

# **The Unvanquished: The Corrected Text Study Guide**

**The Unvanquished: The Corrected Text by William  
Faulkner**

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# Plot Summary

Against the backdrop of the Civil War and its aftermath, William Faulkner chooses to address universal issues through the story of Bayard Sartoris, a white boy of privilege who grows up in a South determined to retain its traditions and lifestyle. As a child, Bayard is typically innocent, as he and Ringo, child of slave parents, play war games and look to Rosa Millard, Bayard's grandmother, for nurturing and protection. When the War comes to their own town, however, Bayard receives a significant "dose" of reality, as his home is burned and the household silver taken by Yankees, leaving Granny and Bayard to take up residence in the slave quarters and devise plans for their own survival, while Bayard's father John commands his own Confederate regiment. Attempts to migrate from the devastation and conflict, Granny, Bayard and Ringo eventually travel to Aunt Louvinia's home, only to find it destroyed, along with the railroad which at one time ran behind their property. Life becomes an "adventure" for teenage Bayard, as the threesome outsmart the Union soldiers, stealing mules from one regiment and selling them to another, in order to assist in their own and their neighbors' survival.

As the War is nearing its end and the Yankees leave Mississippi, Granny and local scam artist Ab Snopes devise a scheme to take horses from a small band of outlaws, Grumby's Independents. In the course of their attempt to gain four horses, Granny is murdered, and Bayard and Ringo seek revenge by tracking the band, ultimately killing Grumby and placing his body on Granny's grave. John Sartoris returns from the fighting, and the extended family of Aunt Louvinia, her daughter Drusilla, and Aunt Jenny gather on the Sartoris property, while the home is rebuilt and John becomes involved in local politics, determined that carpet baggers will not gain control of his town. In the course of his efforts, John kills two Northerners on election day, interrupting the wedding that Louvinia has demanded for John and Drusilla. Drusilla had earlier run off from her home and joined John's regiment, fighting alongside the men, and Louvinia is convinced that they must have slept together during that time.

Bayard assists with the reconstruction and then moves to Oxford to study law. John continues in politics and a business venture to build a railroad with partner, