Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry Study Guide

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred Taylor

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Overview

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry's depiction of social interactions and relationships in the 1930s South remains relevant today. The novel dramatizes the consequences of historical realities, such as slavery, through the oral history recounted by the older characters.

Despite its depiction of hardships and reversals, Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry offers a comforting view of social continuity. Overall, the novel focuses on the uplifting aspects of life: challenge, family solidarity, love, courage, pride, and determination. Although the narrator and several of the principal characters are quite young, their needs are strikingly similar to those of young adults.

They demonstrate a need and desire for acceptance, and they are curious and speculative about the world around them.



About the Author

Mildred D. Taylor was born in Jackson, Mississippi, on November 13, 1943. Motivated by a racial incident, her father moved the family to Toledo, Ohio, when Taylor was only three weeks old.

This migration did not diminish the family's devotion and attachment to the South, and Taylor grew up with a tremendous fascination for the region, eagerly anticipating annual visits there.

She received her education in the Toledo schools, where she was an honor student, editor of the school newspaper, and a class officer.

While completing her college work at the University of Toledo, Taylor aspired to be a writer and a Peace Corps volunteer. Throughout her college years, she prepared herself by diligently researching the places she longed to visit.

She volunteered with the Peace Corps in Ethiopia for two years and returned home to recruit new volunteers before beginning her journalistic training at the University of Colorado. At Colorado, Taylor was active in student government and participated in curriculum changes that emphasized black studies.

Taylor's novel Song of the Trees, set in Mississippi, introduces the Logan family. Song of the Trees won the Council on Interracial Books Award in the AfricanAmerican category and was listed by the New York Times as an outstanding book of 1975. The following year, Taylor wrote another novel about the Logans: Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry. This book, which emphasizes family love, determination, pride, and dignified rebellion against racial injustice, won the Newbery Medal in 1977.

Let the Circle Be Unbroken, which was nominated for the 1982 National Book Award, resumes the Logan family saga, dramatizing many of the themes and ideas dominant in Taylor's earlier works. The racial confrontations remain, but Taylor emphasizes the effects of family unity in the face of hostile social forces. Taylor continues to write full-time, and her own strong family bonds contribute significantly to her fiction.



Plot Summary

Cassie Logan is the feisty 9-year-old daughter of David and Mary Logan. The Logans live on a 400-acre farm near Strawberry, Mississippi, in 1933. Cassie and her three brothers attend a dismal, ill-equipped and ill-heated school where they study from cast-off books--or no books at all. Every day, they walk miles to school, past the large white school building with its manicured lawn and sports field. The driver of the whites-only school bus makes a sport of trying to run the Logans off the road, and his passengers laugh and jeer as the children are covered with dust or splashed with mud.

Finally, Stacey, Cassie's 12-year-old brother, hatches a plan to stop the bus driver, at least for a while. One rainy October day, the four Logan children spend their lunch hour digging deep, wide holes across the road. It pours all afternoon, and the runoff creates a lake 12 feet wide and yards deep. The Logan children hide in the woods and watch as the bus driver firmly accelerates through the "puddle." The bus falls into the hole and breaks an axle, which will take weeks to fix.

The Logan children giggle with glee over their revenge on the school bus, until a neighboring black farmer, Mr. Avery, comes to warn the family that "night riders" are out. The riders are white farmers who extract vengeance from any black people suspected of crimes. Just last week they poured kerosene all over the two Berry boys and set them afire. Their uncle, Samuel Berry, was also burned for trying to shield the boys. The white men suspected the Berrys of flirting with a white woman. Suddenly, the Logan children realize their prank could have fatal consequences for them and for their family.

Papa Logan works on the railroad in Louisiana during the summer and fall, but he returns briefly in early October with a new hired hand, Mr. L.T. Morrison. The children realize Mr. Morrison is there as much to protect them from the nightriders, as to help work the farm.

Mr. Avery's son, TJ, walks to school every day with the Logans. He is a member of Stacey's seventh-grade class, but he has already failed seventh grade once. Stacey resents having his mother for his teacher, but TJ insists it's a great way to steal answers for tests. When TJ makes a crib sheet for a test, Stacey tears it up. The wily TJ makes another at lunch. Stacey sees TJ cheating, and tries to get the crib sheet away from him. TJ surrenders it when he sees Mrs. Logan approaching. She punishes Stacey for cheating, and Stacey has too much honor to tell on TJ, even if he has to suffer the humiliation of being whipped by his mother in front of the whole school.

After school Stacey is determined to confront TJ. He follows TJ to the Wallace store, even though the Logans are forbidden to go there. Stacey confronts T. J. and they trade punches until Mr. Morrison breaks up the fight and takes the Logans home. When they fearfully ask whether Mr. Morrison will tell on them, he assures them they will tell on themselves. Stacey realizes it's the honorable thing to do and confesses to Mama. Instead of whipping them like they expect, she waits until Saturday and takes them all to visit Mr. Samuel Berry, who is suffering from horrible burns at the hands of the Wallaces.



Mama explains that the Sheriff won't punish the Wallaces. The law is only for white people. When the Wallaces set black people on fire or hang them, the Sheriff assumes they deserved it. The children quickly understand why Mama and Papa do not want them at the Wallace store.

Papa comes home for the winter. He and Uncle Hammer anger many people when they form a co-op of black farmers, backed by the white lawyer, Mr. Jamison, to purchase supplies at fair prices in Vicksburg, instead of from the Wallace store or the overpriced Strawberry Mercantile.

When TJ Avery tries to cheat again, the Logans shun him. TJ becomes friends with two older white dropouts, R.W. and Melvin Simms. The Simmses make fun of TJ behind his back. Various families in the neighborhood notice valuable items like watches and lockets missing after visits from the trio. Finally, the Simmses talk TJ into breaking into the Strawberry Mercantile with them. The Simmses steal the cash box, and when Mr. Barnett, the owner awakens, they hit him in the head with an axe. TJ wants to go home, but the Simmses want to shoot pool. TJ threatens to tell on them unless they take him home, and the Simmses beat him severely. He hitches a ride to the Logan farm, and Stacey accompanies the weak TJ home. Carrie and the little boys follow. Just after TJ gets inside, six cars full of boisterous, drunken white men pull up. The white men, including R.W. and Melvin Simms, are accusing TJ of robbing the Mercantile and murdering Mr. Barnett. They say his accomplices were two black boys, seen fleeing by the Simmses.

The crowd decides to hang TJ. Mr. Jamison, the white lawyer, tries to stop them. Harlan Granger, the prominent white landowner sends word that he doesn't want bloodshed on his land. The white mob decides to hang TJ on the Logans' land and to hang Papa and Mr. Morrison for good measure. Cassie runs to warn her father. He loads his shotgun and heads out the door with Mr. Morrison, vowing to save TJ's life. Mama makes him promise not to use the shotgun if there is any way to avoid it.

Just as Mr. Morrison arrives at the Avery farm, a fire breaks out in the forest between the Granger and Logan land. Harlan Granger orders all the farmers, black and white, to save his land. They throw down their guns and start fighting the fire. The sheriff and Mr. Jamison take TJ safely off to jail. The fire consumes a quarter of the Logans' precious cotton crop, but eventually, the rain and the farmers' combined efforts extinguish it. Only later does Cassie realize that with the fire, her father did find a way to save TJ's life without using his gun. Cassie realizes that she must never speak of her father's starting the fire, even within her family.

Chapter 1 Summary

Cassie Logan is walking to school with her three brothers. Six-year-old Clayton "Little Man" Chester, about to attend school for the first time, is happy. Christopher-John, a short, round boy of 7, good-natured as always, is calm. Stacey, at 12, is annoyed to be going back to school. He's indignant that his mother will be his seventh-grade teacher. The children are dressed in their Sunday clothes--worn and patched, but clean, ironed,



and starched. They are wearing shoes because it's the first day of school, although most days they will go to school barefoot unless it's bitterly cold.

It's 1933, the height of the Great Depression, and Cassie's father has work away from his family all summer on the railway in Louisiana. Even with Mama and Papa's both working, the Logans can barely pay the mortgage and taxes on the 400-acre farm Cassie's grandpa bought from Harlan Granger.

TJ and Claude Avery, whose father sharecrops Mr. Granger's plantation, join the Logans. The glib TJ gossips about Big Ma (Cassie's grandmother) doctoring the three Berrys the night before, after some white men burned them. The white men even bragged around town about doing it. TJ brags about getting out of trouble by lying and blaming his brother Claude, instead.

When the children hear the school bus, they scramble up the steep bank into the forest. Little Man remains on the road alone, reluctant to get his fresh, starched Sunday clothes dirty. The white school bus driver purposely runs Little Man off the road, covering him with dust and forcing him to jump into the briars. The driver gloats at the fleeing children, and the white children on the bus laugh and jeer as the bus passes in a cloud of red Mississippi dust.

Jeremy Simms, blonde and blue-eyed, joins the Logans and Averys for part of their walk, as he has every morning for four years. Jeremy is often ridiculed by other children and beaten by his father for trying to be friends with Stacey. Jeremy rushes into the white school with his sisters. Jefferson Davis County School is long and white with a beautiful lawn and flowers. Two school buses deliver white children to its doors. There is a large sports field behind the school. On the flagpole in front of the school, a Confederate flag (the Mississippi state flag) flies on the flagpole above the American flag.

Cassie's school, the Great Faith Elementary and Secondary School, is a dismal collection of four ill-heated weather-beaten houses on brick stilts. It has seven teachers for 320 students. The caretaker's cow munches the crabgrass on the lawn. There are no buses and students from the Montier plantation walk 3 ? hours each way to school. The students are dressed in threadbare clothes, and most of them don't have shoes. Unlike the white school, which starts in late August, the black school doesn't start until October after the cotton harvest.

Miss Daisy Crocker, "yellow and buckeyed," is Cassie's fourth-grade teacher. She is also supervising the first graders, including Little Man, for a few days until they get a teacher. Everyone is thrilled when Mrs. Crocker announces that this year, they will have books! They all promise to take good care of the new books. They're bitterly disappointed to discover the books are 12 years old--faded, worn, and scribbled on.

When Little Man, always fastidious, opens his book to discover it's a discard from the white school, with the word "nigra" inscribed by the board of education inside, he's furious. He throws the book on the floor and stomps on it, demanding a clean one. Mrs.



Crocker is shocked and furious. She whips Little Man with a switch, and when Cassie defends him, she whips Cassie as well.

After school, Cassie rushes to the classroom where her mother teaches, determined to tell her side of the story first. Unfortunately, Mrs. Crocker beats her to it. Cassie stands outside as Mrs. Crocker indignantly shows Mrs. Logan the book that Little Man "ruined." Unperturbed, Mrs. Logan calmly takes out scissors and glue and pasts a piece of blank paper over the offending word. Over Mrs. Crocker's objections, Cassie's mother insists she intends to do the same with every book issued to her seventh-grade class.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Cassie Logan has a strong sense of history and heritage and of connectedness to the land and the greater black community. She thinks of the 400 acres on which she lives, not as belonging to her father or Grandma, but as "Logan Land." She sees the wooden rockers and tall chiffonier in her house as Logan-crafted.

Racism is clearly illustrated in this chapter as it paints a clear image of social injustice in the small Mississippi town. As poor as they are, the Logans are better off than many black families. At least the Logans own their own land instead of sharecropping for a white former plantation owner like the other black farmers. At least the Logan children have shoes to wear on Sunday and when it is bitterly cold. Their threadbare-patched Sunday clothes are at least clean, starched, and ironed.

TJ Avery reveals his wily, conniving character early. He says Stacey should be glad his mother is his teacher because he can steal test answers from her. Mrs. Logan has already failed TJ once. Although he can be charming, he delights in wiggling out of trouble by unjustly blaming his brother Claude. Cassie is feisty and thinks that if TJ ever does that to her, she'll knock his block off. Cassie is outspoken and not afraid to disagree with her teacher when she believes she is right. She thinks the school year is off to a bad start when she gets into trouble on the first day, but she still doesn't back down.

Racism, cruelty, and petty violence are apparent in the Logan children's everyday lives. The black children have to walk to school in all types of weather. The sharp contrast between the conditions of the white school and the black school clearly illustrate the injustice. The black school is woefully under equipped. When Mrs. Crocker warns that the School Board may inspect, Mrs. Logan responds that that would be good. Maybe if the School Board visited, they would notice that the school needs desks, paper, maps, blackboards, erasers, and chalk. The books, symbolizing both learning and a world free of racism, will continue to be an important symbol in this novel. The central conflict of this novel, the struggle between the young Logans and their racist environment, is clearly illustrated in the opening chapter.

The white school driver cruelly delights in tormenting them, trying to run them down. The driver exalts in the small power he has over the disadvantaged children. He gloats when they dive into the briars for cover or get dust blown all over their clothing. Imitating



him, the white children on the bus laugh and shout jeers. No wonder the Logans are suspicious of Jeremy Simms's motives when he tries to befriend them!

