Mississippi is a small village close to Greenwood. It sits near the Tallahatchee River and is where Emmett Till's uncle lives. It is also the location of the Bryant General store where Emmett allegedly makes inappropriate comments towards a white lady, leading up to his kidnapping and murder.



Themes and Motifs

Racism

The theme of racism is at the center of the novel. It is introduced in the first segment of the novel where Hiram is a 7-year-old boy. He goes with his grandfather to the Hillburn cotton fields to talk to the overseer. While Grampa and the overseer talk, Hiram goes to follow one of the workers. All of the workers on the field are African American while Hiram recalls that he has never seen a white field worker. The worker stops at the end of the row to stretch his back for a minute, allowing Hiram the opportunity to pick up the man's hoe. Upon seeing this Grampa is instantly furious, however it is not due to the fact that Hiram could hurt himself. Grampa is upset because the worker allowed Hiram to touch the hoe in general. He is also mad at the fact that the man is taking a moment or two to stretch. Grampa feels that the man is being lazy by doing so and assures him that the next time he catches the man doing this, the worker may be out of a job. After this, Grampa explains his views on race. Grampa feels that African Americans were born to do the hard labor in the world and that they are inferior to whites. They should not have any sort of equality and they should be separated in all things.

R.C. Rydell is another who believes that African Americans are inferior to whites. There is nothing to suggest this when he and Hiram are youths, although R.C. is known to be mean. When Hiram returns to Greenwood in the summer of 1955, R.C. makes a negative comment about Grampa losing his senses as he has hired an African American housekeeper named Ruthanne. R.C. feels that she should not be allowed to become so familiar with the family and have the ability to come and go as she pleases. He even goes as far as to initially say that he refuses to eat anything that an African American has made although he quickly forgets this after he takes a nap on the river. R.C. truly proves how much of a racist he is when he finds Emmett with Hiram as Hiram is getting ready to hand him the leftovers from lunch. In retaliation, R.C. tortures Emmett with the guts of a fish in order to humiliate Emmett for his thinking that he is equal to R.C. and Hiram.

Although Hiram is shocked and ashamed by R.C.'s actions, his grandfather plays this off as a joke gone too far. R.C. also plays this off as a joke and wants Hiram to do the same when he comes to Hiram to ask him not to say anything to the local police. He also informs Hiram that he plans on going over to the small community of Money to talk to an African American male who recently insulted a white woman in the local store. Hiram is against this and threatens to report him to the police if R.C. does this, but he is quickly laughed off by R.C. who feels that he is doing his duty by protecting white women and teaching the young man in question what his place is. Hiram actually does call the police, but the deputy he calls is also prejudiced and refuses to help, agreeing with R.C.'s notion that the African American male needs to learn that African Americans must learn to respect whites in the South.



Because of this racism, Emmett Till is forced from his uncle's home in the middle of the night by Roy Bryant, his half brother J.W. Milam, an unnamed man, and a woman. When Emmett's aunt and uncle try to intervene, they are threatened with violence if they should try to interfere any further. Emmett is at first listed as kidnapped for a few days, but his body is found in the Tallahatchie River a few days later. During the murder trial, the defense fund is paid for by various members of the community, including members of the White Citizens Council, a political group whose intention is to keep segregation and inequality between the races. The defense attorney does his best to discredit the African American witnesses, which results in an innocent verdict for both men.

While most of the community have the same ideology of Grampa, Hiram's father, Harlan, does not. Harlan's views began before he left for the military. Harlan believes in equality and that there should be no segregation. These opinions are looked down upon by Greenwood society and as Harlan grows up, and he and Grampa argue constantly, leading to a severe strain in their relationship. Harlan's views are an embarrassment to his father, something Grampa is trying to avoid with Harlan. After World War II, Harlan comes back to Mississippi, hating the Southern ways of life even more and only stays long enough to earn a teaching degree so that he may move to Arizona. Hiram resents this, but during his summer stay in Greenwood, he comes to terms with all that his father has been trying to tell him.

