

# **The Road to Memphis Study Guide**

## **The Road to Memphis by Mildred Taylor**

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## Overview

Taylor's books about Cassie Logan and her family have been praised by critics because they provide readers with insight into racial tension in the Depression era, particularly in the segregated South. Taylor's descriptions and scenes are so credible that readers have often assumed that her books are autobiographical, that Taylor must have lived these stories. The problems that the Logans face are not sugar-coated; their friends sometimes die or must run away because they are the innocent victims of racial conflict. Most important, however, Taylor presents characters who stand up to oppression, making their voices heard. For the Logans, survival comes from family unity and education and by banding together with their neighbors.

The Road to Memphis is itself an important book because it lets readers see characters from Taylor's earlier books as they are on the verge of becoming adults. Cassie and Stacey are no longer able to hide behind their father, David Logan, and go on a journey during which they must confront racial hatred directly. As a result, as some reviewers have suggested, this is a bleaker book than some of the earlier Logan stories.

The book is not without hope, however—Cassie catches a glimpse of a successful Black man, Solomon Bradley, and begins to make plans for her own future. At the same time, Taylor captures most of the confusion that young adults feel as her characters try to make important decisions and as Cassie begins to struggle with romantic feelings that might threaten her plans to get an education. The Road to Memphis recaptures much of the feeling of the earlier books and should interest readers who have read them, as well as those who have not.

## About the Author

Mildred D. Taylor was born September 13, 1943, in Jackson, Mississippi. Three months after her birth her family moved to Toledo, Ohio, because her father was involved in what she calls a "racial incident." Taylor grew up in Ohio, attending the University of Toledo, where she majored in English education. After graduating, she served in the Peace Corps for two years in Ethiopia, followed by eight months as a recruiter and three more months as an instructor in a Peace Corps training camp.

In 1968, Taylor enrolled in a graduate program in journalism at the University of Denver, where she became active in the Black Student Alliance.

After receiving a master's degree in 1969, she developed and coordinated a study skills program for a black studies program she had helped institute at the University of Denver. In 1971, Taylor moved to Los Angeles, where she tried to become a writer and supported herself through temporary office work.

She had long wanted to write to provide readers with the black heroes that had been missing from her childhood schoolbooks. During this time, Taylor married Errol Zea-Daly, whom she divorced in 1975.

While living in Los Angeles, Taylor learned of a contest for minority writers sponsored by the Council on Interracial Books for Children. She quickly revised a story she had written earlier and, in 1974, won in the African American category. This short book was published as *Song of the Trees* in 1975.

Since then, Taylor, who now lives in Denver, has been writing full time. Six of her books (three novels and three novellas) concern the Logans, a Black family living in Mississippi in the late 1930s and early 1940s. According to Taylor, this series (*Song of the Trees*; *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*; *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*; *The Friendship*; *The Road to Memphis*; and *Mississippi Bridge*) is based on the stories that her father told her as a child, and most of the characters are modeled after friends and relatives. In fact, *The Road to Memphis* is dedicated to her father "who lived many adventures of the boy, Stacey, and who was in essence the man, David." Another book, *The Gold Cadillac*, is based on Taylor's own childhood experiences.

Since her first book was published, Taylor has won a number of awards, including the Newbery Prize and West Germany's Buxtehuder Bulle Award for *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award for *The Friendship*, and the Christopher Award for *The Gold Cadillac*. She has also won the Coretta Scott King Award three times, most recently for *The Road to Memphis*.

Her books have been almost universally praised for their graceful, poetic style, their superb characterization, and their sensitive treatment of racial conflict in the American South.



## Plot Summary

Cassie Logan tells the tale about her family and friends who help to bring Moe Turner out of a tight situation in Mississippi, just as World War II is starting. Moe has struck the three Aames brothers with a crowbar, seriously injuring one, after the brothers harass him. In the segregated South of 1941, this is a serious infraction that could result in a lynching or long jail term. Stacey Logan owns a car that he bought in Strawberry from a sympathetic lawyer, Wade Jamison. The young people work together and drive Moe to Memphis, where he takes a train to the relative safety of Chicago.

Traveling in Mississippi by car is dangerous for blacks. Most black people do not own cars as nice as Stacey's. This attracts the harassment of other white people, but some help the group of young people to achieve their mission. The policy of segregation denies hospital care to one of the group members, Clarence Hopkins, resulting in his death. Jeremy Simms, a young white man who had been friends with the Logans as a child, loses his friendship and regains it when he helps Moe, although this costs him. Charlie Simms, Jeremy's father, bans him from the family.

Cassie falls into a serious infatuation with Solomon Bradley while she stays at his office and apartment in Memphis. Solomon arranges repairs to Stacey's car and finds a train ticket for Moe. The group returns home, where the start of World War II greatly impacts the Logan family, while Jeremy comes by to say his final farewells.



# Chapter 1, A Fine New Car

## Chapter 1, A Fine New Car Summary

Three young, black people wait for another to return from Jackson, Mississippi at the corner of Soldiers Bridge Crossroads in October 1941. The three are Cassie Logan, the 17-year-old narrator of the story, Christopher-John, Cassie's 15-year-old brother, and Little Man (Clayton Chester), 14 years old. They are waiting for Cassie's older brother, Stacey, whom they expect to arrive by bus; and they have come by a mule-drawn wagon. Across from their waiting spot is the Wallace store. As they wait for Stacey, four young white men drive to the Wallace store in a pickup truck, Jeremy Simms and three Aames brothers, Statler, Troy and Leon. Along comes Harris Mitchum, a very large, overweight young, black man, 17 years old.

Through conversation among the people at the wagon, the narrator brings out that Stacey is to arrive with two of his best friends, Moe Turner and Little Willie Wiggins. All three work at a box factory in Jackson. Also revealed is that Harris and Clarence, at this time an unexplained character, are planning to hunt raccoon that evening using traps. Harris has walked to the Wallace store to purchase shotgun shells for hunting squirrels the following week. As Harris walks toward the store, Cassie follows with the intention of asking whether or not the bus is delayed. She does this despite her family's warning to avoid the store. The Wallaces are known to give black people trouble. Harris volunteers to ask about the bus for Cassie and enters the store to purchase his shotgun shells.

The man tending the store, Kaleb Wallace, immediately belittles Harris. Through questions about Harris' intentions with the shotgun shells, the group of white people that includes Jeremy and the Aames brothers, learn about the raccoon hunt that evening. Statler Aames starts to pick on Harris, attempting to belittle him farther and corner him into a humiliating position in order to avoid trouble. The first attempt involves a story about a raccoon and a monkey, with reference to Harris as the monkey. The second attempt is a self-invitation to the evening's raccoon hunt, where Statler presses Harris about being insulted. Jeremy steps in to stop the fearful teasing that could lead to trouble for Harris. In Mississippi during this time, ". . . white folks ruled things, and talking back to them with a smart mouth could only get you into trouble. Hitting one of them could get you killed" (p. 11). Kaleb sells the shotgun shells to Harris without further incident.

After the humiliation of Harris, he and Cassie return to the wagon. The conversation briefly turns to how whites mistreat blacks. Then, Jeremy comes out of the store. He approaches the wagon to engage in small talk. The Aames brothers come out of the store, and Statler starts in on Jeremy's socializing. The brothers leave and the bus arrives, but Stacey, Moe and Willie are not among the passengers. Shortly after the bus leaves, the three do show up in a 1938 wine-red Ford that Stacey had purchased earlier in the day. He had become disgusted with the segregated bus, and since the box factory job paid well enough, he buys the car rather than further suffering the illogical



fact that he had to stand while seats were still available, but only in the white section toward the front of the bus.

Stacey buys the car from Wade Jamison, a lawyer, on a twelve-month payoff deal. The car had been owned by Jamison's wife, but she died two years before. Everybody admires the car, and Harris adjusts the carburetor to make it run better. Except for Christopher-John, who drives the mule-drawn wagon home, the car leaves full of excited, young, black people. They drive past the Jefferson Davis School that is only for whites, and the Great Faith community church/school that is only for blacks. The group drops off Harris a short distance from Great Faith, where the narrator introduces his fraternal twin sister Sissy and Clarence Hopkins, the unexplained character mentioned earlier in the chapter.

Charlie Simms, Jeremy's father, drives his pickup wildly by Stacey's car. Losing control, the pickup truck goes into a muddy ditch. Charlie insists that Stacey use his car to pull out the pickup, but Stacy declines. This angers Charlie, who gives orders to Stacey as if a slave master. Stacey avoids confrontation by having all black hands, except Cassie's, lift the pickup out of the ditch. Charlie leaves without a word of thanks.

## Chapter 1, A Fine New Car Analysis

*The Road to Memphis* begins with a glimpse into the segregated South, before the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Blacks drive mule-drawn carts. Whites drive pickup trucks. Blacks must take humiliation from whites, without protest. Whites regularly dish out humiliation to blacks at any opportunity. Some whites, such as Jeremy and Wade Jamison, refuse to do this and try to either avoid trouble or to help out. Cassie Logan tells the story using the down-home Mississippi accents that are common among both races.

The country is just moving out of the Great Depression. Blacks from the rural areas are finding good-paying jobs in Jackson, and Stacey uses his newly gained money to buy the universal symbol of status and freedom, a good-looking car. The fact that he does this after being disgusted with the segregated bus emphasizes the importance of the symbol. He has taken one of the first steps toward personal freedom. Indeed, a good part of the country is striving for greater equality among the races.

The story narrator, Cassie Logan, displays another drive toward racial equality that is characteristic of Americans, which is a hard-headed courage that defies the way things are in favor of what they might be. Symbols of freedom go only so far. The hearts and minds of people need to follow in order for meaningful change to take place. At this point in American history, the generation that helps define and gives birth to the Civil Rights movement is still young and powerless. The reader should keep in mind that a world war will need to be fought before civil rights can be brought forth.