This chapter provides hints of violence when TJ Avery gossips about the Berrys' burning. Still, violence is clearly foreshadowed in this opening chapter. The reader is presented with the contrast between the innocence of children on their way to school and the brutality of their community.

Chapter 2 Summary

Cassie sits atop a pole, picking high cotton with her brothers, mother, and grandmother when she spies her father, walking toward them with another man. Mr. L.T. Morrison is a formidable man, "a human tree in height, towering high above Papa's six feet two inches." He's deeply muscled, and his ebony neck and face are partially scarred, as if by fire.

They enter the cabin's main room, a combination of living room and Mama and Papa's bedroom. The room is filled with walnut and oak furniture crafted by Cassie's deceased grandfather. The walls are hung with family photographs, including Uncle Hammer. Cassie's father can stay only one night before he must return to his railroad job in Louisiana. He explains that Mr. Morrison lost his job for fighting with some white men. He's agreed to help work the Logan farm for room, board, and a few dollars at harvest time.

While the Logan children do their chores, Cassie speculates to Stacey that Mr. Morrison is there partly to protect the family after the Berry burnings. The next morning at church, a neighbor whispers to Big Ma that John Henry Berry died of his burns during the night. The Logan children finally overhear the story. John Henry Berry and his brother Beacon were filling up their Model T ford when "some white men come up messin' with thembeen drinkin,' you know." One of the white men accused John Henry of flirting with a white woman. The Berrys fled in their Model T, but the white men followed. Knowing they didn't have enough gas to make it all the way home, the Berrys turned into their Uncle Samuel's house. The white men attacked, and when Uncle Samuel tried to stop them, the white men set all three Berrys on fire.

Papa listened to the story, and then took his pipe out of his mouth and said, "In this family, we don't shop at the Wallace store." Papa forbids them to go near the store, where there is drinking and fighting. Cassie cannot figure out what this has to do with the Berrys' being burned.

Chapter 2 Analysis

In many novels of the American south, cotton represents slavery and oppression. For the Logans, cotton symbolizes hope. It is their major cash crop, and the income from cotton, combined with Mama and Papa's jobs, allows them to pay the taxes and mortgage on their beloved land.



All the Logans are delighted to see Papa back for an unexpected visit from Louisiana. When Cassie begins to suspect Mr. L. T. Morrison is there for protection as much as farming, Stacey becomes annoyed. Surely, his father must realize that Stacey is almost a man and can take care of the family while his father is gone.

The next morning at church, we learn the truth about the Berry burnings, and it is much worse than we dreamed. Based on the merest whispered rumor, the white thugs attacked three innocent men, beat them, and then set them on fire. Worst of all, they aren't at all afraid of the law but go around town bragging about their exploits. We get a clear picture just how powerless even the best and strongest black people (like Papa) are.

By refusing to shop at the Wallace store, David Logan takes the first step in ending the cycle of economic oppression that imprisons the sharecroppers as surely as chains. The problems and even violence with this course of action are clearly foreshadowed by the discussion about John Henry Berry's death.

The close sense of community shared by the black Mississippi families is clearly illustrated by Papa's bringing a stranger, Mr. L.T. Morrison, into his home. Morrison has lost his railway job through fighting with a white man. Although we have no doubt the fight was justified, we already fear the violent consequences. To protect Morrison, Papa Logan brings him to live with his family. In return, Morrison will protect the Logans from their increasingly violent white neighbors while Papa is away working in Louisiana. Eventually, L.T. Morrison becomes a foster grandfather, as much a part of the family as Big Ma.

The second major conflict is illustrated in this chapter--the struggle to resolve issues in a non-violent way, despite the fact that the Logans' world is surrounded by violence. By telling his children not to visit the Wallace store, Papa Logan is rejecting violence as the solution to all the community's problems. The apparent disconnection between the discussion about the Berrys' puzzles Cassie and her father's comments about the Wallaces, but we suspect there is a connection. Were the Wallaces involved in the Berrys' burnings? It appears so. The discussion of "night riders" and violence against black men in the first two chapters foreshadows the incidents of racism and violence later in the book.

Chapter 3 Summary

At the end of October heavy rains fall, turning the red dust into thick red mud. Mama makes the Logan children wear dried calfskins over their shoulders like capes. The children can't hear the hateful school bus coming in the rain, and the mud makes the banks too slippery to climb, so walking to school becomes torture. The driver zooms toward them and splashes them with mud, covering them from head to foot on purpose.

Little Man is especially humiliated by this treatment. His mother has explained that most of the money for the black school comes from the black churches, and they simply cannot afford a bus. This still seems unfair to Little Man. The children try leaving for



school earlier to avoid the bus or hiding on the side of the road when it's expected, but nothing works. The bus driver delights in veering towards the cowering children while his passengers shout, "Nigger! Nigger! Mud eater!"

Finally, Stacey insists they forget about lunch and meet him at the school tool shed at noon instead. Grabbing shovels, the Logans go back to the spot where the bus ran them off the road and dig a series of holes a yard wide across the road. The rain continues to pound all afternoon. When the Logans return after school, they find the runoff has created a puddle 12 feet wide and several feet deep. The children hide in the trees beside the road and watch. The bus driver accelerates smoothly through the puddle, never expecting it to be more than a few inches deep. The bus falls into the gully, cracking an axle and drowning the engine. The white children will have to walk to school for at least 2 weeks while the bus is being repaired. When Mrs. Logan gets home, she excitedly tells the children about the trapped bus. She's glad no one was hurt, but she has to admit she's rather happy it happened. The children try to do their homework but keep collapsing in fits of giggles.

The mood is spoiled when T J's father, Mr. Avery comes to the door. He warns Mrs. Logan and Mr. Morrison that the "night riders"--the same men who burned the Berrys--are making their rounds tonight. The adults lower their voices, and try as she might, Cassie can't hear why the riders are out. She and Stacey are terrified it is because of the school bus incident. Someone must have seen them digging the hole, and now the entire family will be burned as punishment. Cassie wakes up in the middle of the night to see the headlights of seven cars pull into the Logans' driveway. As she waits, frightened out of her mind, the cars turn around and pull away.

Chapter 3 Analysis

The economic oppression and racism surrounding the Logan children becomes even more apparent. They hate the calfskins, which reek when they're wet, but Mama is not very interested in what they like. Little Man is especially outraged at the calfskins and their treatment by the bus driver. He hates being muddy, and delays ducking for cover until the last minute when the driver tries to run him down. Cassie and Stacey try to explain to Little Man why the white children have a bus and the black children do not, but it's impossible to make him--or the readers--understand.

Stacey's plan to dig holes across the rain-soaked road seems a reasonable way to get revenge on the bus driver and his white passengers. The rain continues to pour while the children are at school, and the runoff makes a huge hole 12 feet across. The Logan children hide in the trees beside the road, at once terrified that someone will be hurt and exalted that there plan is working. Mama's tacit approval makes the revenge all the sweeter, and the children keep stealing glances at each other and bursting out in happy giggles.

The mood changes completely when Mr. Avery warns of "night riders," the white vigilantes who use violence to "keep the coloreds in line." The theme of racism is highlighted again as we see the contrast between the Logan children's innocent prank,



and the potentially deadly violence of the white community. For the first time, Cassie and Stacey realize that their innocent actions can have unintended and horrible consequences. They crouch in bed, terrified that their entire family will be killed for what they saw as a harmless stunt. It is impossible to appeal to the sheriff since the whites are always considered right. Cassie realizes exactly from what Mr. Morrison is here to protect the Logan family.

Under the threat of white violence, the black community grows closer with Mr. Avery going from house to house, warning the black families. If there is to be a non-violent solution, it seems the black community will have to find it. Whites in this rural area seem bent on increasing the violence, which is clearly foreshadowed.

Chapter 4 Summary

The Logan children have been tired and listless for a week. Mama and Big Ma are especially concerned when they complete their Saturday chores quietly without complaint. TJ Avery, on an errand for his mother, fills them in on the latest gossip on the "night riders." T J reports that the white men poured tar on Sam Tatum and covered him with feathers. When the children press TJ for details, he says Tatum questioned his bill at the Strawberry Mercantile, claiming the white owner, Mr. Barnett, had charged him for extra items Tatum never ordered.

The Logan children are relieved to discover that they weren't the "night riders" targets. Only Little Man questions whether a man should be tarred and feathered for questioning his inaccurate bill. They agree that if the white men knew of their bus shenanigans, they'd be punished. While the children are discussing it, TJ goes into the house and looks through Mrs. Logan's desk. The children catch him and make him stop.

While walking to school, TJ slyly shows Stacey the cheat sheet he has prepared for their test. Stacey is furious and rips it up. After school, Cassie learns that Stacey has been "whipped" by his mother for cheating on the test. Cassie is shocked. How could anyone believe that Stacey would cheat? She learns that, while he was trying to hide his new cheat sheet, TJ slipped it to Stacey. Stacey meant to tear it up, but his mother caught him first. Stacey follows T J to the Wallace store to confront him about the incident.

At the store, the children see Kaleb Wallace and R.W. and Melvin Simms, Jeremy's older brothers. In a back room, older kids from the Logans' school are dancing. Mr. Dewberry Wallace is serving alcohol to the black youths. Stacey fights with TJ until Mr. Morrison arrives and separates the boys.

Mr. Morrison puts the Logans in his wagon and takes them home. They are silent along the way, realizing how much trouble they will be in when their mother learns they were at the Wallace's store. Mr. Morrison says he won't tell Mama they disobeyed her; he'll let them tell her themselves. Cassie and the younger boys think he is crazy. Why would they tell on themselves? Stacey, however, agrees. When Mama lectures them but does not whip them, the children think they "got off easy."



On Saturday, Mama loads everyone in the wagon and takes them to Smellings Creek to visit Samuel Berry. The man is burned so badly his face has no nose, his hair is gone, and his lips are wizened and black as charcoal. He can't speak and can barely stand to have the lightest sheet touch him. On the way home, Mama explains that's why she doesn't want the children around the Wallace store. The Wallaces laugh and brag about pouring kerosene over Mr. Berry and his nephews, and setting them on fire.

On the way home, Mrs. Logan stops to talk to some families about not letting their children go to the Wallace store, about finding another supplier who will charge them fair prices. They protest that they can't get credit in Vicksburg. Mama doesn't speak of the Wallaces' setting Mr. Berry on fire. She explains that some things are best not said outside of the family circle. Too many tongues wag.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The Logans have come to accept the cycle of violence around them. They are relieved to learn that the 'night riders' aren't after them, but only Little Man questions the attacks by white men on innocent people. The Logan children are beginning to realize that even the smallest actions can lead to terrible violence. At nine, Cassie has already come to accept the unequal treatment and economic oppression that Little Man questions.

Stacey tears up TJ's cheat sheet, but the sneaky TJ makes another one at lunch. During the test, when Stacey sees him cheating, he tries to get TJ to stop. TJ refuses, only handing the cheat sheet over to Stacey when he sees Mrs. Logan approaching. Caught red-handed, Stacey is too honorable to turn TJ in, so he's humiliated by being punished in front of the whole class by his mother, which makes it worse. TJ tries to avoid a confrontation by going to the Wallace store, knowing the Logans are forbidden to follow. When Stacey punches TJ, he fakes a severe injury, covering his eyes and bending over. Stacey lets his guard down, and the tricky TJ "sucker-punches" him. Mr. Morrison separates the two boys.

Stacey, and Mr. Morrison's sense of honor are outgrowths of the tremendous loyalty members of the community have for each other. The children are initially relieved to learn Mr. Morrison doesn't intend to tell on them. They think he's crazy to assume they will confess to their mother. Stacey is growing up quickly, however. He realizes that it would be as dishonorable to lie to his mother as to rat on TJ, and when they get home Stacey does the right thing.

Violence is clearly illustrated during the Logan's visit to Samuel Berry. Mrs. Logan surprises everyone by not punishing the children, except to scold them. She has decided nothing she can say will equal the effect of meeting Mr. Samuel Berry and seeing his condition. She's right. The children quickly learn that they live in a world where there can be severe consequences for small transgressions. The escalating violence clearly foreshadows a crisis for the Logan family.

The Logan children begin to understand how truly evil the Wallaces are and the economic power they wield. As much as the local sharecroppers would like to stop



doing business at the Wallace store or the Mercantile, they are unable to get credit in Vicksburg, so, they're trapped in an economic dead end that profits only the white store owners and white former plantation owners. It's this economic oppression that enables people like the Wallaces to get away with lynching and maiming innocent people.