Harlan is not the only one who has anti-racist views. Mr. Paul, the concession stand owner, also believes in equality as he has seen firsthand how segregation laws are unfair. Before the war, Mr. Paul worked for the department of education. On a call to an African American schoolhouse, he noticed how dilapidated the conditions of the school and questioned why he was not called sooner. The teacher at the school informed him that they did call the department several months earlier. He tells Hiram this so that Hiram will understand how crucial it is that there be no segregation in the schools so that all children can have access to decent facilities. He also gives Hiram an important lesson that he thinks God created different kinds of people so that they can learn from one another, not some races being inferior to another. This helps Hiram to come to understand that racism is wrong and that his father's views are not as bad as what his grandfather would have him think.

Justice

Justice can be seen from a few different points of view within the novel, although it does not begin to make an appearance until after Hiram comes back to Greenwood in 1955. When Hiram returns and goes fishing with R.C. on the Tallahatchie River, Emmett is humiliated and tortured by R.C. with the guts of a fish. Upon arriving home, Emmett's family calls the police to file a complaint against R.C. The sheriff comes to see R.C., but R.C. gives a story about how all that happened that day was just fishing with Hiram. Later in the day, R.C. goes to Hiram to ask him to go along with his story, but Hiram refuses. He has figured out at this point, that what R.C. did that day is wrong and he has no intention of covering up for him. This is amusing to R.C. who then calls Hiram a sissy, but R.C. also informs Hiram that nothing will ever happen to him (R.C.) because



of the fact that Hiram is not considered a local any longer and that the police will not take his word over R.C.'s. In this instance, there is no justice against R.C.'s action and the subject is quickly dropped.

When R.C. says that he is going with some men to Money to talk to an African American male about insulting comments he made towards a white woman in a local store, he feels that it is getting justice for the bad behavior that was shown. Hiram immediately calls the police, but he is dismissed by the deputy. The deputy feels that there is no real harm in the situation as the white lady was insulted and the offending party needs to be punished for his actions. It is unknown as to the true intentions of the men that actually went to Money, but their brand of justice included castration, mutilation, beating, and eventually murder. After Emmett is considered kidnapped, J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant are arrested and held in the county jail. Once Emmett's body is found, the charges are changed to murder.

Hiram is summoned to court to testify as he believes that R.C. has had a hand in this crime. Several people, including his own grandfather, do not want Hiram to testify because there could be revenge sought against him or his family. Hiram wants to actively seek justice for Emmett no matter the cost, much to the dismay of the people around him. Hiram knows that there will not be much justice given to these men, but Hiram knows that his testimony will be at least something. Ruthanne is hopeful that although these men will never be punished for their crime, the fact that these men are being brought to trial for a crime against an African American should get changes made to the South where whites cannot be violent towards African Americans and get away with it.

During the trial much is done to discredit any testimony that could incriminate Milam and Bryant. The main parts of the testimony that are scrutinized are anything that is said by other African Americans. This is done so that these testimonies will make the African American witnesses look as if they do not know what they are talking about and are confused as to what actually happened on the night Emmett was taken and when he was found. There is also speculation that the body is not Emmett but just a random body planted by civil rights groups to stir up negativity in the area.

At the end of the trial, the men are acquitted with no intention of pursuing them for legal actions in the matter of kidnapping. This is disgusting to Hiram as he feels that Emmett was killed in cold blood and the murderers are getting away free. For Hiram, there is no justice for Emmett's murder, but the reaction to the outcome is highly celebrated by people in the courtroom and others in the community. Although there is no repercussions against the men that killed Emmett, there is hope. Ruthanne tells Hiram that hopefully this will make people stop and think about civil rights for the South. She says that just by holding these men accountable even for only as long as a trial, change is happening that could make African American lives better.