Other noteworthy parts of the first chapter involve foreshadowing. The Aames brothers look like nothing but trouble. Jeremy Stills seems to be a sympathetic character that has





conflict with his father, Charlie. Charlie is a hotheaded, stubborn man who will likely express himself harshly when facing conflict. Cassie has positive feelings about her friends and family, but she might have special feelings for Moe Turner. Stacey has a level head about him and an ability to find solutions to the demands that white people, like Charlie, place upon him. He also makes his moves quickly, such as buying the car. Harris Mitchum appears to be a favorite target for Statler Aames, while Sissy Mitchum and Clarence Hopkins have a stormy lover relationship.



# Chapter 2, Friendships

## Chapter 2, Friendships Summary

Cassie and Moe discuss the good cotton crop on the land that Moe's father sharecrops for Joe Billy Montier, the landowner. Sharecroppers rent the land from the landowner by paying with a 50 percent share of the harvested crop, plus farming expenses. They start talking about Stacey's newly purchased car, and how this is similar to when Moe's uncle Hammer drove down from Chicago in a new Packard. Moe mentions that he would like a new car, too, but first he needs to buy the land from Montier. He expresses interest in Cassie as a possible wife. Cassie does not want to hear about this, because she has high school and college graduation on her mind and considers Moe to be her best friend, not a possible husband. Moe, Stacey and Willie had dropped out of school in the tenth grade to make money through work, and that work requires no further education.

Stacey drives Cassie and Little Man home to the Logan land, 400 acres planted in hay, soybeans and sugarcane. Christopher-John runs from the house, followed by Big Ma, Cassie's grandmother, and Mama, her mother. Stacey gives them a ride in the car.

Jeremy comes walking by to visit. He comments on how rare the wine color is for a car, and Stacey tells him that the color was special-ordered for Mrs. Jamison. Jeremy then thanks Stacey for helping his father earlier that day. Cassie narrates the unique relationship that her family and friends have with Jeremy. He has been friends with the Logans since childhood.

Jeremy asks Stacey for a ride in the car. This is an awkward situation, due to the cultural protocol whereby blacks always ride, while whites do the driving. However, by staying on Logan land, they would not be seen by anyone else. Stacey gives him the ride. They stop at a pond where, in childhood, they had spent many good times fishing. Jeremy reminisces, explains that he has problems with his father regarding segregation, and this becomes another awkward situation for Stacey. Jeremy brings up a wind pipe that he made for Stacey eight years before, thus breaking the tension. They return to the house.

Cassie's father, an imposing man who demands respect, returns home. He plays a little game with Stacey before finally admiring his car, but Cassie is aware of the joke from a wink that her father gives. He takes the boys and Cassie for an hour-long ride, despite Big Ma's announcement that supper is just about ready. When they return, the supper conversation involves the raccoon hunt and the work situation in Jackson. Defense jobs are available, due to the military buildup in the event that the country goes to war. Although mostly whites are hired into the defense jobs, this opens up other well-paid jobs for blacks. Little Man declares his willingness to fight if war breaks out. Sissy and Harris drop by after bringing food to the pastor of Great Faith, Reverend Charles Gabson, who is ill. Discussions include the raccoon hunt that Big Ma is against for Cassie, and Sissy displays some of her feisty and controlling behaviors.



After supper, Cassie selects her dress for going to church the next day. Her mother helps, telling her that college is what she wants for Cassie, but that she should be careful about Moe's feelings. He can be easily hurt if she leads him on romantically, and Cassie denies that she is doing this. The dress selection made, Cassie gets ready for the raccoon hunt.

## Chapter 2, Friendships Analysis

The friendship between Jeremy and the Logans is a forbidden and dangerous relationship in the segregated South. The friends must be careful not to break cultural protocol in public, which brings forward tense situations on all sides. Jeremy's father has been against his son's egalitarian attitude that people are just people, no matter what the race, all along. By today's standards, Jeremy's attitude is common. However, in 1941, the general attitude for both blacks and whites is to keep as far away from each other as possible. Cassie's father knows how dangerous Jeremy might be to his family, and he keeps his distance. The Logan family has nothing but closeness and warmth for each other, something that Jeremy admires and lacks with his father.

Cassie shows herself to be strong-willed in a 17-year-old's fashion. She wants to go on the raccoon hunt, despite Big Ma's objections that this is not lady-like behavior. Cassie wants to wear pants instead of a skirt, placing practicality over appearance. She confronts Sissy's controlling manners with blunt honesty. Meanwhile, Cassie's father supports her desire to go on the raccoon hunt, and her mother gently warns her not to play with Moe's heart. Big Ma encourages Cassie to attract Moe's attentions, a frustrating situation for Cassie. Overall, this displays that the Logan family has its frictions that are handled within a strong family structure of honesty and love, where damaging arguments are avoided through a rhythmic banter.

The wind pipe that Jeremy mentions is his single tangible connection to Stacey. Presented to Stacey eight years before while they were still children, the wind pipe symbolizes the innocence of youth, where cultural protocols carry very little weight. Now that they are older, the racial differences have not only gained importance on a social level, but they serve to drive childhood friendships apart. Jeremy hopes that the wind pipe will be a reminder to Stacey of what they once enjoyed without fear. Stacey knows that their friendship is doomed to fade away, and although he does not like the situation, he can do nothing about it.

A war is brewing in October 1941. The United States has not yet officially declared its stance with the Allies, yet the country prepares for what might be inevitable. War has already broken out in Europe and Asia, and the fascists are winning. World conquest is the goal of the fascists, so the thinking must be that America's involvement is only a matter of time. The military buildup draws the economies of black communities upward, as it looms as a possible threat to the lives of the Logan boys.



# Chapter 3, The Hunt

## Chapter 3, The Hunt Summary

Cassie describes the raccoon hunt as being more of a nighttime cookout while waiting for the dogs to bark, signifying that they had found a raccoon and chased it up a tree. While roasting peanuts and potatoes by the fire, the hunters exchange stories. Clarence announces that he wants to join the Army, an idea that came to him from his cousin who is in the Army and likes it well enough. Stacey is neither for nor against the idea and agrees to drive Clarence to Jackson, where he can sign up.

One of the dogs starts barking. Harris and Cassie go to investigate, but instead of finding raccoon, they run into the Aames brothers and Jeremy, also hunting for raccoon. Statler begins his usual harassment of Harris and includes Cassie in his offensive suggestions. The situation escalates to the point that Harris must run away and climb a tree to avoid the dogs that the Aames brothers release. Jeremy tries to talk Statler down from his actions before he releases the dogs, but this does not work. Cassie runs to her hunting camp to alert the others to Harris' trouble. They find him in the tree with the dogs beneath, and Harris falls out of the tree, badly breaking a leg. Stacey fights off the dogs until the Aames brothers call them back.

Little Man and Cassie run back to the house to get help. Cassie's father hitches the mules to the wagon, and everyone from the house rides out to retrieve Harris. Once he is placed in a bed, Stacey drives his car out to bring Harris' family to him. Harris cannot be further moved due to his broken leg, ribs and possibly other injuries. He is also unconscious from the fall. Later that night, Harris becomes conscious. Jeremy comes by and talks with Stacey. Jeremy wants to know how Harris is doing and to apologize for the incident. Stacey does not accept the apology. Instead, he gives Jeremy a harsh analysis of the situation, full of hostility. Cassie speculates to herself that the childhood friendship with Jeremy is now over.

## Chapter 3, The Hunt Analysis

What starts out as a pleasant time for Cassie, the Logan boys and Harris turns into a night of terror as the Aames brothers, particularly Statler, harass Harris to the point that he is badly injured. From what Statler said earlier that day in the store, it is likely that he organized the raccoon hunt to consciously continue his torture of Harris or any other black person he might encounter. Statler represents the inhumane cruelty that naturally comes from an attitude of superiority over others. Jeremy tries to talk him out of his sadistic actions and fails.

After Harris falls, the Aames brothers and Jeremy simply walk away from the problems that they caused. As when Charlie drove off without a word of thanks, and when he showed no concern for Stacey's car, the whites display contemptuous disregard for



blacks. Harris is now a black problem, although whites actually caused the problem. Stacey expresses this injustice in no uncertain terms to Jeremy, when he drops by to apologize. Stacey has no forgiveness to give, nor is it required. Pathetically, Jeremy walks away, powerless to rectify anything and caught between two worlds. He seems bound to be rejected by both the white and black communities, in effect becoming a man with no community. His only transgressions have been to treat all people with respect and to avoid confrontations.

Clarence declares his desire to join the Army before the trouble begins with the Aames brothers. He says that he likes the uniform, indicating that serving his country will bring him a measure of automatic respect that he would not otherwise have. He might also be trying to escape the controlling nature of his relationship with Sissy. Stacey remains neutral on the subject, other than to express that he would not make the choice to join the Army. With war brewing, Stacey might not have the choice, and so he is resigned to the fact.



# Chapter 4, Down Home Farewell

## Chapter 4, Down Home Farewell Summary

Stacey drives Cassie, Moe, Little Willie and Clarence to Jackson on Monday morning. Clarence joins the Army and goes to Camp Shelby for training. Cassie has mixed feelings about Jackson, the capital city of Mississippi. She does not like the size of the city, being accustomed to rural living. However, she realizes that living in the city is necessary to work on her education, and her Jackson neighborhood offers family and convenience.

The car gives the group of young people the ability to visit their homes every weekend, and this cuts down on homesickness. Shortly after Thanksgiving, the Reverend Charles Gabson dies, thus prompting the group to return home for the funeral. Clarence arrives on an overnight pass, and many people from the surrounding communities also congregate to give their final respects. The group discovers that Sissy is pregnant with what must be Clarence's child. Sissy confuses the issue by implying that Clarence is not necessarily the baby's father, a misdirection that causes suspicion within the group. Meanwhile, Cassie notices that Moe has been very quiet for a long period. Upon her questioning, Moe admits that he has lost his job in Jackson. The conversation turns to the Army and whether or not to join. Little Willie expresses his disgust that white people start wars, and black people fight them. He will wait to be called up.