Chapter 5 Summary

A few weeks later, Big Ma takes Stacey, Cassie, and TJ Avery to the nearby town of Strawberry to sell eggs and milk at a local farmer's market. The Logans are relegated to a rear stall in the "black section" while plenty of front stalls are free. After lunch, Big Ma stops by to see Mr. Jamison, the white lawyer. While she's there, TJ talks Cassie and Stacey into entering the Mercantile, instead of waiting in the wagon. The Mercantile is a huge, palace-like store filled with every imaginable product. TJ covets a pearl-handled revolver and swears someday it will be his.

TJ hands his shopping list over to Mr. Barnett, the owner, who begins to fill the order. White people constantly interrupt Mr. Barnett, and each time he stops and helps the white customer first. Finally, after several interruptions, the owner puts TJ's order aside to help a small white girl. Cassie is livid. She reminds Mr. Barnett they were her first, and when he doesn't respond, she tugs on his shirt. Shocked, he insults her and asks, "Whose little nigger is this?" Cassie makes a scene while older black folks try to shush her.

Furious, Cassie bolts out of the store and accidentally bumps into a white girl on the sidewalk. It's Lillian Jean Simms, Jeremy's sister. Cassie apologizes, but Lillian Jean demands she walk in the road and leave the sidewalk for decent white people. Lillian Jean insults her, referring to "your nasty little self." Cassie angrily refuses, but Mr. Simms grabs her from behind and shoves her into the road. He demands an apology, and Cassie is afraid that he's going to hit her. A crowd of white people cheers him on. Suddenly, Big Ma appears. She grabs Cassie by the hand and forces her to apologize to Lillian Jean again. She even makes Cassie address the girl her own age as "Miss Lillian Jean."

Chapter 5 Analysis

Mr. Avery has asked Big Ma to take TJ to Strawberry with her to buy a few items that aren't available at the Wallace store. Big Ma takes Cassie and Stacey along only to avoid TJ's obnoxious chatter the whole way. Cassie adamantly tries to convince her grandmother to move into one of the free "white" stalls, but Big Ma wisely refuses. It's hard for Cassie to understand why they have to stay in the back and leave choice locations vacant.

The scenes in Strawberry clearly illustrate the theme of racism that lies at the heart of this novel. The encounter on the sidewalk emphasizes just how powerless black people are in Strawberry, Mississippi, in 1933. Cassie bumped into a girl her own age and promptly apologized. There's no excuse for her being insulted, humiliated, shoved by a



grown man and forced to walk in the street. Perhaps worst of all, she is expected to acknowledge her inferior status by addressing another child as "Miss Lillian Jean." Big Ma is fully as furious as Cassie, but she also knows the situation is volatile. Not wanting the encounter to escalate in front of a hostile white crowd, she forces Cassie to apologize. For Cassie, it's the worst day of her life. She's forced to confront the racial inequality of her community and realizes her powerlessness to change it.

When TJ admires the pistol, we realize even the cocky, mischievous TJ fears the white men. Paradoxically, it is this fear of white violence that propels TJ's actions to their inevitable and violent conclusion. His desire for the gun foreshadows his acceptance of violence as a solution to problems.

The author avoids stereotypes by creating sympathetic white characters. Cassie likes Mr. Jamison. He's as honest as her Daddy, and he is the only white man he's every heard call Mama and Big Ma "Missus." Cassie is livid when Mr. Barnett constantly serves white customers, making the black children wait over an hour. When he waits on a white child, it's the last straw. Cassie is furious that they are being treated like animals or trash. When she objects, Mr. Barnett insults her and demands they leave the store without their order.

Chapter 6 Summary

Cassie is still angry at Big Ma when they get home. That's quickly forgotten when they see a huge, shiny Packard in the barn. At first, they think it belongs to the white former plantation owner, Harlan Granger. Cassie and Stacey are amazed to learn the beautiful car actually belongs to their Uncle Hammer from Chicago.

When Uncle Hammer hears about the incidents in Strawberry he leaves, determined to confront Barnett and Simms for roughing up a little girl. Mama begs Mr. Morrison to follow him, praying the men won't kill him. Mama tries to explain to Cassie that Mr. Simms truly believes his daughter is better than Cassie because she is white. Like many of the whites, he thinks black people are less than human.

The next morning, Uncle Hammer is sitting at the table drinking coffee with Mr. Morrison. He's unshaven and rumpled, as if he'd been up all night, but he's all right. When the Logan children get dressed for church, Uncle Hammer notices that Stacey's patched, threadbare coat is much too small for him. Uncle Hammer gives Stacey his Christmas present early--a beautiful, new wool coat that is just a little too big. They all ride in Uncle Hammer's fine car to church. Stacey proudly wears the fine coat. TJ Avery starts teasing Stacey, saying he looks like a fat preacher in the coat.

After church, Uncle Hammer takes them on a ride through the county. They come to a one-lane bridge, where a white farmer in an old Model-T is crossing. Black people are expected to let the whites cross first, but no one expects a black man to be driving a beautiful, expansive Packard car. Uncle Hammer toots his horn, and the white farmer backs up to let the rich white man pass. Imagine his shock when he discovers the driver of such a fine car is black!



Chapter 6 Analysis

Cassie blames Big Ma for making her apologize to "Miss Lillian Jean." She believes Big Ma was a co-conspirator in her humiliation. First Stacey and then Mama try to explain that Big Ma was as angry as Cassie, but she did what she must to keep them all safe. Cassie can't see any wisdom in that argument. Although she's heard of violence by whites against black people all her life, it's not real to her.

Uncle Hammer represents the black man who has broken free of racism and succeeded on his own terms. All the turmoil in Strawberry is forgotten in Uncle Hammer's annual holiday visit. Tall, strong, and successful, Uncle Hammer is also hot-tempered. When he hears about Mr. Simms's behavior, he's determined to defend his niece. Mama and Big Ma are terrified he will only make the situation worse. They fear he'll be killed and are grateful when Mr. Morrison is able to talk Uncle Hammer out of confronting Simms. Mama and Big Ma both chastise Uncle Hammer for crossing the one-lane bridge before the white farmer. They know the farmer assumed he was stepping aside for Harlan Granger, the rich white former plantation owner. They're sure nothing good will come of deliberately embarrassing white people. Uncle Hammer represents freedom from racism and economic oppression, but he is too ready to suggest violent solutions to problems.

TJ's behavior is progressing from bad to worse. He has always been mischievous and full of life, but now he's becoming sneaky and conniving. He's jealous of Stacey's new coat, so he constantly teases Stacey about it. TJ's continual behavior problems are moving him away from the black community and the protection it affords.

Chapter 7 Summary

Mama tells Stacey to bring her his new coat. She has time now to shorten the sleeves, which are a tad too long. Stacey sheepishly admits that he has given the coat to TJ "just temporarily" because everyone teases him about looking like a preacher in it. TJ says that when Stacey grows into the coat, he will give it back. Mama is angry. She says Logans don't give away gifts from their loved ones. Mama tells Stacey to go get the coat back from TJ, but Uncle Hammer stops her.

Uncle Hammer gives Stacey a tongue-lashing for allowing TJ to talk him out of his warm new coat. He says Stacey deserves to lose his coat for letting TJ make a fool out of him. Maybe if Stacey doesn't have a warm coat, he'll learn not to be so gullible. TJ continues to flaunt the new coat, and Stacey wants to beat him up, but Uncle Hammer says there's no point in blaming others for your own stupidity.

Finally, Papa returns from Louisiana just before Christmas and the kitchen smells like sweet-potato pie, rich butter pound cake, cooked coon, yams, and sugar-cured ham.

Papa and Uncle Hammer sit around the fire and reminisce about their boyhood pranks. Soon all the adults are telling stories, reliving memories. Finally, Mr. Morrison tells a story about his family that was living in a Negro shantytown outside Shreveport at the



end of Reconstruction. Two boys about 18 or 19 came knocking on the door at Christmas, scared out of their wits. A white woman had accused them of molesting her in Shreveport, and they had no place to run. Mr. Morrison's Daddy, a huge man the whites were afraid of, took them in. Suddenly, the door burst in and "night riders," white men with Rebel sabers, started hacking and killing. They burned down the house and killed everyone who came out, even babies and old women. Mr. Morrison was only six. His mother threw him in the bushes, and then turned to fight the nightriders like a wild woman, right beside her husband. Everyone was killed that night except Mr. Morrison, a little boy hiding in the bushes.

Later, the adults discuss a plan to purchase supplies in Vicksburg, instead of paying the interest and high prices at the Wallace store or the Mercantile in Strawberry. Over two dozen families have agreed if they can get the credit. Big Ma says better not to stir up trouble, and Uncle Hammer wants to burn the Wallace store down, but Mama and Papa are determined.

On Christmas morning, each of the Logan children gets a sweater and a pair of pants (for Cassie, a skirt) from Uncle Hammer, except Stacey, who already got his coat for Christmas and gave it away. They get a sock full of oranges, bananas, and licorice, a once-a-year treat. Best of all, they each get an absolutely new, clean, spotless book. The younger boys receive Aesop's Fables. Stacey receives *The Count of Monte Cristo* and Cassie, *The Three Musketeers.* The Avery family joins the Logans for Christmas dinner. Afterwards, there is a knock on the door. When Stacey answers it, it is Jeremy Simms, looking frozen and frightened. He presents Mama with a burlap bag of nuts and gives Stacey a present, a slender wooden flute. Jeremy made it himself. Stacey thanks him awkwardly and stands by the door, waiting for Jeremy to leave. When the adults go into the other room, TJ teases Stacey about having a flute made by a white boy.

The next day Papa, Uncle Hammer, and Mr. Morrison take a trip to Vicksburg in the Packard. When they return, the white lawyer, Mr. Jamison, comes to visit. He has heard that they were trying to find credit for 30 families. He volunteers to sign for the credit, although the white shop owners will resent it. Jamison points out that by boycotting the Wallace store, they are accusing the Wallaces of killing John Henry Berry. Worse yet, they are implying that killing a black man is as bad as killing a white man.

A few days later Papa, Uncle Hammer, and Mr. Morrison take the wagon to Vicksburg. It's a 2-day trip, and they return with the wagon laden with bales and boxes. It's everything the sharecroppers ordered from Vicksburg. The next day, Harlan Granger visits. He tries to talk them out of shopping in Vicksburg, and warns they can lose their land, but they are determined.

Chapter 7 Analysis

After Uncle Hammer chastises Stacey for giving away his coat, Cassie decides she'd rather have a spanking from her father than a scolding from Uncle Hammer. She gets her wish when Papa returns and learns they've disobeyed his order to stay away from the Wallace store.



The cycle of economic oppression continues. Harlan Granger owns an interest in the Wallace store, and he's always wanted the Logan land. Big Ma is afraid that if people find out the Logans are organizing supply trips to Vicksburg, Granger will find a way to take their land away from them. Big Ma's concerns foreshadow continued struggles for the land with Granger. Using the land as a guarantee for the sharecroppers' credit will give him just the opening he wants. Everyone is floored by Jamison's offer to guarantee the sharecroppers' credit.

Stacey's wool coat represents his gullibility and willingness to be manipulated by TJ Avery, in return for acceptance and companionship. These are the traits Uncle Hammer calls "stupidity." In a sense, Stacey becomes a man when he rejects TJ and will no longer allow himself to be manipulated. Stacey decides to do what is right and honorable, rather than what is easy. That decision propels his future rejection of TJ and TJ's friendship with the Simmses with all of its consequences.

The theme of violence is clearly illustrated when Mr. Morrison starts to tell his story about the nightriders, and Mama tries to shush him. Papa says it's the children's history, and they need to know about these things. Violence is so entrenched in the Logans' lives, they consider it a topic suitable and even necessary for small children. Consequently, they hear the story of the heartless former Confederate soldiers slashing and burning the entire family.

The Christmas books are an important symbol in this novel. Cassie is especially excited by her new book, which was written by a black man. Alexander Dumas' father was a French mulatto, descended from a slave from the island of Martinique. It makes her feel happy and hopeful to know black people can write books, too. After the insult of receiving dirty, worn, cast-off schoolbooks, Mary and David Logan give their children the luxury of perfect, beautiful new books. The books represent the hope of a better life, a life of unlimited opportunity, untainted by racism and economic slavery. This is the life the Logans hope to create for their children and the reason behind their boycott of the Wallace store. The books also represent education, which is highly prized, especially by Mary Logan, who sees it as a way out of poverty.

As much as the reader might hope that black people could be friends with whites in this story, we recognize the truth when Papa says that true friendship and trust are impossible when people are not equals. When Jeremy gives Mama a bag of nuts, Cassie exclaims, "Nuts! What are we gonna do with nuts? We got more nuts now than we know what to do with!" but her mother quickly shushes her. TJ is afraid of Papa and Uncle Hammer, so he waits until they leave before he tries to talk Stacey out of his wooden flute. He fails, and Stacey locks it away with his treasures.