There is a surprise accomplice in Emmett's kidnapping, but he is never questioned by the authorities. Through a conversation with Ralph Remington, Hiram finds that Grampa was with Milam and Bryant on the night that Emmett disappeared. Grampa also gave



them the use of his truck later in the evening after he returns home. This is a considerable shock to Hiram as he is able to discern that Grampa was the unnamed accomplice in the kidnapping. Hiram also figures out that the only reason Grampa sold the pickup truck was to get rid of the evidence that could possibly link him to the crime. Upon confrontation, Grampa admits his involvement, but he adamantly maintains that Emmett was alive when Grampa left and that Milam and Bryant promised that the boy would be returned home alive. Hiram believes this, but this creates the final item that puts a permanent fracture in their relationship as Grampa shows no remorse at Emmett's murder. Ultimately, between Milam and Bryant's acquittal and Grampa's lack of shame at his secret involvement, justice is never served in Emmett's murder.

Stereotypical Roles

There are a few distinct stereotypical roles found throughout the novel. The first role is Grampa's role as an upper class, white, land owner in the deep South. He is a man who is known throughout the Greenwood community and is well respected. Grampa has a set routine to his day; he visits the courthouse to chat with other like-minded individuals before heading off to the cotton fields to see the overseer. The stereotypical mentality of the majority of white males in the area is that they should be the superior race while African Americans are significantly inferior and do not deserve the same treatment of whites nor do they deserve to use the same facilities such as schools. Grampa is one of many who belong to a political group called the White Citizens Council, a group that is intent on preserving the unequal ways of the South. Meetings are held frequently late at night and there is no actual identification as to the other members nor is there any indication of the nature of these meetings. Hiram knows about this group but is not concerned with it.

Another stereotypical role is that of the lower income white person. R.C. Rydell is the main example of this kind of person. He does not have a more refined way of speaking, like that of upper class whites such as Grampa. There is no respect given to R.C. and he is known as a troublemaker. Although he is white, R.C. is still looked down upon by people who are considered to be of a higher social class and the common derogatory name for lower class whites is "peckerwood". There is no aspirations or goals to improve himself educationally; in fact, he prides himself on not having an education and quitting school at an early age. R.C. spends his days working hard and his nights dealing with an abusive alcoholic father. People know about the Rydell family situation, but they do nothing to help. When R.C. gets into a fight with his father and his father winds up being badly beaten, the sheriff reveals that the abuse has been going on for many years, leaving the question of why nothing has ever been done to help R.C. or Naomi all this time.

In terms of Naomi, she is cast in the role of a stereotypical female caretaker. The feminine roles of the story are the ones who take care of the house and the family. Naomi has been left the care of her family after her mother died when she was only 7 or 8 years old. Since then, she has had the entire run of the house and taking care of her



alcoholic family. Her responsibilities in the home often keep Naomi busy to the point where she cannot enjoy the usual things that a child does.

In the beginning of the novel, Hiram takes Naomi some cookies made by Gramma Hillburn. Gramma believes that these will cheer her up. As time goes on, Naomi continues her duties, although it is becoming harder and harder for her to do so because her father is frequently drunk and violent. The only thing that truly cheers her up is visiting with Hiram at the bridge in the evenings. She does not talk about life at home, only briefly once or twice when her father has been drinking and she narrowly escapes his wrath. After R.C. beats their father, Naomi still maintains the role of caregiver, going to help the father as he lay bleeding on the floor. After R.C. gets the police to help his father and Naomi, she is sent to live with a family that will take care of her for a change, making her life a bit easier.

The stereotypical African Americans in Greenwood and the South in general are mostly field workers. They do not have much in terms of wealth and are appreciative of any job that they have. They are uneducated, as their schools are in bad need of repairs and they do not receive the help they need. Mr. Paul says that when he was called to an African American school before he went to the military and the school had poor lighting and outhouses for bathrooms with no running water. Some people, like the African American funeral director, have never even been to a doctor or school.