Cassie confronts Sissy about her misdirection regarding her baby's father. The young men in her circle have almost come to blows, and she is very upset with how Sissy manipulates the situation. Sissy explains that her strategy is to make Clarence jealous and possessive. Out of that, she expects him to marry her. Sissy admits that Clarence is the only possible father and that her behavior is justified by love. Cassie finds this difficult to understand, never having experienced love, and how it affects clear thinking.

On her way back to the church, Cassie finds herself in a dangerous position with Statler. He and his brothers drive up to her in their pickup truck. Statler frightens Cassie with sexual innuendoes, and the situation promises to escalate as with Harris, except Statler has rape on his mind this time. Cassie's father appears and defuses the danger, having spotted the pickup truck and being aware of Statler's reputation for raping black girls. He also knows that the law does not protect black girls from people like Statler.

Cassie tells Clarence about Sissy's manipulations to make him jealous and possessive. Clarence confronts Sissy, which reveals that Cassie did not keep the information confidential, as she had promised. Sissy tries to control the situation with her aggressive domineering methods, but this serves to drive Clarence away. Clarence complains about a headache that has been annoying him off and on.



## Chapter 4, Down Home Farewell Analysis

The funeral of Reverend Charles Gabson brings together friends and family from all around, perhaps for the last time. His death is not mourned, because he lived a full life. According to his faith, he has simply been called home by his maker. Although somber for the funeral, the mood of the crowd turns festive afterwards, similar to how funeral processions in New Orleans play sorrowful music to the gravesite and upbeat music afterwards. Death is a sad occurrence, but also a release from this world of pain and misery to a better afterlife.

Drama develops around Sissy's pregnancy and threatens to tear the group of young people apart. Angry with Sissy, Cassie confronts her and discovers the truth, thereby affirming her youthful courage that she often expresses without much concern for the consequences. Statler finds this trait to be attractive when he threatens her with the possibility of rape, a possibility of which Cassie is only dimly aware. Her father is fully aware of her danger and comes to her aid. He explains how he always worries for her safety. It's a common concern among fathers, especially those with daughters. In this case, the law offers no additional protection, as well. Cassie is too young to be cautious, and too old to be safe. When she tells Clarence about Sissy's intentions, she instigates the confrontation that must follow and expresses regret afterward. Cassie is reckless, but learning.

The conversations the young people have about their lives and futures reveal the limited choices they have in the South, although broadened a little with the oncoming war. A big question for the young men is whether or not to join the Army. Despite the opening of job opportunities in Jackson, the men know that a war will mean that they will all be called to fight. They also know that they will be fighting for white freedoms and privileges, not black rights. Stacey finds this to be a disgusting fact, supported by prior experiences with World War I. What he does not know is that military policy during World War II will advance racial equality in the United States. Nevertheless, his feelings are appropriate for the times.

Sissy's crisis reflects the black woman's lot in the 1940s. She must attract Clarence to be her husband in a way that makes him join with her voluntarily. Entrapping him through pregnancy will only make him bitter, and so she attempts to work his feelings of jealousy and possession. Contrasting with this, Cassie has the choice to pursue her education as her mother had done before marrying. Her family owns a significant piece of land, where Sissy's family does not. When Cassie foils Sissy's maneuvers by telling Clarence about them, she does not realize the bigger picture. Sissy has no choice. Cassie does, however limited.



## Chapter 5, Incident in Strawberry

### Chapter 5, Incident in Strawberry Summary

Stacey drives the group to Strawberry, a small town on the way to Jackson. He stops in front of Wade Jamison's office to pay off the rest of his car loan and notices a low tire. Willie volunteers to take the car to Dueeze's garage and fix the tire, but before he does this, Clarence goes into the mercantile to buy headache medicine. The Aames brothers come out of the store as Clarence goes in, and when he comes back out, Statler starts his harassment. Moe becomes involved, and the situation escalates. Wade Jamison shouts for Clarence and Moe from across the street, thereby ending the trouble. The Aames brothers do nothing and say nothing because Jamison ". . . was a formidable figure and, despite everything, one of their own." (p. 119).

Staying at Jamison's office to sign legal papers on the car, Stacey does not accompany the group to the garage when they leave to fix the tire. Clarence stays behind, too. While at the garage, Harris and Sissy drive up in a truck. Sissy wants to see Clarence. Jeremy is also at the garage with his father's pickup truck. The Aames brothers show up and talk with Jeremy, then Statler starts harassing Moe. Moe stands holding a crowbar, and the stage is set for disaster. Pushed too far, Moe takes out all three brothers with the crowbar, seriously injuring one and temporarily disabling the others. Moe hides underneath a tarp in the back of Jeremy's father's pickup truck after Jeremy motions him over. Statler is on the ground facing away, and the other two brothers are out cold. No white person witnesses Moe getting into the pickup truck, except Jeremy.

J.D. Dueeze and Charlie Simms come running out of the garage to see what the commotion is about. They demand to know who attacked the Aames brothers. Jeremy admits that Moe is the attacker and claims that he had run away quickly. Statler mentions Harris and his truck, and how he had left shortly before the attack. Charlie and Dueeze jump into a car to chase down Harris, thinking that Moe might be with him. Stacey comes to the garage, and after finding out what had happened, he asks Jeremy to take Moe to Jackson. Charlie returns and decides to keep on looking for Moe while Jeremy takes the truck to Bogganville, thereby removing Moe from the crime scene.

### Chapter 5, Incident in Strawberry Analysis

Statler Aames finally gets a little of what is due him, not by the law of men, but by the law of the jungle. He pushes Moe too far and ends up with a crowbar beating that disables him and his brothers, seriously injuring one. What Moe does is punishable by a lynching, where due process falls before the hangman's noose. Everyone knows this. Moe must become invisible fast, and in an instant, Jeremy decides to help out.

By hiding Moe in his father's pickup truck, Jeremy takes a huge chance. If he is caught, he will be in some kind of trouble, but not as much trouble as Moe. White people have





the benefit of law protection more than black people. Stacey's request that Jeremy bring Moe to Jackson indicates that the shunning of Jeremy over the raccoon hunt incident must be suspended to give Moe a chance. Stacey has no choice but to trust Jeremy.

Besides Jeremy, the black people have an ally in Wade Jamison. He is a lawyer who has earned respect despite his liberal views (meaning equality under the law), by keeping to his ideals rather than submitting to the sneak attacks that come his way. Jamison stands like the statue of Justice, except he is not blindfolded. He sees the injustices that go on around him regularly and tries to balance the scales when he can. Where Jeremy represents the lost friendship of childhood and the redemption of taking a major risk for the benefit of another, Jamison represents the old warrior who has battled all his life and refuses to stand down from the threats and attacks of a bigoted society.



# Chapter 6, Escape from Jackson

## Chapter 6, Escape from Jackson Summary

The group arrives in Jackson and immediately looks for Moe at a neighborhood cafe that is run by friends. Moe is not to be found, and Clarence is still having trouble with his headache. Stacey decides to go looking for Moe. Most of the group goes, as well, but Cassie stays. She has a debate to study for with fellow students, who are to gather at the cafe. She decides to study on her own in the backroom of the cafe until they show up. The subject matter bores her, so she reads a book of law cases that interests her.

Solomon Bradley, on his way back to Memphis from New Orleans, knocks and enters the room where Cassie studies. Solomon is a very handsome man, and he talks with Cassie in a manner that keeps an air of mystery about him. Cassie is attracted to Solomon, and he is impressed with her knowledge. The talk turns to legal cases, Cassie's education and literature. Jasper, one of the friends who runs the restaurant, and the man that Solomon is looking for, comes to the room. The two men leave the room as Stacey and Willie come in. They are checking if Moe has been seen. Discovering that he has not, they go back out to look for him. This time, Cassie goes with them.

As the group is about to leave in Stacey's car, Jeremy arrives in the pickup truck with Moe in the back. Stacey thanks him for his help, and Jeremy hopes that his debt from the incident with Harris is paid. Jeremy leaves the group for home, certain that his story for being late will be credible enough for his father. The group discusses what Moe should do. Staying in Jackson is not an option, but taking a train to Chicago where Moe can stay with Uncle Hammer might work out. Moe insists on seeing Jamison before leaving. Stacey and Cassie go into Jamison's house after the group decides that Moe should not be seen in the white neighborhood. Jamison advises that Moe's best chance is to go north, because the Mississippi law requires that he do at least prison time if he turns himself in.

The group discovers that the Jackson police have been alerted about Moe, and this means that the bus and train stations are being watched. Stacey offers to drive Moe out, and after discussing the various ramifications of the move, they decide to head out to Memphis that evening. From there, Moe can take a train to Chicago. Oliver, another cafe worker, lends them money from the till and suggests that they look up Solomon, a highly influential man, once in Memphis.

## Chapter 6, Escape from Jackson Analysis

When Jeremy brings Moe to Jackson, the problems are not over. Moe cannot stay long in Jackson due to the local police having been notified about his wanted status. Moe displays a great deal of concern that he has caused the trouble and should simply



return to Strawberry and turn himself in. The group does not accept this as being the best thing to do, and instead decides that driving to Memphis in Stacey's car will be better. However, before this decision can be made, Stacey and Cassie consult with Jamison on Moe's behalf. Jamison accurately describes Mississippi law, unfair as it is, and gives the realistic advice that Moe has a better chance if he goes north. Stacey's car becomes not only a symbol of freedom and status, it serves as a confidential meeting room for the group, safe transportation while in Jackson, and a way out of Mississippi. Without the car, the group's options would narrow to nothing.

Cassie meets the mysterious and handsome Solomon Bradley, an influential and accomplished man who makes Memphis his home. He shows an interest in Cassie that is partly admiration and partly romantic, a reflection of what might be one of his internal conflicts. He is a smooth lady's man, trying to fill a void. Cassie is curious, puzzled and attracted to Solomon in a way that she does not yet understand. Solomon's suggestions to Cassie for expanding her reading subjects into fiction indicate his belief that although hard work is admirable, life should also be enjoyed.