In an effort to end economic oppression, the Logans consider using their land as collateral to secure credit in Vicksburg. Mr. Jamison warns them that during many years, the sharecroppers lose money, and the Logans are likely to lose their land. The Logans know they are no match for Harlan Granger's economic power, but they want their children to see their parents standing up for what is right and to support the black community, so they go ahead with the boycott of the Wallace store.



Chapter 8 Summary

Cassie has made friends with Lillian Jean Simms, carrying her books home from school and calling her "Miss Lillian Jean" all the time. Her brothers are surprised, and even Jeremy tries to convince her it's unnecessary. Soon Lillian Jean is telling Cassie secrets about all her friends, her boyfriend, and even her brothers. One day, Cassie offers to show Lillian Jean a secret glade in the woods on the way home from school. Once they reach the glade, Cassie throws Lillian Jeans' books on the ground. When Lillian Jean slaps her, Cassie knocks the tar out of Lillian Jean, carefully avoiding the face. Cassie pulls her hair until she apologizes. Even if Lillian Jean does tell, no one will feel sorry for a 13-year-old beat up by a 9-year-old.

Kaleb Wallace, the principle, a school board member, and Harlan Granger sit in on one of Mrs. Logan's history classes. She is teaching the children that slavery was a cruel, unjust thing. She tells them how the country grew from the free labor of enslaved people and how the economic oppression continues.

Mr. Granger inspects the books, where Mama has glued paper over the word "nigra." He argues that she's teaching something that's not in the books. Mama replies that the books are wrong, and she's going to teach the truth. Mr. Granger fires Mama, "so you'll have more time to write your own book." They all know it's really to get even for shopping in Vicksburg. Stacey discovers TJ is the one who told Mr. Wallace and Mr. Granger about Mama. Instead of beating TJ up, Stacey convinces the others not to be friends with him anymore. TJ says it doesn't matter, he has better friends than the Logans, and they're white, too.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Although Cassie abhors violence by whites, she uses violence to resolve her problem with Lillian Jean Simms, despite the family's warnings that it could escalate. Cassie knows her Papa would like to punish Mr. Simms for the way he treated her, but Papa realizes that if he does, the Logan family will suffer in the long run. The Simmses might kill Papa and Uncle Hammer or burn down the house and everyone in it. Cassie needs a way to get even with Lillian Jean that won't involve the adults, so she befriends Lillian Jean. After the fight, Lillian Jean threatens to tell. Cassie says she will tell everyone all the school secrets Lillian Jean confided and that shuts her up quickly. This passage shows that Cassie has not yet found a non-violent way to resolve her problems.

Harlan Granger continues to use economic oppression as a weapon to control the black community when he gets Mama fired. Teaching is the only thing Mama has wanted to do since she was a little girl. The Logans know she will be miserable without it. They also need the money from her job to pay the taxes and mortgage on the land. The Logan children are learning first hand the economic pressures that whites use to "keep the black people in line." When the children learn that TJ is to blame for Mrs. Logan losing her job, they want to attack him. Only the maturing Stacey sees that by refusing



to hang around with TJ, they use the one tactic that might get through to him. Unfortunately, isolating TJ from the black community will have tragic consequences.

Again, the books take on symbolic significance. Mama is fired for covering the hated word "nigra" with blank paper. Symbolically, she is fired for trying to free the black children from racism and the limited opportunities that surround them.

Chapter 9 Summary

In the spring, Papa and Mr. Morrison plant the cotton. They plant extra to make up for Mama's lost income. Jeremy confides that TJ hangs out with his brothers, R.W. and Melvin, who laugh at him behind his back. By late March, the black school term has ended, so the children could help on the farm. White kids like Jeremy still have to go to school until mid-May. With rumors that the Wallaces were going to put a stop to shopping in Vicksburg, Papa is reluctant to return to his railway job in Louisiana, but the family needs the money to pay the mortgage and taxes on the land.

Mr. Avery visits and tells Papa not to buy him any supplies in Vicksburg. His landlord, Harlan Granger, has told all the black farmers if they don't shop at the Wallace store, they will have to pay him 60% of their crop in rent, instead of the usual 50%. It's too late in spring to plant more cotton, so they have no choice but to go back to the Wallace store. Even then, some of the farmers would boycott the Wallace store, but Harlan Granger has told them to get off his land. He threatens to call the sheriff and put the farmers on the chain gang for their unpaid debts unless they stop shopping in Vicksburg.

Stacey criticizes the farmers when they leave, but Papa tells him to be quiet. If the Logans didn't own their land, they would be acting the same way. Only seven of the 30 farm families continue to shop in Vicksburg. On Wednesday morning, Papa and Mr. Morrison leave for the supply trip. They take Stacey with him. On Thursday, the day of their return, it rains all day. As the evening grows later, the rain pours down. Mama sends the children to bed and sits up with Big Ma, waiting. She can't get the image of the white men, bent on revenge, out of her mind. Finally, she hears a sound outside. The dogs start to bark, and Mama throws the door open. It's Stacey with a flashlight in his hand, lighting the way for Mr. Morrison, who is carrying Papa. Papa's left leg is broken and splinted with his shotgun. His head is wrapped in blood-soaked bandages.

While Big Ma sets Papa's leg, Carrie makes Stacey tell her what happened. After they left Vicksburg, both rear wheels fell off the wagon at the same time. Stacey told his Papa and Mr. Morrison that he saw two boys fooling with the wheels in town. They agree it must have been planned--both wheels wouldn't come off by accident. It was getting late, so they decided to try to put the wheels back on without unhitching the horse or unloading the wagon. Stacey held Jack, their old plow horse, while the men wrestled with the wheels. Mr. Morrison, with his enormous strength, held the wagon up while Papa slipped the first wheel on. Just as Papa got the wheel on, a shot rang out! The bullet grazed Papa's head, causing a wound that bled profusely. A truck had come up behind them in the rain and thunder. Three white men got out of the truck. Papa fell



with his left leg under the wagon. Jack, scared by the shot, reared, and he was too strong for Stacey to hold. The wagon rolled over Papa's leg, crushing it. Stacey thinks it is his fault Papa's leg is broken because he didn't hold Jack.

Stacey tied Jack to a tree and ran back to Papa. After the men shot Papa, they went after Mr. Morrison, but he was too fast and strong for them. Morrison threw one man so hard it broke his back. One of the others shot at Mr. Morrison, but missed in the dark. Stacey couldn't see the rest of the fight, but soon the white men grabbed the man with the broken back, put him in the truck, and drove off fast.

Christopher-John is afraid Papa is going to die, but Stacey says he'll be just fine in the morning. Cassie asks Stacey who the white men were, and he says he's pretty sure it was the Wallaces. They all sit and stare at the dark outside, waiting for morning.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The extra cotton planted by the Logans symbolizes their best hope for the future and to compensate for the loss of Mama's job. When Harlan Granger waits until after the planting season to raise his sharecroppers' rent, he symbolically deprives them of hope by depriving them of the opportunity to plant extra cotton.

The sharecroppers begin to recognize their economic oppression when they realize that the Wallaces pad their bills at the store, in addition to charging interest. They know that at the end of the year, Harlan Granger will extract an extra10-15% fee for guaranteeing their credit at the Wallace store, and they'll only have a few dollars to show for their entire year of backbreaking effort. Members of the black community unite, to try to find a way out of the endless economic cycle through cooperation and sharing.

The violence long foreshadowed in earlier chapters is finally apparent. The Wallaces wait until just before Papa is due to go back to Louisiana to work, to make their move. They have two boys sabotage the wagon wheels in Vicksburg, and then creep up on the disabled wagon in the dark, under cover of a thunderstorm. Their plans to kill Mr. Logan and Mr. Morrison are thwarted when the huge, powerful Morrison fights back. They give up and flee, although one of the white men has a broken arm and another is seriously injured, possibly fatally. Papa suffers a head wound, a concussion, and a broken leg. There is no doubt in our minds that further violence will follow. The central conflict of the book emerges--will the Logans be able to find a non-violent solution? Can they find a way out of the cycle of violence that threatens to engulf their small community?

Chapter 10 Summary

A week later, Papa is able to get out of bed for the first time. Mama is figuring the accounts, planning how much money they need now that Papa won't be able to work on the railway this year. She decides that with Uncle Hammer's half of the mortgage, they have enough to get through June. They'll sell some cows and calves to make the July and August payments, and maybe the old sow. By August the cotton should yield enough to make the September payment. Of course, they'll have to take the cotton to



Vicksburg to have it processed in a gin. They can hardly use Harlan Granger's gin, after everything that's happened.

Mama and Papa discuss the supplies they can do without. The flour, sugar, and baking powder are low, but they can do without biscuits and cornbread most days. They're out of pepper and almost out of salt, but those are not strictly necessary. The garden is doing well, so they'll have plenty of vegetables to eat. The coffee's all gone.

Papa feels like taking a bullwhip to the Wallaces and not stopping until his arm is sore, but Mama says no good will come of doing things "Hammer's way." They're both afraid for Mr. Morrison, a criminal now that he has injured a white man. When Cassie, Little Man and Christopher-John go for a ride with Mr. Morrison, Kaleb Wallace confronts him. Kaleb parks his Model-T truck in the road, blocking the wagon. He shouts that Mr. Morrison should be in jail for hurting the two Wallace brothers. Mr. Morrison calmly lifts first the front, then the back of the truck, and moves it aside. He drives the children home. Kaleb Wallace is speechless at this phenomenal show of strength, and he doesn't try to follow them.

Cassie thinks the simplest solution would be to have the sheriff put the Wallaces in jail for attacking Papa. Mama explains it doesn't work like that. The sheriff would assume Papa did something to the Wallaces first, and he'd put Mr. Morrison on the chain gang. The Wallaces are too embarrassed by their injuries at the hands of a black man to complain. If they keep silent, the Logans have to, also.

By August, several black families have found valuable items missing after a visit by TJ and the Simmses--a watch or a locket. At dusk, Mr. Morrison comes back from Strawberry, where he had gone to make the August mortgage payment. He handed Papa an envelope. The bank has called the mortgage. It's due and payable immediately. The next day, Papa goes to Strawberry. He tells Mama he called Uncle Hammer and he's going to get the money for the mortgage. Mama asks how, and Papa admits he doesn't know.

The third Sunday in August is the annual revival. It's a huge tent meeting, with serious church services but gay potluck suppers and get-togethers. Cassie's excited about the chance to see old friends and relatives and run around with other kids. There's a feast of ham, turnip greens, black-eyed peas, ribs, fried chicken, buttermilk biscuits and sweet-potato pie. While the Logan children are eating, a familiar figure walks up the road. It's Uncle Hammer! He's sold his fancy Packard car. Papa doesn't want to tell Hammer how he broke his leg, for fear Hammer will go after the Wallaces. He makes Hammer promise he'll go right back on the train to Chicago, and stick around to pick any fights with white men.

The last day of the revival, a storm is brewing. They start the meeting early, so they can finish before the thunder and lightning. TJ comes dressed in spiffy new clothes, and brings the Simms boys with him. TJ brags the Simmses will give him anything he wants, including the pearl-handled revolver at the Mercantile in Strawberry. They roar off in a cloud of dust.



Chapter 10 Analysis

The cycle of economic oppression continues. Granger and the Wallaces have deprived the Logans of all outside income. The Wallaces did as much harm to the family as possible by waiting until Papa was ready to go back to his railroad job before injuring him. Without a job for either Mama or Papa, they are in danger of losing the land. It will take every cent from the extra cotton they planted just to make the monthly mortgage payments and pay the taxes.

The bank has waited until the worst possible moment to call in the mortgage. Mama objects that the mortgage is good for another four years, but Papa reminds her that Harlan Granger is a friend of the banker. No doubt, he had a hand in this. Mr. Morrison begged the bank to wait just a month--until the cotton was harvested--but they refused. Papa wants to head to Strawberry to the bank immediately, but Mama convinces him to wait until tomorrow. She's afraid to have him on the road again at night. Papa calls Uncle Hammer, and he comes through. Uncle Hammer borrowed some of the money for the mortgage. He emptied his savings, and then he sold his Packard to pay for the rest. Not trusting the mail or a messenger, Uncle Hammer has brought the money himself.

The cycle of violence continues, and threatens to escalate. Papa is concerned about the hotheaded Hammer's reaction when he learns that the Wallaces broke Papa's leg. He knows Hammer's wild temper, and he also knows the town is a tinderbox of racial tension. He convinces Hammer that it is safer if he goes back to Chicago--for Hammer and for the rest of the Logan family.

Even in the face of such pressures, the black community is strong. At the revival, TJ looks lonely and desolate, even in his nice new clothes. He's hurt when nobody pays attention to him. For just a minute, Carrie thinks he will stay and go to the church service, but then he jumps in the Simmses' car and they roar off toward Strawberry. This encounter represents a turning point, for both TJ and Cassie. For a moment, we hope TJ will choose the more difficult path and rejoin his church and his community, abandoning his shiftless friends and their violent ways. Instead, he chooses to become a criminal and to rejoin his friends, although he knows they are no good. Cassie recognizes the moment of decision for TJ, and the reader can't help but wonder whether the results would have been different if Cassie had somehow been able to reach out to TJ

Chapter 11 Summary

The chapter begins with Mr. Morrison sitting on the porch singing a song:

"Roll of thunder

Hear my cry

Over the water



Bye and bye Ole Man comin' Down the line Whip in hand to Beat me down But I ain't Gonna let him Turn me 'round."

Mr. Morrison has sat on the porch and watched every night since Papa was hurt. No one explained to Cassie what he was watching for, but she knew it had to do with the Wallaces. When he finally goes in, Cassie hears a noise in the yard. She looks out and finds TJ, so afraid he's stammering. He's been brutally beaten by R.W. and Melvin Simms. He's desperate to get home before daylight, since his father will kick him out if he stays out all night one more time. Stacey asks why R.W. and Melvin beat him, and TJ tells the story.

When TJ and the Simms got to Strawberry, the Mercantile was already closed. The Simmses said they would just go in and take the gun from the store and pay for it tomorrow. TJ was scared, but they convinced him to slip in through a small window in the back and let the brothers in through the door. When the Simmses came in, they were wearing stockings over their faces and gloves on their hands. R.W. broke the lock on the gun case with an axe and gave TJ Avery the pistol.

Then R.W. and Melvin used the axe to break open the cabinet with the cash box inside it. The noise brought Mr. Barnett from his living quarters above the store. He came down the stairs, followed by his wife. R. W. and Melvin panicked and struggled with Mr. Barnett. R. W. hit Mr. Barnett on the head with the axe, and they fled. Mrs. Barnett, mistaking the dark stockings for dark faces, yelled, "You nigger done killed Jim Lee! You done killed him." R.W. slapped her and they all ran out.

TJ wanted to come home, but the Simmses told him to wait in the truck. When TJ threatened to tell unless they took him home, they beat him. TJ got a ride on a farmer's wagon as far as the Logans' farm. TJ tries to get up to walk home but collapses, coughing up blood. He begs Stacey not to tell his father. Stacey finally agrees to help his friend home. The other Logan children follow. As TJ enters his house, the thunder and lightning begin. As the Logans near the forest, they see half-a-dozen sets of headlights headed towards the Avery house. Noisy, angry, white men leap from the cars and surround the house. They call TJ a murderer and a thief, and demand he come out. Soon the Avery family is dragged savagely from the house and slapped and kicked. The men pull TJ out. His jaw is swollen like it's broken, so that he can't speak. One of the



men pulls the pearl-handled revolver from TJ's pocket, and they are sure of his guilt. They demand the stolen money, which TJ doesn't have.

Another car pulls up, and Mr. Jamison jumps out. He demands that the white men stop and surrender TJ to the sheriff. The men mutter that they may as well kill a "niggerlover" tonight, as well. The sheriff pulls up uneasily and then delivers a message from Harlan Granger. Mr. Granger doesn't want any hanging on *his* land. Kaleb Wallace suggests that they take TJ to the Logan place, where they can "take care of" Mr. Morrison and Papa at the same time! Kaleb has three new ropes with him for the purpose. Mr. Jamison continues to argue with the men, while Cassie runs to warn her father and Mr. Morrison. Cassie takes the younger boys with her, but Stacey stays. He promises Cassie he won't try to take on the white men by himself.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Mr. Morrison's song illustrates the central theme of the book, the search for a nonviolent solution to racism. It also tells us the origin of the book's title. The spiritual talks about the slave's refusal to be broken by physical force or by the racism around him, just as the Logans, especially David Logan, refuse to be bowed by white oppression. More important, they reject violence as a solution and refuse to be reduced to the same level as people like the Wallaces.

TJ's rejection of the black community and his choice of bad company has finally come back to haunt him. His white friends were only using him. Now they are the first to turn on him, accusing him of the near-fatal attack on the Barnetts. By accusing TJ, they shift the blame from themselves. R.W. and Melvin insist they saw TJ and two other black boys running away after robbing the Mercantile. Stacey still feels a sense of obligation to TJ Perhaps if he had remained TJ's friend, all this would not have happened. Stacey tries to help his injured friend home, and Cassie and the little boys follow.

TJ's unwitting cooperation in the robbery of the Mercantile is ironic. The Barnetts have long overcharged, cheated, and insulted their black customers. In his own way, TJ tries to counter that economic oppression by taking the pearl-handled revolver he's always admired. Of course, any attempt to break the cycle through violence only results in more violence.

When the white men attack TJ, only Mr. Jamison has the courage to stand up to them. The sheriff reluctantly agrees. Mr. Harlan Granger sends word that he does not want blood shed on his land, but he won't get out of bed to prevent the lynching. When Kaleb Wallace suggests killing Mr. Logan and Mr. Morrison as well, Cassie knows she has to run to warn them. Despite It seems more violence is the inevitable end.

Chapter 12 Summary

The kerosene lamp is lit as Cassie and the boys draw near the house. Papa starts to punish the children for their midnight excursion, but Cassie makes him realize that they are all in danger. She admits that Stacey is still at the Avery place, hidden in the forest.



Papa is determined to get Stacey safely home. Despite his bad leg, he moves around quickly, grabbing his shotgun and shells. Mama begs him not to take the gun, but Papa insists they'll kill TJ if he doesn't. Papa is determined to defend TJ and his own family if he has to.

Mama tries to make Papa promise he won't use the gun. The best he can offer is his word that he'll try to find another way. Then he and Mr. Morrison rush off into the night. The family waits silently for many minutes. Suddenly Mama stiffens. She smells smoke. The woods are on fire, near the border with Granger land. The wind is pushing it east, and the Logans' cotton is beginning to burn. Mama and Big Ma grab burlap sacks and washtubs of water and run across the field to fight the fire. Cassie wants to go, too, but Mama makes her stay with the boys. Cassie is afraid for Papa, Stacey, and Mr. Morrison, who are among the burning trees. The children wait and worry almost until dawn.

Jeremy Simms wakes them up with news of the fire near dawn. He's been fighting the fire with his father. R. W. and Melvin Simms were fighting it, too. Jeremy says lightning struck one of the Logan's fence posts and set the woods on fire. The fire spread to the Granger forest and the Logan cotton. Mr. Granger, Papa, Stacey, and Mr. Morrison are all fighting the fire. All the black farmers have come to help, and the white men are digging a deep trench across a slope to stop it. The sky is still overcast with thunder and lightning. Jeremy says the thing that would help them the most is a good, hard rain to put the fire out. Even as he speaks, the rain starts to fall.

When dawn breaks, the fire is out. One fourth of the Logan cotton crop is burned, but most of it is saved. The fire stopped at the trench. All the men and women from nearby farms are putting out the last embers, including Kaleb Wallace. Mr. Avery and Mr. Simms are working side-by-side. Harlan Granger himself is helping Papa douse a few remaining flames. Soon all the Logan children go home, and Mama and Big Ma follow. They assure Cassie that Papa and Mr. Morrison, Mr. Avery, and Mr. Jamison are all safe. The sheriff and Mr. Jamison took TJ to jail, but at least he's still alive. Stacey says just as Mr. Morrison arrived, the fire started. At Harlan Granger's orders, all the men, white and black, threw down their guns and went to fight the fire that threatened his land.

Papa and Mr. Morrison return just as Mr. Jamison drives up. Jim Lee Barnett has died, so TJ will be charged with murder and likely go to the chain gang. Mr. Jamison will take the Averys to see their son at the jail. Papa offers to come along, but Mr. Jamison stops him. Mr. Jamison says everyone believes that lightning started the fire. It's better if Papa isn't around to start anyone thinking differently. They'll say Papa got what was coming to him, with a quarter of his cotton burned up. It's better that no one wonders about the fire.

Chapter 12 Analysis

When TJ is threatened, the black community springs into action to protect one of its members, even though he's not a very nice or popular person. The Logans know Harlan



Granger has the power to stop the lynching. They also know that if he were going to stop it, he would have done so already. Cassie asks why Papa wasn't with Mr. Morrison when he got to the Averys' place. Mr. Morrison says Papa couldn't climb the slope with is bad leg, but Cassie knows he could, if he had to.

The strong sense of community is illustrated again by Big Ma's actions. As soon as Big Ma returns from the fire, she goes into the house to change clothes saying, "Fannie will need someone." She means TJ's mother will need another woman with her to face her son's being taken to the jail. At least he's alive. This is one of the strongest illustrations of the cohesiveness of the black community in the book. Big Ma has been up all night and should rightfully be concerned bout her own family's loss of their cotton crop. Instead, she turns to help a neighbor in distress.

David Logan has resolved the central conflict of the book and found a non-violent way to combat racism. Cassie's father has capitalized on the universal truth that nothing unites people like a common enemy. By creating a crisis, he gives the black and white farmers a common goal. They work side by side to achieve this goal, which is putting out the fire. The reader can't help but wonder what great things the community would accomplish if only black people and white people would stop fighting each other. Unfortunately, we realize that's not the destiny of this community. Racism may be reduced, but it's not likely to be eliminated in Cassie's lifetime.

Mr. Jamison's words make Cassie realize her father's wisdom in dealing with the lynch mob without violence and bloodshed. He found a way to make all the farmers, black and white, work together instead of fighting with each other. For the first time in her life, Cassie also understands that she mustn't speak of the fire, ever, to anyone, not even her family, not even Stacey. If anyone learns Papa set the fire, the cycle of violence will begin again.

Cassie realizes she never liked TJ, but he was always there, a part of her community and as much a part of her life as the dust and the mud and the Logan land. She realizes TJ will never dodge the Jefferson Davis School Bus again. She cries about the things that happened that could never be undone, including children growing up without books or education and being surrounded by racism. Despite Mama and Papa both assuring Cassie that they will be able to pay the taxes, the final line seems to imply that the Logan land will be lost forever. Perhaps a better interpretation would be that just as the Logan land has been blighted by fire, TJ's life (and by extension, each Logan's life) has been blighted by violence, economic oppression, and unconscionable racism.



Characters

Cassie Logan

The independent and feisty daughter of Mary and David Logan, Cassie is outspoken when she encounters racism in the community, a dangerous trait for a young black girl in 1933. Cassie can't believe the way she is treated at the Strawberry Mercantile. At first, she thinks the owner, Mr. Barnett simply forgot to wait on them. When she realizes he is purposely making them wait more than an hour, she is enraged, and makes a scene. Furious, Cassie bumps into Lillian Jean Simms on the sidewalk and is humiliated and manhandled by Mr. Simms. During the course of the novel, Cassie learns that there is much to fear from the white community. Gradually, Cassie learns how to get even with people who abuse her without endangering her family. She befriends Lillian Jean only to punch her and pull her hair until Lillian Jean apologizes. She keeps the prissy Lillian Jean from telling with threats, but Cassie also learns that some white people can be trusted, like the lawyer, Mr. Jamison. Cassie finally learns that there are alternatives to violence when her father stops TJ's lynching without firing a shot. As Cassie matures, she loses some of her idealism and learns that it takes as much courage to keep silent sometimes as it does to speak out.

Clayton "Little Man" Chester Logan

The youngest Logan, Little Man at six is fanatically neat. He hates dust on his clothes, and he is the Logan child most affected by their daily feud with the school bus. Cassie is perhaps more offended by the worn, tattered schoolbooks on Little Man's behalf, than on her own. We see in Little Man the innocence of childhood. He hasn't yet been exposed to racism enough to accept it. Little Man always folds or hangs his clothes neatly. When he receives a copy of Aesop's Fables for Christmas, he immediately protects the cover with brown paper.

Stacey Logan

A 12-year-old seventh grader, Cassie's older brother tries to be the man of the family while his dad is away. Stacey initially resents Mr. Morrison because he feels he can handle things. Stacey has a well-developed sense of honor, and won't tell on TJ, even when it means Stacey suffers a humiliating whipping in school from his own mother. TJ ridicules Stacey about his new coat, (a gift from Uncle Hammer) saying he looks like a preacher, until Stacey gives it to TJ. When Uncle Hammer severely scolds Stacey, he learns not to be so gullible and easygoing. When TJ goes too far, Stacey finally instigates the shunning that drives him to become friends with the white Simms boys. Ultimately, Stacey is a loyal friend who tries to help TJ when he is beaten by his white "friends." The author based both the characters of Stacey and David Logan on her



father, and many of the Stacey's exploits were adventures her father had as a child in Mississippi.

Christopher-John Logan

Cassie's eight-year-old brother is calm, good natured and easy going. Christopher-John often tries to talk the feisty Cassie and brave Stacey out of their wilder adventures. He is the Logan child least likely to argue or get into trouble.

David "Papa" Logan

Cassie's father is strong, kind, and intelligent. He protects his family at all costs, although he must work for the railway in Louisiana during the summer and fall. The railway money pays the taxes and mortgage on the Logan land. Papa loves his land, but he's willing to risk it to help the sharecroppers purchase supplies at fair prices in Vicksburg. When the sharecroppers boycott the Wallace store with Papa's help, the Wallaces shoot him and break his leg. Unable to work with a broken leg, Papa loses his railroad job. Papa Logan is as angry as his brother Hammer about racism in the community, but he is able to conceive of solutions that aren't violent.

Uncle Hammer Logan

Hammer is David's hotheaded brother, older by 2 years. When Uncle Hammer gives Stacey a tongue-lashing, Cassie thinks she'd rather be whipped by her father than endure a scolding from Uncle Hammer. Uncle Hammer has a good job in Chicago, which enables him to buy a fancy Packard automobile. Hammer is a prankster, and when he approaches a one-lane bridge, he honks at a white farmer in a Model-T. The farmer, believing that such a fine car could belong only to a wealthy white man, pulls aside. Hammer rejoices in the white farmer's dismay when he sees a black man driving the car. When Harlan Granger pressures the bank into calling in the Logans' mortgage, Uncle Hammer sells his car to pay it off.

Mr. L.T. Morrison

When Papa brings home a hired hand, as much to protect the family in his absence as to work the fields, Stacey is insulted. Soon, they all learn to love the huge man, tall as a giant, strong, and dependable as a tree. Mr. Morrison tells the children about his parents' death at the hands of white men on Christmas day. When white men fire on Papa, Stacey, and Mr. Morrison on their way back from Vicksburg, it's Mr. Morrison who fights back, beating all three until they flee. He carries Papa home when he's injured, and when a white man blocks the wagon with his Model-T, Mr. Morrison simply lifts first the front end of the truck and then the back, setting the truck down beside the road as gently as if it were a baby. Mr. Morrison confesses that he never had children, but he



feels like David and Mary Logan are his children and Cassie and her brothers, his grandbabies.

Mary "Mama" Logan

Cassie's mother is smart and strong. She's wanted to be a teacher her entire life. She hates racism and fights it whenever she can, but she also fears for the safety of her family. When the children are given outdated, worn textbooks with the word "nigra" written inside, Mary Logan pastes paper over the offending notation before handing out the books. Stacey is a member of Mama's seventh-grade class, but she doesn't play favorites. When Mama catches Stacey with a crib sheet during a test, she whips him in front of the whole class, although she knows Stacey would never cheat. Mama teaches her class the truth about slavery and racism and is fired by the school board for it.

Caroline "Big Ma" Logan

Big Ma takes care of the house, cooks, and watches the children while Mary Logan works. She works in the fields like a young woman and is a source of strength and courage to her family. Big Ma is well versed in using herbs and remedies, and many of the farmers call on her instead of an expensive doctor. She treats the Berrys after they are burned but is unable to save John Henry Berry. All of the Logans' love of their land comes from Big Ma and her husband, who originally bought the 400 acres. Big Ma loves the trees, pond, and fields of their home.

TJ Avery

Fourteen-year-old TJ attends Mrs. Logan's seventh grade class with Stacey because he failed last year. He blames his brother, Claude, when he gets into trouble and talks Stacey out of his new wool coat. TJ grows from a talkative, irritating, and mischievous boy to a liar, cheat, and thief during the course of the book. Ultimately led astray and betrayed by his shiftless white friends, we find TJ doesn't deserve the harsh punishment life has handed him.

Mr. Jamison

Although he's born and bred in the south, Mr. Jamison doesn't approve of the racism or the Wallaces' tactics. He does everything in his power to fight racism. When the Logans consider risking their land to guarantee credit in Vicksburg for the sharecroppers, Mr. Jamison steps up and volunteers to sign for the poor black farmers in defiance of Harlan Granger. He is the only white man to try to dissuade Kaleb Wallace and the Simmses from lynching TJ. He is, perhaps, the only white person who realizes that David Logan set the fire as a non-violent way to quiet the lynch mob.



Harlan Granger

The Logan land was originally part of the Granger plantation before the Civil War, and Mr. Granger wants it back. He is constantly pressuring the Logans to sell, and eventually convinces the bank to call in their mortgage. Mr. Granger sees himself as a kind, generous man who keeps peace in the community, but in reality he exploits the sharecroppers in every way he can. When a lynch mob threatens TJ Avery, Harlan Granger doesn't object to the boy being killed, only to its being done on his land. This gives the mob the idea of hanging TJ on Logan land and hanging some Logans while they're at it.

Jeremy Simms

A blond-haired, blue-eyed white boy, Jeremy tries to be friends with Stacey, although he is ridiculed and punished for it repeatedly. Jeremy is the anomaly in a racist, white family that includes the detestable Lillian Jane and older brothers, R.W. and Melvin. Every day he walks part way to school with the Logans. Jeremy brings the Logans a gift of nuts on Christmas, and gives Stacey a wooden flute he carved. Despite Jeremy's attempts at friendliness, Stacey and Cassie never truly trust him.



Objects/Places

Good Faith School

Like all black children in the community, the Logans attend the dismal, ill-heated school housed in four weather-beaten houses on brick stilts. The classrooms, separated only by curtains, lack equipment, including desks, paper, maps, erasers, blackboards, and chalk. Black students have to walk up to 3 ? hours each way to school, while white students ride a bus to a modern, clean, white school building with an immaculate lawn and a large sports field.

Logan Land

Unlike the majority of their neighbors, who are sharecroppers, the Logans own their land. Cassie's grandfather purchased it, and half of it is free of mortgage. Cassie has a strong sense of connectedness to the land. She doesn't think of it as belonging to any one person but to the whole family, including her grandmother and Uncle Hammer. The land frees the Logans from the economic oppression of Harlan Granger, the former plantation owner and the Wallace store.

Books

The children are thrilled on the first day of school to learn they will actually have books this year! Their excitement fades to disappointment when they learn they are being given the dirty, faded, torn outdated, 12-year-old discards from the white school. Worst of all, the books have the word "nigra" written prominently inside the front cover. Cassie's teacher, Mrs. Crocker, accepts this situation. She whips Little Man when he demands a clean book and Cassie for defending him. When Mrs. Crocker tattles to Cassie's mother, Mrs. Logan sides with the children. In fact, she will cover the offending word in the books before she gives them to her seventh-grade class. At Christmas, Cassie's favorite gift is a brand new, perfect book of her own, written by a black man, no less.

Books symbolize education in the novel, and they illustrate Mary and David Logan's hopes for their children. By presenting each child with a clean new book written by a black man, they express their dreams that their children will grow to their full potential in a world untainted by racism.

The Pearl-handled Revolver

After the horrendous attacks on the Berrys, all the members of the black community are frightened. When TJ visits the Strawberry Mercantile with Cassie and Stacey, he covets the gun because "then he would be safe from anything." Like all the black children, his



biggest fear is the Wallaces and other white men. Ironically, when TJ is almost lynched, it is because of this very gun. The revolver illustrates the cycle of fear and violence that drives TJ and the white men around him.

The School Bus

Throughout the first few chapters, the whites-only school bus is the Logan children's nemesis. The driver takes glee in running the children off the road, forcing them to jump into the briars. He jeers as he drives past, splashing them with mud, and the children on the bus follow his example, laughing and taunting. It's a wonderful day for the Logan children when they figure out how to get even until they begin to understand the consequences of their prank.

The Wallace Store

The Wallaces wield enormous economic power in the community. Along with the Mercantile in the town of Strawberry, they charge the black farmers inflated prices for their supplies. They also include items the farmers never ordered or received on their bills. The farmers are forced to shop at the Wallace store and the Mercantile because they extend credit to the sharecroppers. Worst of all, the Wallaces keep a back room set up for black youths to dance. There, they serve alcohol to under-aged girls and boys, charging the liquor to the family's account.

Stacey's Wool Coat

When Uncle Hammer sees Stacey about to go to church in a worn out, threadbare coat that's much too small for him, he delights Stacey with an early Christmas present. The gift is a soft, warm wool coat, the nicest coat any of the Logan Children have ever seen. It's a bit too big for Stacey, but when he puts it on, he's thrilled. When he gets to church TJ Avery, clearly envious, begins to tease Stacey unmercifully about the coat. He says Stacey looks like a "preacher" in the coat. Eventually, Stacey lends TJ the coat, which fits TJ,to end the teasing. Uncle Hammer is furious and insists Stacey let TJ have the coat permanently to pay for his gullibility and "stupidity." This exchange fuels Stacey's rejection of TJ when he cheats a second time and eventually encourages TJ to enter into an ill-fated friendship with the Simmses.

Harlan Granger Land

Harlan Granger is the wealthiest white landowner in the area. His family owned the area's major plantation before the Civil War. After the war, the Grangers sold 2000 acres to a white Yankee carpetbagger to pay overdue taxes. Cassie's paternal grandfather, the now-deceased Paul Edward Logan, bought 200 acres from the Yankee carpetbagger, and mortgaged another 200 acres. Harlan Granger has managed to reacquire all of the land except the Logans' 400 acres, which he covets.



The Mercantile Store in Strawberry

The Mercantile is a large general store in nearby Strawberry, Mississippi. The owners, Mr. and Mrs. Barnett, live in an apartment above the huge store. At first, the store seems like a palace, with goods of every kind for purchase. TJ Avery especially covets the pearl-handled revolver. The store loses its charm for Cassie after she is insulted by Mr. Barnett. When R.W. and Melvin Simms con TJ Avery into breaking into the Mercantile, disaster ensues.

Cotton

Although cotton was a symbol of oppression during slave days, it represents hope for the Logans and their neighbors. Only through planting additional cotton can the Logans pay their taxes and recoup some of the income lost when Mama is fired. When Harlan Granger raises his sharecroppers' rents after planting season, he deprives them of the opportunity to plant more cotton and the hope of earning more money. Ironically, it is only by sacrificing a measure of his cotton to fire that David Logan can end the cycle of violence in his community.



Setting

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry is set in Mississippi at the height of the Great Depression; most of the action occurs between 1933 and 1934. The Logan farm, comprising four hundred acres of land, is home to the narrator Cassie, her parents, her three brothers, and her paternal grandmother. Cassie's grandfather, Paul Logan, purchased this land in two separate transactions, acquiring two hundred acres in 1886 and two hundred more in 1918. The family still owes a mortgage on the latter purchase, and the first requires tax payments.

Ever since the price of cotton fell in 1930, Cassie's father, David Logan, has had to take jobs in other cities during the off-season to fulfill his financial obligations. The Logans are the sole black property owners in this community, the only black family in the narrative to escape the sharecropping system. Their farm borders a dense forest, with an ancient oak tree serving as an official dividing mark. Although the Logans are not poverty-stricken, their financial reources are quite modest and require careful monitoring to ensure the family's continued independence and survival.



Social Sensitivity

Throughout the work, Taylor addresses the dynamics of racial tension, and although the dramatization of this sensitive issue is carefully controlled, some students might benefit from background information concerning the era in which the novel is set. The attitudes and tolerance of the older blacks toward social injustices could prove problematic. Some students may find it difficult to accept the older characters' assertions that some situations simply must be endured. Careful preparation should precede discussion of the scenes depicting burnings or referring to lynchings and hangings. Ultimately, the sense of community demonstrated by both blacks and whites toward the end of the novel offsets the acts of violence.

The events of the novel need not be distorted or minimized since most younger readers are emotionally capable of confronting the difficult issues raised.

Violence is not a major theme of the work, but the nature of the conflict necessitates some solutions and strategies that contradict the values that families such as the Logans would usually uphold. On occasion, characters in the novel include guns in their preparation for a potential confrontation, but the conflicts are resolved without the use of firearms.

The racial conflict among the school children in the community is not particularly intense and in some instances differs little from normal tension among young people in any community. This dimension of the work should pose few, if any problems.



Literary Qualities

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry features a straightforward and uncomplicated style. Taylor's controlled use of symbolism lends depth to the work's major themes. The old oak tree that borders the Logan land, for example, represents the Logans' strength and perseverance.

The frequent allusions to slavery afford a backdrop for the Logans' struggle and provide revealing, instructive historical background. The characterizations are, for the most part, effective and believable, although Cassie sometimes seems unbelievably perceptive for her age.

Despite limited physical descriptions, the interactions among characters reveal much about their personalities and motivations.

Taylor deftly manipulates diction, shifting appropriately between the relaxed idiom of the children and the rather stilted, impersonal language of teachers addressing their classes. The rhythmic dialect in the informal conversations lends itself well to reading aloud. The pace of the narrative is somewhat slow, rendering the book less exciting than many other novels for young adults, yet the progression of the plot is masterfully controlled and free from confusing subplots. The few flashbacks fit naturally into the context of those scenes in which they appear.