Emmett does not fit this stereotype in any form. Hiram automatically knows that Emmett is not from the area when he first meets Emmett at the train station. Emmett's clothes and speech are different. His speech is a bit slower due to his occasional stutter, but he speaks more clearly and fully enunciates his words. His attitude is also different. When he first meets Hiram, Ruthanne tells Emmett to carry Hiram's bags for him, Emmett is upset. He does not want to carry the bags as he feels that doing such is beneath him, and since no one offered to carry his bags when he arrived he should not have to carry Hiram's. This causes Ruthanne to become angry with Emmett, ending with Emmett grudgingly carrying Hiram's bags when Ruthanne is looking, but tricking Hiram into carrying them when her back is turned.

Emmett is bored easily with Southern life. He does not work in the fields like the others and does not know the dangers of the local river like others do. Hiram has to rescue him from the river when Hiram is fishing by himself. This causes a minor shift in Emmett's attitude and he carries on a pleasant conversation with Hiram. He does this as Hiram's equal and does not find himself inferior to Hiram in any way, like local African Americans would. Although Hiram appreciates this, this feeling of equality is also something that turns into a problem later on when Hiram encounters Emmett again.

This time, Hiram is with R.C. and they are fishing after eating a lunch prepared by Ruthanne. While R.C. sleeps, Hiram runs into Emmett and his cousins playing in the river. After Hiram mentions the lunch, the stereotypical action of his cousins is to not ask about the lunch or take it when it is offered to them. Emmett on the other hand is excited about this and goes with Hiram to get the bag. His cousins try to warn him that the interaction could prove to be a problem, but Emmett refuses to listen. They are correct



as R.C. wakes up and finds Emmett interacting with Hiram as an equal. This causes R.C. to become enraged and torture Emmett for being what he considers "uppity" while his cousins do nothing to stop R.C. for fear of retaliation against them as well.

This break in stereotype ultimately hurts Emmett as he is accused of harassing a white woman in a local store. For this, Emmett is kidnapped, beaten, mutilated, and murdered for his supposed action. The community belief is that Emmett needed to be taught a lesson in how an African American should act in the South. During the trial, his mother says she warned him before coming to Mississippi to be humble and act with humility, along the lines of how a typical African American would act.

Relationships

There are plenty of relationships within the novel and each have some affect on the development of the plot. The two biggest relationships is the relationship between Hiram and his grandfather and between Hiram and his father. The relationship between Hiram and Grampa is a very special one, as Hiram lived with Grampa until the summer of 1948 while Hiram's father and mother lived in Oxford. Hiram spent more time with Grampa than anyone else, and through this Grampa started teaching Hiram the ways of the South. It was Grampa's intention that Hiram love the South as much as he does, for this would continue his family's heritage and drive away some of the shame he has felt since Hiram's father has a different way of thinking that Grampa finds embarrassing. Hiram looked up to Grampa as a hero as well as a caretaker until Hiram's father takes him to live in Arizona.

Over the next few years, Hiram still feels very close to his grandfather and wants to go back to Mississippi as soon as he can. Hiram gets his opportunity in 1955 when Hiram is 16 after Grampa has a stroke. At first, the two carry on as if nothing has changed between them. Over time, the relationship becomes more strained as Hiram gets a closer look at Grampa's views on the inequality of society, something that Hiram did not understand previously. As Grampa sides with those seeking the continued segregation of school and lack of rights for African Americans, Hiram drifts from this view especially after he encounters Emmett Till and realizes that all people should be respected. Hiram begins to see that his father's views were not so far fetched and that the ways of the South do not reflect how he feels at all.