Jeremy's brief appearance does two highly important things. He delivers Moe as promised, and he asks for forgiveness. Stacey does not respond, and Jeremy's eyes look empty. Of all the people involved, Jeremy needs forgiveness the most, but it is not for Stacey to give. Jeremy needs to look elsewhere for what he seeks, and he might not find forgiveness among humans. He has a disturbed soul that requires a type of comfort not available to him in Mississippi. Most of the whites involved want revenge and punishment, following a low creed that demands Moe's life to be sacrificed, at best in jail and at worst at the end of a rope.



# Chapter 7, The Road to Memphis

## Chapter 7, The Road to Memphis Summary

On their way to Memphis along the pitch black highway, Stacey notices that the car is not running well and stops at a gas station to check under the hood. Cassie wants to use the restroom, but the station has only white toilets. The gas station attendant looks at the engine and finds a worn fan belt. He offers to change it, but a car carrying white couples pulls up. The attendant serves them first, and more cars, with whites in them, drive into the station. One of the men demands that Stacey move his car, which he does with some protest. Stacey leaves for the store and gives Cassie the car keys in case she needs to move the car again. Cassie spots the whites-only restrooms and decides to secretly use one. A white woman catches her before she can enter, and this leads to a humiliating experience where the gas station attendant kicks Cassie like a dog. She scrapes her knees, and he makes her run away without her purse. She runs toward Stacey's car, but it is surrounded by white men. She then runs to the store to get Stacey. After confronting the white men, Stacey gets in the car along with the rest of the group and speeds away, scaring a white man, who was trying to block him.

It appears that someone is following Stacey's car, possibly the white men who surrounded it. Stacey takes a side road and runs without lights, while everyone looks for a road branching off the side road. They find one and drive into a stand of trees. Stacey produces a handgun and walks back the way they came to see if they were followed. He finds that nobody has followed. When he tries to start the car, nothing happens, because wires were shaken loose from the rough ground in the grove of trees. He also finds that the fan belt is broken. He can reconnect the wires, but running without a fan belt will overheat the engine. The group decides to wait for dawn before doing anything, and everyone tries to get some sleep. Cassie has a nightmare about her experience with the gas station attendant and wakes up with a scream. She becomes sick to her stomach and vomits in the woods, soiling her clothes. In the morning, the group discovers that someone had made a deep scratch all around the car the night before. This enrages Stacey.

Stacey and Willie walk toward a small town to see if they can get a replacement fan belt. Cassie talks with Clarence, who is still suffering from his headache, about his relationship with Sissy. She encourages him to write a letter to Sissy. Moe and Cassie eat some food that the group has brought along. Moe speculates that one of the Aames brothers might die, making him a murderer. After Moe snatches a kiss from Cassie and is about to reveal his feelings for her, two white men approach from the woods. They question Moe and Cassie about the car and look under the hood. One of the men tells Moe that he might have a fan belt for him at the house, and Moe leaves with them. Stacey and Willie return from town, but nothing is open on Sunday. Moe returns with a fan belt that the white men gave him without charge.



Clarence's headache explodes into intolerable pain that drives him out of the car. He runs into the woods and falls down a rocky slope. He hits his head on a rock hard enough to knock him out. Stacey, Willie and Moe carry Clarence back to the car. They put the fan belt on and take Clarence to a whites-only hospital in the nearby town, but the hospital rejects the patient. A cleaning woman helps by giving medicine to Stacey and directing him to Ma Dessie's place, a woman who knows something about health care. Ma Dessie mixes the medicine from the hospital with other powders, dissolves them in water and has Clarence drink the potion. The group leaves Clarence with Ma Dessie after politely eating their very basic food and talking the decision through with Clarence. He feels better after taking the potion and decides to stay in case the headache comes back again. As the group says their farewells to Clarence, he tells Cassie that he has started his letter to Sissy. Ma Dessie refuses offered money for her help, quoting the Bible about taking strangers in.

As the group rolls into Memphis, night has fallen. They are impressed by the city lights and Christmas decorations, and they try to get Moe on a train to Chicago at Central Station. A shoeshine man tells Stacey why so many soldiers are at the station. The Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor, and this means that the United States will without doubt declare war. This also means that it is nearly impossible to get a ticket to Chicago anytime soon, not without help. Train stations all over the country will be jammed with service personnel reporting to their bases, and new recruits going to their basic training.

## Chapter 7, The Road to Memphis Analysis

The group encounters endless troubles during their trip from Jackson to Memphis. Although most of the white people they meet are tolerable and helpful, others cannot let an opportunity to harass, belittle and humiliate pass by. Cassie brings on her own attack by trying to use the whites-only restroom, but Stacey simply minds his own business and still attracts conflict, although his impatience with the situation probably encourages the troublesome whites. They gouge his car all around with something like a screwdriver to emphasize their dominance and immunity from punishment. This act is an attempt to deflate the symbol of status, but it does not remove the freedom that the car gives to the group. Stacey drives away from the trouble, the trouble follows, and Stacey hides like a fox chased by hounds. He finds his foxhole in the darkness, but the car suffers further damage.

The two white men who help with the fan belt offering provide a contrast to the troublesome white men. Not all whites are bad, although the social protocols are still followed. The men express suspicion about the group's motivations and treat them as inferiors, but not in a sadistic manner. This is just the way of Mississippi and the rest of the segregated South. The white men treat the group as best they can, offering help and not taking any money in return. This honorable behavior is also demonstrated in Ma Dessie's treatment of Clarence, and in the cleaning woman who helps out at the hospital. The shared principle is to provide help freely and with the faith that this is the right thing to do, no matter what the race or social status of the person being helped.



For all the segregation of the time, blacks and whites do share common ground in their religions.

Clarence's headache escalates to intolerable pain, and this is worrisome. He should be hospitalized and treated for possible deadly conditions within his skull. An aneurysm might be developing or some other condition that causes extreme pressure and pain, but he is turned away from the closest hospital on racial grounds. The doctor and nurse are not sadistic about this, just stubbornly following the rules. That the rules are unjust and possibly deadly make no difference, only whites can use the hospital. There is no equality in separation if the services for blacks do not exist, as the group discovers at both the gas station and hospital. Still, nobody is surprised. The rules are unjust, and that is the way things are.

The start of the United States' involvement in World War II plants what seems to be an insurmountable obstacle in the group's plan to get Moe on a train to Chicago. This is the immediate ramification of war, and one on which the group initially focuses. They have worked very hard to get this far, only to be thwarted by powers far beyond their control. However, the start of war has greater meanings for all involved. Clarence is already in the Army, and Stacey will soon be called up along with his contemporaries. Cassie could likely end up working in a defense factory, and Sissy may lose her chances with Clarence. Nobody fully grasps how war will impact their lives, nor can they have much foresight. War is an obstacle, but still a distant abstraction.



# Chapter 8, The Memphis Prince

## Chapter 8, The Memphis Prince Summary

The first alternative to getting a train ticket for Moe is to drive him to Chicago in Stacey's car. The trouble with this plan is that the car has been damaged enough to need a new oil pan and probably transmission work. Willie brings up Solomon Bradley as being able to help with the situation, and the group makes its way to the downtown address where they draw a woman's attention. She tells the group that everyone is working to get a newspaper out and that Solomon owns the paper. Stacey informs the woman that the group has mutual friends in Jackson, and she brings Solomon. He confirms that the country is at war, just how this will impact people is not certain other than significant changes will happen. His office staff is busy working into the night to produce a special edition of his weekly paper. Solomon invites the group to his back office.

Stacey fills Solomon in on the details of why he and the others have come. Solomon comments that it isn't surprising that the group had trouble while driving up from Jackson. "They had a double lynching along there just a few years back" (p. 226). He finds out that Moe is in big trouble from hitting white men, and that the reason for coming to Memphis is to get him on a train to Chicago. Solomon calls an auto mechanic and arranges to have Stacy's car repaired. Stacey tries to call Chicago, but the lines are tied up due to the war. He takes the car to be fixed and leaves Cassie with Solomon and Willie.

Cassie meets Mort, who is patriotic about the war. He expresses his desire to sign up and fight Hitler. Cassie questions his reasoning, which starts an argument. Solomon asks why Cassie is so angry, and she relates what she saw after Uncle Hammer came back from World War I. Nothing had changed for black people, and black soldiers were lynched. Solomon breaks the ensuing awkward silence by giving Mort a reason to leave. He then he asks Cassie about the gas station incident. He discovers that she is upset about vomiting and arranges for her to clean up in his apartment and put on borrowed fresh clothes while hers are at the cleaners.

In Solomon's apartment, Cassie learns that he has many lady friends. She takes a long bath, dresses and goes back downstairs to Solomon's office. He reveals his past, where he grew up in the north and went to predominantly white and non-segregated schools. Him being the only black person in the schools, he was lonesome most of the time. While they talk about the law and Cassie's interest in it, Solomon notices Cassie's scraped knees and puts iodine on the wounds. He then gives her an assignment to proofread newspaper copy while he goes on business elsewhere. After proofing copy for a long period, Cassie's mind wanders to the war and what this means to her friends and family. She turns on the radio for news, but the station is broadcasting only music. Standing, she starts to sway with the music, and while thinking about Solomon and how she ". . . was Cinderella and he was my Memphis Prince" (p. 248), Solomon enters the



room. He suggests that Cassie go back to his apartment and get some sleep, but she decides to remain in the office and sleep on the sofa.

Cassie wakes up at noon to find Stacey, Willie and Moe sleeping on the floor of the office. She wakes up Stacey and finds out that work on the car has started, and Uncle Hammer has been contacted to send money for Moe. Her clothes are back from the cleaners, and she goes up to Solomon's apartment to change. She plays a Gershwin recording, Solomon enters the apartment, and they dance and kiss. Solomon breaks off the romancing with apologies, although Cassie desires more. They leave the apartment to find Moe standing outside with the news that Stacey's car is repaired, and the money from Uncle Hammer has arrived. Moe decides to stay in Memphis until a train is available, rather than driving with Stacey to Chicago. When they enter Solomon's office, he has already arranged for Moe's ticket on a train leaving for Chicago that evening. The group sees Moe off at the train station, and he confesses his love for Cassie just before the train leaves. The group then drives from Memphis to Ma Dessie's place, where they learn of Clarence's death from whatever was causing his headaches.

## Chapter 8, The Memphis Prince Analysis

Upon arriving in Memphis, the group must determine how to bring Moe to Chicago, but none of the alternatives look workable. They wisely seek out Solomon Bradley's help, a successful business and newspaper man. Solomon becomes Cassie's Memphis prince as she experiences her first serious infatuation with an older man, although Solomon is still relatively young, being in his twenties. He attracts the attentions of many women and displays photos of them in his apartment like his other trophies that involve education and journalism. Solomon displays his metal by controlling his urges to romance Cassie. She is coming of age and not in control of her emotions. Solomon refuses to take advantage of her. He also extends his help to fix Stacey's car and obtain a train ticket for Moe. Where Cassie feels for Solomon as a prince in the romantic way, his stellar work with the group's problems make him a prince of a man in the human way.

Moe realizes the attraction between Cassie and Solomon, suspecting that Cassie would be just one more trophy for his wall. Time runs out for him, and he must tell Cassie the feelings he has before leaving on the train. Cassie knows that he feels romantic love for her, while what she feels is close friendship, nothing more. Had Moe finished what he started to say in the grove of trees when the helpful white men came, Cassie could have worked to maintain their friendship. As it stands, Moe will be living in Chicago for a long time, which makes romance nearly impossible and friendship difficult. This turn of events has likely spared Cassie the ugliness that can come about as adolescent attraction falls away or is abandoned in favor of adult love.

The death of Clarence is a tragedy in the most serious degree. Rejected by the white hospital, he must take whatever health care is available. Although Ma Dessie does her best, she is not nearly qualified enough to treat the condition that causes Clarence's untimely and wrongful death. A swelling of the brain might have caused his physical





death, but the laws that support segregation in the South of that time deny him, and by extension many other black people, the care that probably would save his and many other lives. Ironically, he is the only member of the group who has already committed to fight in a war that, as Cassie expresses with high emotion, will only benefit white people. Nothing will change for black people in 1941, as far as anyone can foresee.



# Chapter 9, A Final Farewell

## Chapter 9, A Final Farewell Summary

The group goes to see Clarence's body before leaving for home. Ma Dessie gives Cassie the letter that Clarence had been writing to Sissy. The group arrives in Jackson before dawn, where they contact the Army about Clarence. By noon, the group arrives in Strawberry. Although everything seems the same on the surface, Cassie will never think of the town in the same way. At Soldiers Bridge Crossing, the group sees Harris tied up and sitting on a truck bed. The sheriff explains that Harris is suspected of helping Moe escape. The group talks with Harris and Sissy. Sissy insists that someone tell the Sheriff that Moe escaped in the pickup truck that Jeremy drove, thus saving Harris. Jeremy drives up with Charlie and Statler, and Sissy accosts Jeremy to admit that he helped Moe. Statler pushes her to the ground, and Charlie goes into a rage and starts approaching Sissy. The sheriff stops him, and Sissy again accuses Jeremy of helping Moe. Jeremy admits to driving him out, but also that he did not see Moe get into the truck. Charlie's rage ratchets up to maximum force, and he slams his fist into Jeremy's face, knocking him down. Charlie then disowns his son.

With Jeremy's confession, Harris is free to go. Jeremy goes with the sheriff, and the group heads home. They meet Cassie's father along the way in his truck, and he turns around to follow them home. Stacey tells his father about Clarence and Moe, and Sissy's family tells her about Clarence. Sissy descends into denial of Clarence's death, while Cassie gives her his letter. Sissy takes the letter and leaves the house with Harris following. "A short while later we heard Sissy scream Clarence's name, and her scream was like a knife that rent the afternoon asunder" (p. 280). The scream haunts Cassie's dreams.

The Army brings Clarence's body home to be buried in the Great Faith graveyard. Rain falls during the wake and funeral, and continues to fall as Cassie prepares to return to Jackson. America is gearing up for war by lowering the draft age. Little Man declares that he is willing to volunteer once he turns sixteen. The family expresses various concerns, and Cassie's father calls for them all to pray in a circle while holding hands. At the end of the prayers, Jeremy knocks at the door. He wants to talk to Stacey outside, where the rain has let up to a drizzle. Cassie, Little Man and Christopher-John listen from the porch as Stacey and Jeremy walk slowly together and talk. Jeremy expresses his sorrow at Clarence's death, his full rejection from his entire family, including his mother, that his father enforces, and his desire to join the Army. He is free to do so, because the sheriff " . . . said he got no choice but to believe what I was saying, that I ain't know'd Moe was on the truck. Said it was too hard not to believe me. 'Sides, only folks in the jail are Negroes and he said he couldn't stand to put me in 'side of them' " (p. 286). After asking about Moe and reminding Stacey about the wind pipe, Jeremy leaves to walk the roads of home one last time. Later, as Cassie lay in her bed, she hears Stacey playing the wind pipe outside. The family never sees Jeremy again.



## Chapter 9, A Final Farewell Analysis

With the burial of Clarence, the Logan family turns inward to their concerns about the war. The thought of losing children is especially painful, because the family has already lost sons to World War I. With the lowering of the draft age, even the very young boys might be required to serve. Sissy's refusal to accept Clarence's death adds to the dark mood, as does the ongoing rain. The future looks hopeless, and with no other place to seek comfort, the family prays together in a circle while joining hands, forming a family unit that must hold together to face the uncertainties and tragedies ahead.

Immediately after the prayers, Jeremy comes to the family for the last time. He tells of his banishment from his family, a victim of his father's bigotry and anger, and his plan to join the Army. Stacey gives him a warm farewell handshake, indicating that whatever bad feelings there were between them are forgiven. Washed of his guilt, Jeremy leaves the Logan family to never be seen again, a strong suggestion that he dies in the war. Stacey plays the wind pipe in tribute to his friend, Jeremy, which is another expression of forgiveness and friendship.



# Characters

## Cassie Logan

Cassie is the 17-year-old narrator of the story, who accompanies Stacey, Moe, Clarence and Willie along the road to Memphis. She expresses some of the story themes directly.

## Stacey Logan

Stacey is Cassie's older brother. He buys the car that enables Moe's escape from Mississippi.

## Moe Turner

Moe loses his temper and strikes the Aames brothers with a crowbar. He must leave Mississippi to avoid harsh punishments.

## Jeremy Simms

Jeremy is a friend to the Logans and their friends. He helps Moe to escape from Mississippi, bringing on the wrath of his father, once he admits to this.

## Statler Aames

Statler is the primary antagonist who tries to start trouble with black people whenever he gets the chance. Jeremy tries to stop the trouble whenever he can.

## Solomon Bradley

Solomon is a handsome, successful black man. He helps the group in Memphis. He becomes a romantic interest for Cassie.

## Clarence Hopkins

Clarence joins the Army, accompanies the group to Memphis, and dies from an unknown head ailment. He is the father of Sissy Mitchum's baby.



## **Harris Mitchum**

Harris falls from a tree and is badly injured as a result of Statler's harassment. He is also accused of helping Moe to escape.

## **Sissy Mitchum**

Sissy is a fraternal twin to Harris. She and Clarence have a relationship that results in a baby. Their possible union is cut short by Clarence's death.

## **Papa**

Papa is Cassie's father. His strong character leads the family, and he avoids trouble with the whites whenever he can.

## **Charlie Simms**

Charlie is Jeremy's father. He cannot understand his son's friendships with black people. Charlie personifies the Southern bigot.

## **Wade Jamison**

Jamison is a lawyer who sympathizes with black people, and how they are treated unfairly in the South. He sells the car to Stacey, and helps to avoid trouble and gives legal advice to the group.



# Objects/Places

## Memphis

Memphis is the city in Tennessee where the group brings Moe, in order to get him on a train to Chicago. Cassie develops a serious infatuation with Solomon in Memphis.

## Strawberry

Strawberry is the small Mississippi town where Moe attacks the Aames brothers. Jeremy later confesses to his involvement in Moe's escape while in Strawberry, and Stacey buys his car from Jamison in this town.

## Jackson

Jackson is the capital city of Mississippi where Stacey works, and where Cassie goes to school. Jeremy delivers Moe to Jackson, from where he goes to Memphis in Stacey's car.

## The Cafe

The cafe in Jackson is where the group gathers and plans how to get Moe out of Mississippi and on to Chicago. Cassie first meets Solomon in the cafe.

## The Gas Station

The gas station along the road to Memphis is where the group runs into trouble with white men. Cassie is treated like a dog at the gas station.

## The Tree Grove

The tree grove is where Stacey drives his car to escape the white men encountered at the gas station. Moe almost declares his love for Cassie here, but he is interrupted.

## The Train Station

The train station is where Moe boards a train to Chicago after Solomon arranges for the ticket. Moe finally tells Cassie about his love for her, just before his train leaves.



## **Ma Dessie's Place**

Ma Dessie's place is where the group must take Clarence when his headache becomes intolerable, and he is rejected from the whites-only hospital. Clarence dies at Ma Dessie's place.

## **The Logan Farm**

Besides the home of Cassie and Stacey, the Logan farm is where the young Jeremy plays with black children and develops his friendships with them. This is also where he comes to ask forgiveness and to say his final goodbyes. The story starts close to the farm and ends here, as well.

## **Stacey's Car**

Stacey's car is a symbol of freedom for the group. Without the car, the trip on the road to Memphis is nearly impossible. The strength of the symbol attracts troublesome white men at the gas station, and they put a deep gouge in it that encircles the car.

## **Wind Pipe**

The wind pipe that Stacey plays at the end of the story, a gift to him from Jeremy during their childhood, is a tangible symbol of their friendship. The music Stacey plays with it is a wordless declaration of the forgiveness that Jeremy so desperately needs.

## **Solomon's Apartment**

Solomon's apartment is where Cassie develops her serious infatuation with him. She dances with Solomon, while in the apartment, and feels tremendous romantic attraction.

## **Chicago**

Chicago is Moe's safe destination while escaping Mississippi and its harsh laws that are written to disfavor blacks and unfairly protect whites.



## Setting

The first four chapters of *The Road to Memphis* take place mostly in rural Great Faith, Mississippi, near the Logan farmhouse during October 1941.

Cassie, who now attends school in Jackson, still has a fondness for the country, especially the land that has been in the Logan family for forty years. She and her family, however, are still subject to verbal and physical abuse, especially when they visit the nearby store owned by the Wallaces, their white neighbors. Cassie and her friends also encounter racial hatred when they go hunting in the woods near a river called the Rosa Lee.

The nearest town, Strawberry, where Moe Turner is provoked into attacking Statler Ames in chapter five, is in Cassie's mind "a sad, desolate place" that has not changed much over the years.

The old men who sit on the veranda of the Barnett Mercantile "seem like gray sentinels from another era." It is a town in which blacks are clearly viewed as subordinates by whites and in which they are either ignored or threatened by those they encounter. Because the whites are clearly in control, it is automatically assumed that Moe Turner is entirely responsible for his attack on Statler Ames and his brothers, Leon and Troy.

Cassie does not care much for Jackson, either, which serves as the setting for chapter six. She prefers country life to city life, but like her brother and friends, she has been forced to leave home to pursue her education. Jackson has, however, provided security for Cassie and her friends in the way of jobs, but it is not a large enough place to protect Moe Turner when he must go into hiding.

The rest of the novel takes place on the road to Memphis, including at a service station where Cassie and her friends try to get their car fixed and in a small town where they seek medical attention for Clarence. In each of these places, they find the same attitudes and dangers as in Strawberry. Memphis, on the other hand, is, in Cassie's words, "massive and grand," aglow with Christmas lights. It stands in sharp contrast to Strawberry and Jackson because it is a place in which a black man like Solomon Bradley can practice law, run a newspaper, and become wealthy. For Moe, it is the gateway to the freedom that he hopes to find in Chicago.



## Social Sensitivity

The Road to Memphis openly attacks the treatment of blacks at the beginning of World War II, showing how they were often denied hospital care, the use of public restrooms, and justice itself. Moe Turner, one of the main characters, is provoked by three white men who taunt him and as a result must flee for his life. Although the majority of white characters are presented as bigoted and oppressive, Taylor does not suggest that all whites are guilty of such behavior. Mr. Jamison and Jeremy Simms, familiar characters from earlier novels, provide help. In the end, Jeremy must leave home as a result of helping his black friends. As in all of Taylor's books, there is the suggestion that some of these problems might eventually be overcome, although at the moment things look hopeless. At the same time, Taylor does not suggest that all of the Logans' joining the army, Clarence Hopkins is avoiding his responsibilities to his pregnant girlfriend, Sissy Mitchum.



## Literary Qualities

The Road to Memphis, like some of Taylor's other works, is narrated by Cassie Logan, whose authentic voice gives credibility to amazingly atrocious acts of bigotry and prejudice. Unlike many of Taylor's earlier Logan books, this one is not centered on the Logan home, but is a journey book in which many of the characters must temporarily escape from Mississippi. Like other journey books, from Homer's *Odyssey* to Cynthia Voigt's *Homecoming*, *The Road to Memphis* is episodic, focusing on a series of adventures resulting from the protagonist's travels. These episodes, however, are closely connected. Each one involves either a moment of racial hatred or an act of fellowship that helps the travelers.

Cassie's odyssey changes her and her companions. She has experienced the first inklings of romantic love, the death of a childhood friend, and the loss of other friends, including Jeremy Simms, who is banished from Great Faith, and Stacey, who will likely go off to war.

Taylor uses one fairly important symbol, the wine-colored 1938 Ford that Stacey buys from Mr. Jamison. It is a source of pride for Stacey and others, representing freedom and a degree of success. It also sparks the animosity of whites who see it and, at one point, vandalize it. Stacey, however, does not plan to repair the scratches in it, choosing instead to let them represent the battle that he has helped to wage.

# Themes

## Friendship

The strong friendships among the group members help them to face obstacles, difficulties and attacks as a team dedicated to common goals. Other family members and friends in Jackson work to help the group attain its common goal of getting Moe out of Mississippi and into Chicago. The kind of friendship in the group has been developed from growing up together and dealing with the same problems that all black people share while living during 1941 in Mississippi.

Even among strangers, the black people have an immediate level of friendship. The cleaning woman at the whites-only hospital gives Moe headache medicine and directs the group to Ma Dessie. Ma Dessie takes in Clarence and does all she can do for him. Solomon immediately accepts the group and solves two of their primary problems, fixing the car and getting the train ticket to Chicago for Moe.

Although rare and dangerous, friendships exist between blacks and whites. Jeremy has the strongest connection with Stacey. The loss of their friendship, resulting from when the Aames brothers chase Harris into a tree from which he falls, causes a great emptiness in Jeremy. This loss prompts him to make up for it by hiding Moe in the back of his father's pickup truck and later delivering him to Jackson. On a more professional and universal level, Jamison befriends the blacks as being an oppressed people in a country that is supposedly free.

## Segregation

Segregation in the South is still supported by the doctrine of separate but equal, as decided in the Supreme Court's ruling on *Plessy versus Ferguson*. Blacks have their own schools, churches, neighborhoods, restaurants, restrooms and drinking fountains. Some things are not segregated, such as gas pumps, but whites get priority service and expect blacks to move out of their way. If a black facility is not available, such as a restroom for Cassie or a hospital for Clarence, then blacks must make do however they can. The whites expect Cassie to use the bushes and do not care what happens to Clarence. Stacey buys his car, because he becomes disgusted with the segregated bus he was riding from Jackson. Seats for whites were available, but blacks have to stand.

Another ramification of segregation is the inability for whites and blacks to interact on equal footings. The gas station attendant tries to give service to the group, but he unconsciously denigrates as he does so. When Cassie is caught attempting to use the whites-only restroom, he consciously kicks her like a dog. The white men around Stacey's car take it upon themselves to gouge the car as punishment for Stacey's behavior at the gas pump. The law is written to protect whites and to deny blacks their



rights. This injustice manifests itself through Jamison's advice to take Moe north where the laws are not as skewed.

Segregation shows itself to be impossible to maintain, as the young blacks grumble about their treatment, foreshadowing the advances in civil rights to come. The group's generation is about to fight World War II, during which time the US military will insist on equal treatment of all soldiers. Once the war is over, and the surviving soldiers return home, equal treatment under the law will become a national movement by the late 1950s. In the 1960s, attempts will be made to integrate schools and workplaces. Segregation might still happen, but it will not be required. It will also not be supported by the law.

## Coming of Age

A major subplot is Cassie's coming of age when she meets Solomon. She is already committing herself to gaining her higher education before marriage, a route that her mother had taken, before the meeting. She examines her feelings for Moe, and although she finds him attractive as a friend, he stirs no romantic feelings in her. Part of this is practical. She does not believe Moe will be anything more than a share-cropper farmer. She wants a better life, possibly as a lawyer who might be influential in forming the laws to better empower black people.

Solomon shows a deep appreciation for Cassie's sharp mind, when they meet in the cafe. At this point, Cassie is attracted physically to his unique good looks. Solomon is attracted, too. He tries to keep a space between Cassie and himself by toying with her assumptions and avoiding straight answers to her questions. He mentions that he has served prison time, possibly an attempt to keep Cassie's interest in check, or possibly to check his own interest.

The emotions of both defy discipline in Solomon's apartment while they dance. Up until this moment, Cassie has behaved as the practical and ambitious young woman. As Solomon kisses her, she becomes a fool in love for the first time in her life, stepping out of childhood and adolescence into the first stage of womanhood. Solomon realizes what a huge mistake he is making. Cassie should fall in love with someone closer to her own age, not a man with a trophy room full of conquered females. Out of concern for Cassie and perhaps for himself, Solomon decides to break off before their feelings become too powerful. For Cassie, it is too late. Solomon has awakened the woman in her, an action he might not have intended and for which he should feel no remorse. Cassie is a strong character with the ability to handle all of life's challenges with, if not grace, then raw courage.

## War

While the main plot involves getting Moe out of serious trouble, another kind of serious trouble lays in the background like a phantom setting. It's World War II. The story begins in October and ends shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December. None of the



characters can do anything about the war. They cannot stop it or avoid it. Clarence decides to join the Army, while Stacey waits for what will become his inevitable fate. Ironically, Clarence dies before tasting war. Stacey will likely not be so lucky, if dying young is any kind of luck.

Cassie has strong opinions about war. She feels that blacks should not fight in wars that whites start for their own benefit. While she is in Solomon's office, Mort argues that fighting this war is necessary, because the Japanese attacked the United States. He includes Hitler, too, due to the Axis treaties that require the member countries to act as one when it comes to war. Bringing up the master race idea of the Nazis, Mort's argument causes Cassie to comment that whites are the same in the US. Mort maintains that the difference is significant. He does not state what this difference is, but the reader should keep in mind that the Japanese, Germans and Italians are common enemies to both white and black America at the start of World War II.

Cassie and her family understand what war will mean, basing their thinking on the results of World War I, which ended 24 years earlier. World War II will last years longer, cost many more American lives and mark the beginning of the Cold War. It will also lead the way out of legally enforced segregation and into greater civil rights for blacks. While the Logan family contemplates the fates of their sons, no positive results can be seen from waging war. They have just buried Clarence and do not know who else will come home to his same, final resting place.

## Race Relationships

The relationships between whites and blacks in 1941 are always strained and often dangerous. Keeping away from whites as much as possible is the best strategy for blacks. However, avoiding all interactions is impossible, especially when people like Statler Ames keep trying to make trouble. He is also infamous as a sexual predator upon young black women. Jeremy is another threat, but in a directly opposite way. He does not want to give up his childhood friendships, and despite his good intentions, he is still a cause for concern.

A small minority of whites can be trusted, and Jamison represents these people. He holds what is considered a liberal view for the time, that all people regardless of race should be equal under the law. Possibly a majority of whites try to treat blacks as well as can be expected in a segregated South. The gas station attendant unconsciously belittles, as he tries to serve his black customers. However, he must enforce segregation when Cassie tries to use the whites-only restroom, in order to impress upon his white customers that he upholds the segregation laws. The two white men who provide a fan belt demonstrate an amount of kindness, but not too much. They still use derogatory references to blacks, which is the cultural norm of the time.

Looking back at this history from the perspective of the 21st century might leave the reader amazed that the legal system once sanctioned the abuse of a whole race by another in the United States, and that this was happening not so long ago. The novel is



written from Cassie's point of view, which probably filters the reality through her perceptions. She might describe whites in a harsher light than an objective observer, but the abuse described does have historical credibility. To this day, race relationships within the United States continue to be steeped in suspicion. Does the government favor whites over blacks? Does business? Banking? Mortgage companies? The situation has improved over the segregated South of 1941, but it is arguable that more work needs to be done to make this a country in which all people are treated fairly.

## Family

Cassie reveals the tight bonds among family members, both black and white. The extended family, consisting of father, mother, children, grandparents and possibly other relatives, is still a viable unit in the agricultural South. However, the job opportunities in Jackson attract the young men of the community. This movement from farm to city will change the country tremendously after World War II. The nuclear family, consisting of father, mother and children, will become the urban norm. Family farms will be absorbed by corporate entities. For the time being; however, Cassie lives among the members of a family who watch out for each other and friends of the family. No one person can deal with the realities of the time without the support of family. Jeremy is cast out of his family. His recourse is to join the Army, which can possibly serve as an extended family replacement throughout life.

Family loyalties exist beyond the extended family unit, as well. Those who work the cafe in Jackson help the group to bring Moe to relative safety, whether related or not. Solomon also helps in important ways, without hesitation, on the basis of mutual acquaintances. Not to be forgotten, the two white men who provide the crucial fan belt show that the family of mankind still exists, despite segregation. Suspicion displaces trust on this level, but the urge to help out fellow human beings is still an important part of living. Contrasting with this, the doctor and nurse at the whites-only hospital do not try to help at all.

While Cassie's family comes across as always being supportive, Jeremy's family does not seem to be this way. His is a dysfunctional family unit that maintains the power of the dominant male through intimidation. Among the young men, Statler is the dominant male. Charlie, Jeremy's father, is the dominant family male, as evidenced by his ability to keep Jeremy away from his mother. In the end, Cassie's supportive family survives and grows closer, demonstrated by the family prayer circle. Jeremy's family disintegrates. From a broader view, black families must stick together for mutual survival. White families are free to destroy themselves in racial bigotry.



## Themes/Characters

Most of the major characters in *The Road to Memphis* have appeared in Taylor's earlier novels, but they are now seven or eight years older. Taylor is generally consistent with earlier depictions of them, but they must now face new challenges that are associated with the transition to adulthood. The narrator of the novel, Cassie Logan, has always been feisty and willing to stand up against oppression. As a seventeen-year-old who is contemplating college, she resists attempts to transform her into a lady, still glorying in the chance to go coon hunting with her male friends. At the same time, however, she is determined to obtain an education and is convinced that she is safe from any romance that might steer her away from her goal.

Like all of the other major characters, Cassie is changed by the late-night flight to Memphis. As in earlier books, she stands up for what she feels is right; in this case, she uses a restroom in a service station that is designated for whites only. As a result, she is humiliated and nearly attacked, feeling firsthand the racial hatred she has so often seen directed at others. She soon discovers that she is not free from romantic entanglements either. She becomes infatuated with Solomon Bradley, a lawyer who helps rescue her and her friends. She also discovers that Moe Turner has strong feelings for her, and, although she would never admit it, she makes the dangerous journey to Memphis because he is important to her. It is Cassie's matter-of-fact narrative that makes the book seem believable.

The other major characters in the novel, Cassie's companions on her trip to Memphis, include her brother, Stacey, now twenty years old, and their friends, Little Willie Wiggins, Clarence Hopkins, and Moe Turner. As in previous books, Stacey is a leader, bent on protecting those around him. Little Willie is rarely serious, accompanying the others largely because he wants to see Memphis but gradually understanding the grave nature of the situation. Clarence, who has enlisted in the army, is running away from his pregnant girlfriend, Sissy Mitchum.

Plagued with headaches, he becomes ill on the trip and eventually dies, partly as a victim of prejudice because he cannot get proper medical treatment.

Moe is also an unwitting victim of his society. A sensitive, compassionate young man, he is provoked to violence against three white men who have harassed him and Cassie and, as a result, becomes a fugitive.

Another important character, both at the beginning and end of the novel, is Jeremy Simms, a white boy who has always befriended the Logans. Described as shy and sensitive in contrast to his bigoted father and siblings, Jeremy must now stand up for his friends, proving himself by smuggling Moe Turner out of Strawberry. In the end, he is disowned by his father and, like Moe, is forced to leave Mississippi, never to see his family or the Logans again. He is not, however, the Logans's only white ally. Mr. Wade Jamison, a lawyer who has always aided them, appears briefly at the beginning of the novel, helping to rescue Clarence from Statler Ames.



A major new character in the novel is Solomon Bradley, a wealthy black lawyer and newspaperman who is nicknamed "The Prince of Memphis." He encourages Cassie to read, helping her crystallize her dream of becoming a lawyer. She discovers that she is attracted to him, even though he has many women friends. He becomes an important figure in the novel because he suggests to Cassie that blacks can become successful and obtain a certain degree of power. Most of the other characters in the novel are shadowy, nameless people who threaten the group or, less often, help them on their way.

With this variety of characters, Taylor explores a number of themes common to many of her other books about the Logan family. The dangers that Cassie and her friends encounter demonstrate the destructive, terrifying nature of racism and the difficulties that minorities have faced in trying to overcome it. At the same time, Taylor suggests that it is important to stand up against oppression, even though it may have destructive consequences. Both Cassie Logan and Jeremy Simms are attacked for doing what they feel is right, and yet they are clearly presented as noble figures for doing so.

The novel also suggests that gaining freedom often comes at a cost; although Moe Turner is able to escape, he can never return. Moreover, for assisting with Moe's escape, Jeremy Simms must leave Mississippi and Clarence Hopkins dies.

Another important theme of the book is the power of reading and education.

Solomon Bradley, it appears, has become a highly successful man, at least in part because he has a solid education behind him. In all of the Logan books, education is stressed, and Cassie clearly feels that it is her responsibility to gain as much education as possible, even to the point of postponing aspects of her personal life.



# Style

## Points of View

Mildred D. Taylor writes *The Road to Memphis* in a first-person narrative style. Cassie Logan tells the story exclusively from her point of view. This style brings in a greater level of personality to her character than the omniscient narrator style, as the reader sees all other characters through Cassie's eyes. Her deepest feelings come through when she falls for Solomon, and her terror is palatable when she is caught trying to use the gas station restroom.

Cassie explains how other characters feel or think about the situations from their speech and behaviors. She puts her father on a pedestal, which is not uncommon among daughters. She has a deep respect for her older brother, Stacey. Tension sometimes builds between herself, her mother and grandmother, as Cassie begins to assert her young adulthood while still being a child. When any member of the group is harassed or attacked by the common enemy, white people, she tends to paint the antagonists in clearly demarcated lines. Character subtleties are not attempted, nor can they be presented due to segregation. If the white characters seem two-dimensional, it is because Cassie cannot flesh them out. She does not know them well enough.

## Setting

The story is rich with setting shifts. The movement starts with the crossroads and store to the Logan farm and surrounding areas. Strawberry seems like a minor place at first, but becomes the setting of Moe's attack on the Aames brothers. Jackson, seemingly a primary setting early in the story, becomes secondary to Memphis. On the road to Memphis, the gas station and grove of trees are important settings for moving the story ahead. Ma Dessie's place is where Clarence dies. The most important setting is Memphis, particularly Solomon's offices and apartment. That is where the group achieves its goal of protecting Moe, and where Cassie starts to come of age as a woman. Secondary to this for an anticlimax is the train station, where Moe confesses his love for Cassie. Other supporting settings include Stacey's car, which acts as a private conference room for the group, and the woods in which Harris is injured.

The Logan farmhouse is a major setting. Cassie prepares her clothing for Sunday here, and the family brings Harris to the house after his injuries. At the end of the story, the family joins in a prayer circle, and Jeremy says his goodbyes at the farmhouse. Cassie and her brothers leave the house, move through the other settings, and come back to the house. Their adventures come full circle, and the family is changed. It grows stronger.



## Language and Meaning

The author gives Cassie an artful grasp of the language of Mississippi in the dialogs. The effect is to bring realism into the story and a sense of theater, where the reader hears the voices of the characters with greater clarity. The straight narrations are delivered in standard English with a slight hint of Cassie's voice and are intermixed with dialog to expand the story. Word choices are kept toward what would be expected at a high school level, and this makes the story an easy read.

Overall, the meanings brought forth in the story are immediate and accessible. Complex symbolism and metaphors do not appear, but the simple and universal symbols of family, freedom, friendship and love are well-handled. The author neither dispenses syrup, nor does she evacuate essence. This results in a story that has a satisfying emotional impact at its end, carefully built upon a classic novel structure. The form and function of the story are in perfect harmony with its meanings.

## Structure

*The Road to Memphis* is written within a classic novel structure. The beginning of the book introduces the major characters and quickly brings in conflict. The middle of the book moves from conflict to conflict, each situation getting worse than the one before. Subplots develop and move with the main plot. The ending resolves the main plot and all subplots. Plot climaxes burst forth as Cassie falls for Solomon, Moe gets on the train to Chicago and Clarence dies. The family joins in a unifying prayer circle, and Jeremy says goodbye. Once the story plays out, the ending is short, bitter-sweet and full of emotional impact.