The point of view from which the story is told, that of an eight- or nine-year-old girl, permits a naivete that illuminates an illogical social system. It also offers a view of reality from a character who is still too young to be embittered by the injustices that are a part of her life.

Cassie's inquisitiveness forces the adults to see the hypocrisy in accepted behaviors and value systems. An older narrator more thoroughly indoctrinated and inhibited by the social climate could not have raised the same provocative questions that serve to highlight the failures and inconsistencies of the immediate environment.

In this novel, oral history provides valuable information about the influence of past events on the characters.

Cassie's grandmother recounts past events so often that Cassie can almost recite the stories simultaneously. Much of the story that Mr. Morrison tells about the death of his parents when he was only six years old may have been engraved in his memory in a similar manner.

Strong verbs add vitality to the book's descriptive passages, allowing the reader to visualize the scenes and characters. Taylor's use of language and her manipulation of scenes establish a generally nonconfrontational tone. In many instances in the novel, the adversaries do not face one another, and consequently many negative reactions are



portrayed indirectly. This authorial strategy reduces the emotional intensity and harshness that could well have resulted from a different presentation.



Themes

Racism

At its heart, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* is a story about the tragic effects of racism on the black and white citizens of the rural area near Strawberry, Mississippi, during the Depression. Racial segregation is clearly illustrated in the opening chapters. The black children attend a shabby, dismal school in a group of four ill-heated and weather-beaten houses where classrooms are separated by curtains. The crabgrass lawn is forage for the caretaker's cow. The children walk as much as 3-and-a-half hours each way to attend school, often barefoot, wearing faded, patched, threadbare clothing. They're thrilled to receive books, until they realize they've been given the white children's castoffs, texts that are 12 years out of date.

The white children, by contrast, attend Jefferson Davis County School, a long, white building with expansive lawn, flowers, and a large sports field. They study from new books and wear nice clothes to ride the two school buses. The white bus driver takes pleasure in running the black children off the road, forcing them to jump into the briars and weeds and splashing them with mud. The white children, following his lead, laugh and jeer at their black counterparts.

Even worse than the poverty, is the injustice. When Cassie accidentally bumps into Lucille Jane in Strawberry, she's insulted, pushed into the street by a grown man, and forced into a humiliating apology. Her grandmother, Big Ma, is powerless to help her. The entire black community lives under the constant threat of lynching. Eventually, the racism devastates both a good portion of the Logan land and the life of TJ Avery.

Violence

From the beginning of the book, the threat of violence is very real. The Berry brothers and their uncle, Samuel, are burned by a white mob for supposedly making a pass at a white woman.

The cycle of violence threatens to continue as members of the black community, most notably Uncle Hammer, are understandably enraged and tempted to solve their problems with violence. Unlike their white counterparts, any violence by black people is likely to result in imprisonment, lynching, or wholesale retaliation against the black community. The Confederates' rampages against defenseless black people are still remembered, including their slaughter of babies and old women.

R.W. and Melvin Simms con TJ Avery into robbing the Mercantile in Strawberry with them. When the robbery is interrupted, the Simmses help lead the lynch mob targeting TJ. No one believes TJ when he accuses the Simmses. When Cassie's father and L.T. Morrison decide to confront the lynch mob, violence and tragedy seem inevitable.



Cassie's mother begs her husband to find another solution, but it seems Mr. Logan and Mr. Morrison will surely be killed.

When fire strikes, it seems almost a miraculous solution. Black people and whites are at least temporarily united, forgetting their differences while fighting the flames. Only later does Cassie realize that the blaze was not a lucky accident, but her father's brilliant non-violent solution to the problem of racial mayhem. David Logan has sacrificed a small part of his crops to ease the tension of racism, at least for a single night.

Economic Oppression

The black community is enslaved by economic oppression as surely as their ancestors were enslaved before the Civil War. The Logans are the only landowners. The other black farmers are sharecroppers, giving half of their crop to their white landlords. They're forced to buy supplies on credit from white-owned stores where they are charged inflated prices, and their bills are padded with items they never purchased. In addition, the white shop owners charge interest, and the white landowners charge a "guarantee fee" to sign for the farmer's credit. At the end of the year, the farmers are lucky to have a few dollars for all their backbreaking work.

The Logans lead an effort to break this vicious cycle. They take orders to buy supplies at fair prices in Vicksburg on credit guaranteed by Mr. Jamison, the upstanding white lawyer. When Harlan Granger learns of this plan, he unilaterally decreases the sharecroppers' portion of the crop from 50% to 40%. He gets Mrs. Logan fired from her beloved teaching position. When the Logans and a few black families still refuse to give in, the Wallaces follow Mr. Logan and Mr. Morrison one dark night and fire shots at them, injuring Mr. Logan. The other black families are cowed into returning to the Wallace store. Mr. Logan is unable to return to his railroad job, and Mr. Harlan Granger has the bank foreclose on the mortgage, 4 years early. Unable to meet the mortgage payment and taxes, the Logans are in danger of losing their farm.

Family & Community

The terrible racism of this rural community creates a unity amongst members of the black community. The black people survive largely because of their cooperation and sharing. When the Berrys are burned, Big Ma treats them as best she can. The only reason the black children have a school at all, is through the efforts of the black churches. When TJ is arrested, Big Ma's first thought is to be with his mother, Fannie. The annual revival meeting is a celebration, a chance to renew old ties, celebrate, feast, and reconnect. It is only when TJ rejects the connectedness with his community represented by the revival that things go horribly wrong.



Themes/Characters

The pride with which the Logans work to keep their land demonstrates the value they place on independence. The white landowners—the Grangers, the Montiers, and the Harrisons—all work to maintain the white power structure, using various strategies to achieve this purpose. Another prominent family in the white community, the Wallaces, own the community store and cooperate with the landowners to keep the current social structure intact. In this environment, the Logans encounter many challenges, both subtle and overt, to their independence and self-esteem.

Cassie Logan, the nine-year-old narrator, embodies the spirit of independence, the trademark of the Logan family and one of the primary thematic emphases of the novel. Although not truly rebellious, Cassie questions and challenges practices that many of the other characters accept at face value.

When she travels with her grandmother to the town of Strawberry to sell milk and eggs, Cassie unflinchingly questions and criticizes the accepted practices that force her grandmother to display her goods behind the white sellers' wagons. She is equally assertive when she informs the store owner that she is next in line after he has waited on three white customers out of turn, and again when she refuses to accept the wornout school books that have been issued eleven times to white students before being offered to students at the all-black school.

Cassie is consistently assertive and logical as she proves in her well-planned retaliation against Lillian Jean Simms, a twelve-year-old white girl who delights in humiliating Cassie. Lillian Jean directs Cassie to call her "Miss" and to carry her school books from the bus stop to her home. Even while following Lillian Jean's orders, Cassie methodically plots her revenge. She listens to Lillian Jean's secrets during this period of service, ultimately threatening to reveal them in order to keep Lillian Jean from reporting the beating Cassie gives her. Cassie's independence is symbolic of the family's emphasis on freedom from the prevailing sharecropper system, although, in her retaliation against Lillian Jean, she compromises family values somewhat by defending fairness at the expense of peace.

Mary Logan, Cassie's resourceful and strong mother, teaches seventh grade at Great Faith Secondary School, manages the family during her husband's frequent absences, and works cooperatively with Big Ma, her mother-in-law, to keep the family intact. She demands accept able, courteous behavior from her children, supporting the school's punishment of Cassie and Little Man, her youngest son, for refusing to accept the wornout schoolbooks. She is, however, sufficiently disturbed by the affront that prompted her children's action that she refuses to condemn them categorically for their behavior.

Politically committed to the cause of dignity for blacks, Mary helps to organize and implement the boycott of the Wallace store after the Wallaces participate in the lynching of black men.



False reports of Mary's incompetence as a teacher, along with her determination to teach her students all the historical facts—even the ones excluded from the old textbooks—contribute to her dismissal from her job, a loss she accepts stoically. Her most painful task is attempting to make Cassie see that certain racial injustices have to be endured while at the same time assuring her daughter that blacks are as good as whites.

David Logan, Cassie's father, demonstrates intense pride in the family property and considers it his greatest obligation to maintain this land for his children's sake. He is gentle and kind to his wife and children, and displays respect and love for his mother. Particularly protective of his family, he attempts to ensure their safety by bringing an unemployed rail layer, Mr. Morrison, to live at the farm while he is away. He makes no effort to perpetuate racial strife but does caution his son against forming close relations with a white youngster, hoping to shield his son from potential hurt. Toward Cassie, he exhibits extreme patience, urging her to control her temper but also encouraging her to identify and, fight for the values she cherishes. He is understanding of others' circumstances and does not condemn a sharecropping neighbor for withdrawing from the boycott of the Wallace store for fear of retribution.

David's mild temperament contrasts sharply with that of his brother Hammer, who lives in the North and exhibits an impatience with the status of race relations in the South that causes his family considerable anxiety when he visits them in Mississippi. Hammer, however, is equally devoted to the cause of land ownership and sells his fancy car when the banks, in an act designed to punish the Logans for their participation in the boycott, call in the mortgage.

The brothers are emboldened by the strength and determination of Big Ma, who provides support for her sons and inspiration and information for Cassie.

She ensures her sons' legal entitlement to the Logan land by carefully supervising the transfer of ownership.

Cassie's brothers, Stacey, Christopher-John, and Little Man, share a genuine commitment to the family.

Stacey displays commendable responsibility in protecting the rest of the family while his father is away. Loyal to his friends, he remains supportive of his irritating friend T.J., even when he does not approve of T.J.'s actions. Christopher-John is less rigid and intense than either of his brothers or Cassie, exhibiting sensitivity for others and attempting to please as many people as possible. He refuses to dwell on unpleasant matters or controversies. Little Man has a penchant for cleanliness and neatness, and reacts vigorously to humiliation of any nature.

T. J. Avery, the son of a black sharecropper, is capricious and unreliable.

Although he possesses some positive character traits, he is cunning and deceitful, thriving on the discomfiture of those around him. Angered by a second falling grade in Mary Logan's class, he Roll of Thunder. Hear My Cry reports to the white community



that her teaching is ineffective and that she is responsible for the boycott of the Wallace store. At times he is repentant, but his character remains flawed. His ambiguous behavior during racial crises estranges him from both blacks and whites. T.J. demonstrates his weakness by participating with the Simmses in an attempted robbery. Overall, T.J. is the antithesis of the book's main themes, lacking integrity, pride, independence, and group loyalty.

Jeremy Simms and attorney Wade Jamison contrast sharply with the oppressive white characters in the novel.

Jeremy, the older brother of Cassie's nemesis, Lillian Jean Simms, exhibits understanding toward the Logan youngsters, often opting to walk with them and awkwardly bringing Christmas gifts to their home. Essentially conciliatory, he often apprises the Logans of the prevailing views and attitudes of the whites. His refreshing sensitivity and kindness enhance the humanitarian aspect of the novel. Equally exemplary is Wade Jamison, an attorney from whose family the Logans obtained their land. He is supportive of the Logans' efforts to retain their property, offering legal advice and drawing up the papers that transfer the ownership from Big Ma to her two sons. He demonstrates tremendous support in the boycott of the Wallaces' store and volunteers to help obtain credit in Vicksburg for the boycotting sharecroppers. His fairness and honesty are consistent with the positive themes Taylor emphasizes.



Style

Point of View

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry is told in a first-person, past-tense narrative from Cassie's point of view. Cassie often sneaks out of class or gets up when she's supposed to be in bed, so we see many important events through her eyes. Events Cassie doesn't see are described to us in believable, colloquial dialogue, by TJ, Stacey, or others. Deeply enmeshed in Cassie's point of view, we see the community as she does, shocked at the racism and angry at the injustices she suffers at the hands of Mr. Barnett, Mr. Simms, and others. Although we see only through Cassie's eyes, the author provides information and understanding about racism, violence and the future of this community that Cassie is not yet mature enough to grasp.

Setting

The story is set in the rural community near Strawberry Mississippi, in the parallel worlds of the black and white communities. Important locations include the black school, the Logans' farm, the Wallace store, and Harlan Granger's land, as well as the Mercantile in Strawberry. Prominent locations in the area are the former plantations. Their owners are still the most influential white members of the community.

The Logans have a 400-acre farm, purchased by Cassie's deceased grandfather from Harlan Granger. They grow cotton, maintain a large vegetable garden and own a milk cow, several horses, and pigs. Mrs. Logan works as a teacher, and Mr. Logan works in Louisiana as a railway worker in the winter to support the farm. The children disobey their father's strict order not to visit the Wallace store where black youngsters are given alcohol on their family's "tab."