This worsens as every time Hiram mentions any sort of action that goes against Grampa's beliefs. When Emmett is tortured by R.C., Grampa feels that although it was a joke that got out of hand, and Emmett actually deserved it because Emmett should have known to no act so familiar with a white person. After Emmett is kidnapped and murdered, there is a great division as the what should be done about this. Grampa feels that Hiram should keep out of it, but Hiram feels that his morality is in question if he just keeps silent. Hiram considers himself doing the right thing but Grampa views this as foolish and the possible renewal of embarrassment he felt years earlier when Harlan expressed similar views.



The final break in the relationship between Hiram and Grampa comes after the murder trial. The sale of the truck is only a part of Hiram's frustration, but when he encounters Ronnie Remington, he learns a secret that permanently damages their relationship. Ronnie divulges that Grampa was with J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant on the night that Emmett was kidnapped. Hiram confronts Grampa with this knowledge and Grampa is unapologetic towards his being present when Emmett was kidnapped but he was assured that the boy would be returned alive. With this new knowledge, Hiram can barely be in the same room with Grampa during his final time in Greenwood. When they see each other for the last time Grampa offers no remorse for his actions, leaving Hiram to fully understand that his father was right all along.

The relationship between Hiram and his father is strained after the move to Tempe as Hiram feels that the move takes him away from the only home he has ever known. Throughout the following years, tensions mount as Harlan does not allow Hiram to visit Greenwood. It is only because of Grampa's stroke that Hiram is allowed to go back for a summer visit. Before Hiram leaves, Harlan warns him as to the conditions of Greenwood, but Hiram is reluctant to listen. When Harlan does not drop Hiram off at the train station, Hiram takes this as a sign that their relationship is too far gone to try to make amends. As the summer wears on and Hiram is exposed to the prejudicial culture of Greenwood, he begins to learn that his father was right to believe as he does and Hiram begins to feel the same way. This leads to a desire for Hiram to make peace with his father and to rebuild their relationship but Hiram is unsure if his father is interested in doing the same. After the trial, Hiram is actually excited to go home to see his father and talk to him as he finally understands what Harlan has been saying. The surprise comes when it is Harlan who is at the train station in Arizona to pick Hiram up, showing that he too is interested in mending their relationship. During the conversation that ensues, Harlan is able to give his account of what happened between him and his father and Harlan and Hiram begin to resolve their own differences.

The relationship problems between Harlan and Grampa come from Harlan's youth. Harlan does not share the same prejudices that many in the Greenwood community have. This makes Grampa feel that Harlan is a weakling and that there is something wrong with him. Grampa tells Hiram in a conversation that they used to do everything together and that at one time they too had a special bond but since Harlan developed what he considers "anti-South" views, Grampa could no longer deal with him. Both Grampa and Harlan admit that Grampa would do everything he could, including beating to try to get Harlan to change. Since Harlan would not, the two drifted apart as their ideologies were completely different. The relationship is never repaired even after Harlan moves his family to Tempe, although Grampa admits at one point he does miss Harlan sometimes and Harlan admits that he still loves his father.

Change

Change is another crucial concept to the plot of the novel. The first change is Hiram's move from Greenwood, Mississippi to Tempe, Arizona after his father accepts a teaching position at a local school. This is met with negativity by both Hiram and



Grampa as this means they can no longer see each other. Grampa is no longer able to teach Hiram the ways of the South like he wanted to and Hiram will not be able to carry on his special bond with Grampa. This not only signals the end of end of Hiram's childhood in Greenwood, but it also is the beginning of years of tension between Harlan and Hiram.

When Hiram returns, he finds that Grampa himself has changed. No longer is he the strong and youthful person he was before his stroke. Grampa is much grayer and gets tired very easily although he is still active with the White Citizens Council. Grampa's demeanor has changed as well, but Hiram finds this out slowly. Grampa is more heavily involved with his White Citizens Council meetings, so much that he is often tired during the day.