The story is not a morality play in that the themes are intertwined in a realistic way. Segregation indicates a superior race, and the war will ironically be against this attitude as expressed to its extreme by Nazis. The laws are written to disfavor blacks, and so Moe must go north to survive. Clarence both loves and fears Sissy. Sissy gets her way through intimidation and manipulation. Some whites treat blacks better than others. Cassie's emotions pull and push her toward womanhood. The story stands solid, like vines climbing the statue who is Cassie.



## Quotes

"Statler Aames and his brothers got a big kick out of teasing colored folks, and for the most part all colored folks could do was stand and take it, for white folks ruled things, and talking back to them with a smart mouth could get you into big trouble. Hitting one of them could get you killed. That was the way of things." Chapter 1, p. 11

"There weren't all those many jobs open to educated colored folks except to teach, and none of the boys had an inclination for teaching. Besides, there were some other jobs around that paid a whole lot better than teaching." Chapter 2, p. 32

"In fact, he [Jeremy Simms] was the only white person of manhood whom we addressed face-to-face directly with his first name without setting a *Mr.* in front of it, but we only addressed him at those times when there were no other white folks around, for addressing him so familiarly could get us all, including Jeremy, into trouble." Chapter 2, p. 37

" 'Always tryin' to help us?' Stacey repeated, his words like an ice-cold torrent. '*Always trying to help us?* When we ever ask your help 'cept for that one time, and that was to help a white man?' " Chapter 3, p. 77

"Now Sissy with her trouble-making accusations was causing them to argue and almost fight, and I didn't like that. I didn't like one bit what Sissy was doing, and I decided I was going to tell her about it, too, all about it, as soon as I caught up with her." Chapter 4, p. 95

"He [Jamison] seemed always to survive. Now they weren't about to go against him in broad daylight. If they did anything at all, it would be under the cover of darkness. That was their way." Chapter 5, p. 119

" 'I [Jeremy] figured I owed y'all. Now maybe the debt's paid. Maybe we's even.' He looked back at Stacey, his eyes strangely empty." Chapter 6, p. 151

"Stacey's eyes hardened. White folks were always doing that, assuming they knew what we all liked or didn't like, what we all were like or weren't like." Chapter 7, p. 169

"It most times paid to be suspicious of white folks, even in good deeds." Chapter 7, p. 202

"I rose from the bed. Opening the door, I went onto the wet porch and just stood there in my long cotton nightgown, staring across the blackened lawn. The music played on. Then as suddenly as it had awakened me from my sleep, the music stopped, and soon Stacey came walking from the forest and across the road and up the damp grass, a box in his hand." Chapter 9, p. 289



## Topics for Discussion

1. Why does Jeremy Simms sympathize with the Logan family and why does he finally help smuggle Moe Turner out of Strawberry?
2. Is Taylor's depiction of either the whites or blacks in the novel onesided, or does she manage to show a diversity of attitudes and personalities in each group?
3. The novel is filled with references to reading and writing, such as allusions to Dashiell Hammett and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. According to this novel, what is the value of literacy? In what ways do reading and writing give Cassie Logan and Solomon Bradley power?
4. What does the 1938 Ford represent to Stacey? To Cassie? Why doesn't Stacey plan to fix the scratches that were made on the car while it was parked at the service station?
5. Although Cassie claims to ignore Moe's attempts to court her, what clues are there that she is actually attracted to him?
6. Discuss why each of the following characters makes the trip to Memphis and how the journey changes them: Cassie Logan, Stacey Logan, Little Willie Wiggins, and Moe Turner.
7. Why does Taylor include the subplot about Clarence Hopkins and his pregnant girlfriend, Sissy Mitchum?

What are their real feelings toward one another?

8. What impact does Pearl Harbor seem to have on the major characters of the novel? How and why are their reactions different from those of the people they encounter in Memphis?
9. At the beginning of the novel, Cassie resists her family's attempts to make her behave like a "lady" and claims that she is immune to romance.

How and why do Cassie's attitudes about romance change through the course of the novel?

10. Compare and contrast Cassie Logan's relationship to Moe Turner and Solomon Bradley. Which man seems more compatible with Cassie?
11. Why does Taylor have Clarence Hopkins die at the end of the novel?

What effect does his death have on how Cassie and her group view their trip to Memphis?



12. Should Cassie have risked using the women's restroom at the service station, as she knew it was against the law?

13. Throughout their journey, Cassie and her friends are rescued or helped by a variety of characters, including Wade Jamison, Jeremy Simms, Ma Dessie, several white men who help them find a fan belt, and Solomon Bradley. Is such help believable? What do these characters' actions suggest about the interdependency of human beings?

14. Is Moe Turner justified in hitting Statler Ames with the tire iron? How much blame does Moe deserve for the incidents that follow?



## Essay Topics

Trace the advancement of civil rights in the United States from 1941 to the present. Is there more work to be done? If so, what needs to be done?

How do Cassie's attitudes get her into trouble? How do her attitudes help her along?

Analyze Cassie's family. What are the main dynamics? Who is the leader? Does leadership shift among family members? Why is her family strong?

Cassie and Mort have an argument in Solomon's office about the war. What are Cassie's main points? What are Mort's rebuttals? Why does Solomon ask about what happened to Cassie at the gas station?

Stacey buys his car after becoming disgusted with the segregated bus. The car symbolizes freedom. How would this story turn out without the car?

What are Statler Aames' redeeming qualities? What about Charlie Simms'? If the two antagonists have no redeeming qualities, why does Cassie portray them this way?

What is similar between Jeremy and Jamison? What is different?

How does religion bridge the gulf between black and white in the story? How does friendship? How does justice?

What does the character of Solomon represent in reference to the historical changes in race relations since 1941?

Imagine that the story is being prepared as a screenplay. Among current or past actors, who should be selected to play each of the main characters?



## Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. The white characters are not the only people in the novel who are guilty of prejudice. Discuss the degree to which the following individuals might be described as prejudiced: Cassie, Stacey, Clarence, Sissy, Solomon Bradley, and David Logan.
2. At least one reviewer, Susan Schuller, has suggested that *The Road to Memphis* is too episodic, that its scenes are only loosely connected. Explore the thematic connections between the various incidents that take place on Cassie's journey to Memphis.
3. Read one of Taylor's other books about the Logans and compare the way the same characters are treated in each.

How have the characters grown or changed from their depiction in the earlier novel?

4. Compare and contrast the trip taken in *The Road to Memphis* with journeys in works such as Homer's *Odyssey*, Cynthia Voigt's *Homecoming*, and Taylor's own *The Gold Cadillac*.
5. At the end of the novel, a number of plot elements remain unresolved, such as whether Cassie will go on to become a lawyer, whether Moe will ever return to Mississippi, and whether Stacey will go off to war and return safely. Write an essay explaining what you think will happen to the characters next. Support your ideas with information from the novel.
6. Automobiles play a major role in Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, *The Gold Cadillac*, and *The Road to Memphis*. Discuss the importance of automobiles in these books and what they represent.

## Further Study

Brown, Rosellen. "Starting from Great Faith, Miss.: The Road to Memphis."

The New York Times Book Review (20 May 1990): 48. Emphasizes the moral crossroads Jeremy Simms faces and how the Logans and their friends are gradually being pulled apart by the war and by social upheaval.

Dussell, Sharon L. "Profile: Mildred D. Taylor." *Language Arts* 58: 599-604. A discussion of Taylor's life and works.

Fogelman, Phyllis J. "Mildred D. Taylor." *Horn Book* 53: 410-414. A short biographical assessment of Taylor and her abilities as a writer.

Rees, David. "The Color of Skin." *The Marble in the Water: Essays on Contemporary Writers of Fiction for Children and Young Adults*. Boston: Horn Book, 1980. Although this essay was written prior to the publication of *The Road to Memphis*, its discussion of Taylor's treatment of prejudice is relevant to all of the Cassie Logan books.

Robak, Diane. "The Road to Memphis."

*Publisher's Weekly* (13 April 1990): 67, 68. A highly positive review that links Taylor's work to that of Maya Angelou and Alice Walker.

Schuller, Susan. "The Road to Memphis." *School Library Journal* (June 1990): 138. Suggests that the novel is more stark than its predecessors, in which Cassie's family is often able to soften the blows of racial violence.

Schuller also criticizes the book's episodic plot.

Taylor, Mildred D. "Newbery Acceptance Speech." *Horn Book* 53: 401-409.

In this speech delivered when *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* won the Newbery Medal, Taylor discusses the role that her father and family have had in shaping her fiction and in inspiring her to become a writer.



## Related Titles

The Road to Memphis is the most recent of five books narrated by Cassie Logan focusing on her family and friends and their struggles with racism and economic hardships in rural Mississippi. In Taylor's first book, *Song of the Trees*, a novella set in 1932, eighty-year-old Cassie watches as her father, David, takes a stand against a white man who tries to take lumber from his land. The Newbery Medal-winning *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* takes place the following year. A fully developed novel, it traces Cassie's first experiences with racism, focusing on the unjust arrest of T. J. Avery for crimes committed by two white boys. *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* is largely a continuation of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, emphasizing Stacey Logan's attempt to help his family and introducing Moe Turner, who figures prominently in *The Road to Memphis*. In another novella, *The Friendship*, set in 1933, Cassie tells the story of two men, one white and one black, whose friendship is destroyed by racism. All of the novels explore the devastating effects of bigotry and feature characters who, sometimes unsuccessfully, fight the repressive attitudes of their times. As a whole, these works create a believable, well-developed community, not unlike William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County.

In addition, Taylor's two other books are closely related in both plot and theme to *The Road to Memphis*. *Mississippi Bridge*, which was published the same year as *The Road to Memphis*, is narrated by Jeremy Simms, the sympathetic white boy who befriends the Logans. Like Cassie, he also struggles to understand the racial attitudes of his day. *The Gold Cadillac*, Taylor's only book that does not feature the Logans, is about a cross-country car trip that is marred by racial violence, much like *The Road to Memphis*.



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