The Mercantile, a large store in Strawberry, at first seems like a palace. When the store owner ignores the Logan children and then insults Cassie, it becomes a frightening place. The Simms brothers con TJ Avery into robbing the Mercantile with them, and when they're discovered, the Simmses attack the owners, injuring Mrs. Barnett and killing Mr. Barnett.

Language and Meaning

The language uses description and imagery to evoke a strong sense of place. Mrs. Crocker is described as "yellow and buckeyed." Taylor uses colloquialisms such as "Y'all Jus'startin'school today?" to deftly evoke time and place without ridiculing or demeaning her characters. Characters may speak in southern colloquialisms, but many, including David and Mary Logan, are intelligent, insightful people. Others, like Big Ma and Mr. Morrison, are wise, kind, and strong.



The author is sensitive to the power of words to denigrate, especially racial slurs. Even Little Man, at just 6 years of age, takes exception to a school book with the word "nigra" written prominently inside the cover. The word "nigger" is invoked several times by the vilest racists. It is never a word the Logans would apply to themselves or to anyone they know. The author, Mildred D. Taylor, avoids stereotypes by including sympathetic white characters, including Mr. Jamison and Jeremy Simms. Young people will find the transparent style interesting and enjoyable.

Structure

The book is divided into 12 chapters, with the narrative in chronological order. Readers experience the events along with the Logan family, especially Cassie. Each chapter draws the reader deeper into a web of racism, economic oppression, violence, and fear. The Logan children's understandable impulses to exact revenge for overt racism on the school bus and Lillian Jane sometimes backfire, threatening to make the situation worse. As the conflict becomes more acute, the chapters are longer and more complicated, comprising more scenes and characters.



Quotes

"In the first place if anyone from the school board should come, maybe he could see all the things we need - current books for all of our subjects, not just somebody's old throwaways, desks, paper, blackboards, erasers, maps, chalk. . ." Mama's voice trailed off as she glued the second book. Chapter 1, 30.

"We were not very fond of the skins, for once they were wet they emitted a musty odor which seeped into our clothing and clung to our skins. We preferred to do without them; unfortunately, Mama cared very little about what we preferred." Chapter 3, p. 43.

It was as if the bus were a living thing, plaguing and defeating us at every turn. We could not outwit it. Chapter 3, p.46.

"I don't rightly know," said Mr. Avery, "But y'all knows how they is. Anytime they thinks we stepping' outta our *place*, they feels like they gotta stop us. You know what some of 'em done to the Berrys." He paused, then went on bitterly, "It don't take but a little of nothin' to set them devilish night men off." Chapter 3, p. 62.

As we turned away from the entrance, Melvin Simms said, "Just look at all the little niggers come to dance," and the laughter of the men filled the room. Chapter 4, p. 84.

A still form lay there staring at us with glittering eyes. The face had no nose, and the head no hair; the skin was scarred, burned, and the lips were wizened black, like charcoal. As the wheezing sound echoed from the opening that was a mouth, Mama said, "Say good morning to Mrs. Berry's husband, children." Chapter 4, p. 97.

"You can't watch where you going, get in the road. Maybe that way you won't be bumping into decent white folks with your nasty little self," Lillian Jean said. Chapter 5, p. 114.

"Unnecessary trouble!" Uncle Hammer said, "You think my brother died and I got my leg half blown off in their German war to have some red-neck knock Cassie around anytime it suites him? If I'd've knocked his girl down, you know what'd've happened to me? Yeah, you know all right. Right now I'd be hanging from that oak over yonder." Chapter 6, p. 124.

"It is something, Cassie. White is something just like black is something. Everybody born on this earth is something and nobody, no matter what color, is better than anybody else."

Chapter 6, p. 127.

Papa reached out and softly touched my face in the darkness. "If you remember nothing else in your whole life, Cassie girl, remember this: We ain't never gonna lose this land. You believe that?" Chapter 7, p. 152.



Mr. Jamison allowed Papa and Uncle Hammer several moments to search for a motive behind his mask like face. "I'm a Southerner, born and bred, but that doesn't mean I approve of all that goes on here, and there are a lot of other white people who feel the same." Chapter 7, p. 161

"And Lillian Jean apologized. For herself and for her father. For her brothers and mother. For Strawberry and Mississippi, and by the time I finished jerking at her head, I think she would have apologized for the world being round had I demanded it." Chapter 8, p. 180.

"Got me better friends than y'all! They give me things and treat me like I'm a man and. . . and they white too. . ." Chapter 8, p.194.

"It don't give up. It give up, It'll die. There's a lesson to be learned from that little tree, Cassie girl, 'cause we're like it. We keep doing what we gotta and we don't give up. We can't." Chapter 9, p. 206.

Mister Morrison lowered his eyes and looked around the room until his gaze rested on the boys and me. "I ain't never had no children of my own. I think sometimes if I had, I'd've wanted a son and daughter just like you and Mr. Logan. . . and grandbabies like these babies of yours. . ." Chapter 10, p. 226.

"But TJ did not follow immediately. He remained standing in the middle of the compound, his face puzzled and undecided. I had never seen him look more desolately alone, and for a fleeting second I felt almost sorry for him." Chapter 10, p. 241.

Mr. Jamison leaped out. But once out of the car, he stood very still surveying the scene; then he stared at each of the men as if preparing to charge them in the courtroom and said softly, "Y'all decide to hold court out here tonight?" Chapter 11, p. 254.

"All I can say, Cassie girl. . . is that it shouldn't be." Then, glancing back toward the forest, he took my hand and led me into the house. Chapter 12, p. 275.



Topics for Discussion

1. The Logan family exhibits pride and independence. Which family member seems to exhibit these traits most consistently?

2. The Christmas celebration at the Logans' motivates the recounting of a considerable amount of oral history.

What information gleaned from these conversations enables the reader to better understand some facts or some attitudes presented in the novel?

3. How do you rate Mary Logan's strength and leadership ability?

4. Stacey is forced to grow up quickly because of his father's frequent absences. Of the several actions that he takes to protect and maintain the family's interests, which do you consider the most admirable or impressive? Why?

5. Cassie is perplexed by Big Ma's instructions to apologize to Lillian Jean Simms, who has openly humiliated Cassie for accidentally bumping into her on the street. Are you disappointed with Big Ma's actions in this case? Are there other actions by the characters in this novel that disappoint you? Consider some possible explanations for these actions.

6. Cassie and Little Man refuse to accept the worn-out textbooks issued by the school they attend. How do you view their actions? Would some other reaction on their part have been more appropriate?

7. David Logan and his brother Hammer share a determination to keep the Logan land, yet their attitudes toward dealing with the power structure in the community are quite different. Which character, in your opinion, has the more effective strategy for dealing with those who oppose the family's independence and determination?

8. More than once, Wade Jamison actively supports the blacks in the community. How do you account for his courage in view of the certain criticism and condemnation he will receive from the white community?

9. Discuss the attitude of Jeremy Simms toward the Logan children and describe how his attitude differs from the attitudes of the other white children in the community.

10. Some literary classics are listed among the books the Logan children receive for Christmas, including The Count of Monte Cristo and Aesop's Fables. What other books might provide good reading for children of these ages?

Explain your choices.



Essay Topics

In the opening chapter, the white bus driver takes great glee in running the black children off the road, forcing them to jump into the weeds and briars on the shoulder. He laughs as he splashes them with mud. Why would a grown man do such a cruel thing to children? Why do the white children laugh when he does?

What are some of the differences between the black school and the white school?

When it's properly displayed, the American flag should be the same height or higher than any state flag. Outside the white school, the Mississippi state flag, which is also the flag of the Confederacy, flies higher than the American flag. Why do the white residents fly the state flag higher? What does it mean to them?

There are many injustices in Cassie's town, including the Mississippi flag's flying higher than the American flag, the interest and inflated prices the Wallaces' charge their black customers, and the excessive fees the landlords charge sharecroppers. Why do the black people tolerate such treatment?

When Cassie gets into trouble in Strawberry, Big Ma knows Cassie is right and is almost as angry with Mr. Simms as Cassie is. Why does Big Ma force her to apologize to "Miss Lillian Jane?"

Mr. Jamison, the white lawyer, offers to guarantee the black farmers' credit so they can buy goods at fair prices in Vicksburg. Why would he do something like that?

Many of the white people in this book like Kaleb Wallace are bad, but Jeremy Simms and Mr. Jamison are good. Many of the black people like Mr. Morrison are good, but TJ Avery lies and helps rob a store. He even steals from his friends. Is it good to think of people as "white" or "black"? Or is it better to think of them as individuals?

The Logan children each receive a sweater and slacks or skirt for Christmas. They also receive a sock full of oranges, bananas and candy, and a book. Which is their favorite gift, and why?

Harlan Granger is constantly badgering the Logans to sell their land back to him. He forces the bank to foreclose on their mortgage 4 years early. When an angry mob tries to lynch TJ, Mr. Granger sends word that they should not do it on his land. But he doesn't get out of bed to stop the lynching himself. Is Mr. Granger a good person or a bad person? Why?

The fire destroys one-quarter of the Logan's cotton crop, at a time when they need every dime, yet it unites the black and white farmers and distracts the whites from lynching TJ. Is the fire a good thing or a bad thing?

If Mr. Logan and Mr. Morrison had marched over to the lynch mob and started firing their guns, what would have happened? Would anyone have been hurt?



At the beginning of the book, Cassie loudly complains over every injustice, like the old books at school. At the end, when Cassie realizes that her father set the fire to save TJ's life, she knows she must never speak of it. What has changed?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. All societies in one way or another establish roles and expectations for people of different genders and cultural groups. Research the roles and expectations of the early 1930s, the time period covered by this novel. Analyze the extent to which the characters in this work uphold traditional roles.

2. Review the descriptions of slavery in this work and compare them with descriptions in other works for young adults such as Amos Fortune, Free Man by Elizabeth Yates or Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad by Ann Petty. Identify the major differences in the descriptions and give as many reasons as you can that account for these differences.

3. Mary Logan is fired from her job as a secondary school teacher because of negative testimony from one of her son's friends and school board members' dissatisfaction with her teaching philosophy. Assume the character of Mary Logan and write a journal entry at the end of the day on which you were dismissed.

4. Oral history, the sharing through conversation of memorable incidents from the past, seems to be a cherished tradition of the Logan family. Write about an event that is shared time after time by older members of your family and describe the importance of this event to you.

5. T. J. Avery is the source of many conflicts in the narrative, and his motivations are not always clear. Select any event in which you think T.J. behaves inappropriately. Imagine that you are T.J. and write a letter to another character, rationalizing the action taken.

6. Write a short character analysis of Cassie's teacher, Miss Crocker, based on your impressions of her behavior on the day she issued the old textbooks to the students at Great Faith Elementary School.

7. The reactions of Cassie and Little Man to the worn-out textbooks are open to different interpretations. Write two paragraphs, one defending their right to reject the books under the circumstances and the other discussing the possible negative results of such actions by students.



Further Study

Dussell, Sharon L. "Profile: Mildred D. Taylor." Language Arts 58 (May 1981): 599-604. Presents interesting biographical details and relates them to Taylor's writing and world view.

Dussell discusses Song of the Trees at some length.

Estes, Glenn E., ed. Dictionary of Literary Biography. Vol. 52. Detroit: Gale Research, 1986. An excellent biographical and literary source that chronicles Taylor's early life as well as her literary career. Also summarizes and provides critical comments on Taylor's works.

Fagelman, Phyllis J. "Mildred Taylor."

Horn Book 53 (August 1977): 410-414.

A biographical sketch that includes an analysis of Taylor's effectiveness as a writer and a chronological survey of Taylor's life.

Rees, David. "The Color of Skin: Mildred Taylor." In The Marble in the Water: Essays on Contemporary Writers of Fictionfor Children and Young Adults.

Boston: Horn Book, 1980. Discusses Taylor's work in the tradition of other works addressing racial prejudice. The issue of racism, rather than family pride and loyalty, is emphasized in this essay, which offers an essential and interesting perspective on the work.

Taylor, Mildred. "Newbery Award Acceptance." Horn Book 53 (August 1977): 401 -409. An outstanding and intensely personal speech by Mildred Taylor before the American Library Association. The speech, mostly autobiographical, details quite effectively the influence of Taylor's family on her success. She pays an especially warm tribute to her father and relates several instructive observations concerning the writing and publication of Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry.



Related Titles

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry is the second of three books about the Logan family. Taylor's first work, Song of the Trees, addresses similar themes: the complex nature of racial conflict, the strength of family love, and the Logans' determination to keep their land. She continues the saga of the Logan family—which in many respects resembles her own family—in Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry. In Let the Circle Be Unbroken, the same characters continue to grow, their interactions further clarifying Taylor's themes of family pride and determination in the midst of racial strife.



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