The main change is how Hiram views the community of Greenwood and the South in general. In the beginning of the novel, Grampa tells Hiram that African Americans are meant to be inferior to whites. At the time, Hiram dismisses this idea as he is too young to fully understand Grampa's words. After his return, Hiram sees that there is a mentality of white superiority and prejudice that is very noticeable. This is particularly exemplified by R.C. not wanting to eat any of Ruthanne's food when he and Hiram go fishing. Of course, R.C. soon forgets this and eats the lunch, but when Emmett comes to take the rest of it, R.C. is enraged that an African American would be so bold as to interact with a white person. The result is that R.C. tortures Emmett, much to Hiram's disgust. When Hiram gets home and tells Grampa about this, Grampa is dismissive, saying that it really was Emmett's fault as he should have known not to interact so familiarly with a white person.

Later on, when Emmett is kidnapped and murdered, Hiram truly sees the more sinister side of the community as there is a general consensus that Emmett got what he deserved. This brings about the biggest change for Hiram. Now he sees the hidden and ugly truth that his father had been trying to protect him from in that the community does not value the lives of African Americans and that this prejudice is unacceptable. Hiram has the ability to come forward and testify but is pressured by Grampa not to do so. after some time of introspection, and discussions with Mr. Paul and Naomi, Hiram has changed from being heavily influenced by Grampa to wanting to become his own man by doing what he he feels is right.

This also brings about a change in his relationship with Grampa and his father. This is also covered in Theme of Relationships, but there is a significant change. As the trial goes on, Grampa becomes more agitated with Hiram for going against what Grampa thinks is the better choice in not wanting to be a part of it. Hiram has adopted the family trait of being stubborn as he wants to continue with his interest in the trial. At the end of the trial, Hiram is disgusted by the desire to forget that this crime ever happened, causing Grampa to lash out at Hiram. This causes a significant change as Hiram gets frustrated as well, leading to the loss of trust between the two. This is a significant change as Grampa was once Hiram's hero, but Hiram is beginning to no longer think this. Instead, Hiram is gravitating more towards his father and his views on life and

equality, something that greatly frustrates Grampa as he thought that Hiram would continue his family's prejudice traditions.

The ultimate change for Hiram comes from the sudden revelation that Grampa had a role to play in Emmett's kidnapping. Although Grampa maintains that he only went with Milam and Bryant to talk to Emmett and that he was alive when Grampa last seen Emmett. This changes Grampa's role from observer to actual accessory to this horrendous crime. This in turn ultimately damages the relationship between Hiram and Grampa. The relationship changes from where Hiram views Grampa someone to be trusted and loved, to someone Hiram barely knows and does not want to interact with. with the damage becoming irrecoverable, Hiram's view has officially changed to where he no longer wants to be in Greenwood and is eager to leave it, with Naomi being the only one he will actually miss.

Styles

Point of View

The story is told in the first person omniscient point of view. This allows the reader to fully be immersed in thoughts, emotions, and actions of the narrator, Hiram Hillburn. This is especially important as it shows the gradual change in the relationships between Hiram and his father as well as his grandfather. It also gives insight into the evolution of Hiram from someone who is afraid of R.C. to someone who is willing to stand up for what he believes in for the sake of justice, no matter the consequences. These views give the reader a greater understanding of the plot development as the focus is solely on Hiram's role in the novel and how it is conjoined with a major event in the civil rights era of United States history.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is fairly simple to understand when it comes to actions and descriptions. The novel is not heavily loaded with scenic descriptions and metaphors, making the flow of the novel easy to follow. The dialogue is written as how a person would actually speak. Emmett speaks with a slight stutter and there is a noticeable Southern drawl, seen especially during the trial scenes. Derogatory terms for African Americans and for poor whites are used throughout the novel. There is little else in the way of profanity and there are no sexual innuendos. Due to the nature of the plot, this novel is suggested for advanced middle school or high school students through adults.

Structure

The novel is comprised of 17 chapters, most being 10 -12 pages in length. The exception to this is the chapters during which the trial occurs as they are almost double in length to allow for witness questioning and testimony. The first 4 chapters handle Hiram's youth, move to Arizona and establishes his need to return to Greenwood. Chapters 5 - 10 illustrate Hiram's adjustment to living back in Greenwood, the encounters with Emmett Till, Emmett's torture by R.C., and the beginning of Hiram's shift to understanding his father. Chapters 11 and 12 cover the kidnapping and murder of Emmett, Hiram's reaction, and the shift of Hiram's attitude toward his grandfather. Chapters 13 through 15 are comprised of the trial of J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant. The final chapters 16 and 17 show the falling action of the novel, the reactions of the verdict and the revelation that ultimately changes Hiram's views of his own family.



Quotes

Our way of life is precious. It's the way I live, the way my daddy lived, my granddaddy, and his daddy before him. It's going to be the way you live, if I have anything to say about it.

-- Grampa (chapter 2 paragraph 9)

Importance: Grampa Hillburn has high emotions when it comes to the way of life in the South. Grampa believes that whites and African Americans are not equal, that whites are meant to be the bosses and that the African Americans are meant to be the obedient and hard working people. This is a racist view that goes back several generations in his family and he intends to raise Hiram to be as racist as he is as Grampa finds that there is nothing wrong with this way of thinking.

Son, you don't know some of the uglier things about the South. I want you growing up understanding that all men are free and deserve to be treated that way.

-- Harlan Hillburn (chapter 3 paragraph 49)

Importance: While Hiram's father explains why he has decided to move the family to somewhere out West, the notion of race is heavily present as one of the reasons for the move. Harlan has always been against the racist views of his father and the community, which is further enhanced by the time he spent in the military. In an effort to get away from this lifestyle, Harlan is looking for work that will take him and his family away from the area. Hiram does not understand why they will have to leave Greenwood, but Harlan knows that if he does not move now then Hiram will grow up with these same racist views.

You think you won something big, don't you? Well you're going to find out that I know some things you don't. Greenwood's not going to be what you expect, Hiram. You're older now, you'll see. And I'm sorry for what you'll see.

-- Harlan (chapter 4 paragraph 28)

Importance: This is a foreshadowing statement meant as a warning to Hiram who is pleased that Harlan has let him go to Greenwood for the summer. Harlan knows the extreme amount of prejudice in the area, which is one of the reasons he moved the Tempe. Harlan wants to shield Hiram from seeing this, but he has agreed to send Hiram to Greenwood for a part of the summer to help Grampa.

Hiram, maybe God put different kinds of people on earth so we could all learn to get along. Ever think about that?

-- Mr. Paul (chapter 7 paragraph 41)

Importance: As Hiram says that he sees no problem with segregation as he shares his grandfather's view on how God wants segregation, Mr. Paul becomes upset. He is trying to make Hiram realize that maybe there is an actual purpose in having different races so that they can all learn from one another. After Hiram gets home, this statement makes



Hiram start to think that maybe segregation really is wrong and his attitude towards his father begins to soften.

R.C. Rydell was one screwed up kid, and for the life of me I couldn't understand why he - or anyone - would enjoy making other people miserable. Maybe R.C. was so miserable himself the he was always looking for somebody or something he could make worse off than he was.

-- Hiram (chapter 8 paragraph 43)

Importance: Hiram thinks this to himself after being told of the prank R.C. pulls on Ronnie Remington. Hiram thinks that it was cruel to have left Ronnie in the country naked and alone, but he knows that R.C. has always been incredibly mean to anything or anyone that is not pleasing to him. Hiram tries to rationalize what R.C. does because R.C. has had a tough life at the hands of an alcoholic and presumably abusive father.

And maybe that's why Dad acted so crazy about the South and segregation. Maybe he realized that bullies would always find somebody to pick on. If not the Negroes then somebody else.

-- Hiram (chapter 9 paragraph 14)

Importance: Hiram is confused and frustrated by Grampa's dismissal of what happened to Emmett as it being Emmett's fault. Here, Hiram begins to realize that his father may have been right to leave the South as Hiram is finally exposed to the consequences of prejudice and the uncaring nature of those who consider prejudice as a way of living. Hiram also realizes that anyone could be hated and bullied and that hatred can come in any form.

Before I came down here, I didn't care about how we got along - and I didn't care because I thought he didn't care, but I don't like how things are with me and Dad, and now I'm starting to think that maybe he doesn't either. The problem is I don't know what to do about it."

-- Hiram (chapter 10 paragraph 26)

Importance: Hiram now wants to have an open conversation with his father to try to resolve their previous conflicts. Hiram also realizes that if he is wanting to talk to his father, then perhaps there is a chance that his father has been feeling the same way and that Hiram has not thought of this before. The only thing that concerns Hiram about this concept is that because of their constant arguing, he does not know how to begin this reconciliation.

You stay away from that trial, Hiram Hillburn. I don't care if you have to sneak out of town and I never see you again, but you stay away from that trial.

-- Naomi (chapter 12 paragraph 100)

Importance: Hiram tells Naomi that he has been summoned to testify in court against the men who kidnapped and murdered Emmet. Naomi wants to know why, which causes him to tell her about R.C. having encountered Emmett once before and that he



said he was going to Money along with those men to Money. Naomi tells him this quote because she feels that either R.C. or someone else could come and retaliate against him or his family and that the situation has become extremely dangerous.

Nothing would bring Emmett back to life, but the trial of his killers might be the start of things, might be a small step to making life for Negroes in the south - heck in the whole United States - a little better. If nothing else it might make me feel a little better.

-- Hiram (chapter 13 paragraph 73)

Importance: Hiram is still conflicted as to whether or not he is going to testify. He knows that it is the morally right thing to do but he also know what could happen to him. Hiram is also filled with remorse that he could do nothing to save Emmett and has realized how dangerous life for African Americans can be, especially in the South. At this point, Hiram is hopeful that with the trial of Milam and Bryant, people will start to realize that this way of life is unacceptable and that change will start to happen to make things better.

A man's got to take charge of his own life. He's got to do what he thinks is right.

-- Grampa (chapter 14 paragraph 55)

Importance: Grampa tells Hiram this, thinking that Hiram will come to his senses and forget about being a participant in the trial. This statement actually backfires on Grampa. Instead of Hiram choosing not to stay, Hiram is fueled by his morality and desire to do what he feels is right by staying to make sure that justice prevails against Milam and Bryant, even if he has to put his safety on the line by testifying against them and R.C.

The boy was alive when I left; they promised they were done with him when they brought me home.

-- Grampa (chapter 16 paragraph 115)

Importance: This is a pivotal statement made by Grampa after Hiram confronts him with the secret Ralph Remington tells him. Hiram finds out that the truck used in Emmett's kidnapping belonged to Grampa and that Grampa was with Milam and Bryant during the night. Grampa uses this statement to confess to his being a part of the kidnapping, but he also mentions that Milam and Bryant took him home before they murdered Emmett. This makes Grampa an accessory to the crimes, provides a reason why he has been so nervous throughout the trial as well as why he has sold the truck, and totally destroys his relationship with Hiram.

I realized that no matter how wrong or bad or stubborn your father is, he's still your father. I sure didn't like the things he did and said, and frankly, lots of times I didn't like him, but he's my father and he loved me, and for that I love him.

-- Harlan (chapter 17 paragraph 98)

Importance: Harlan discusses his own relationship with his father after he picks Hiram up at the train station. This shows that although Harlan and Grampa argue constantly

and do not agree on many things, there is still a certain amount of love felt by Harlan for his father. Harlan says this in hopes that Hiram will understand him a bit better and make this the beginning of rebuilding their relationship.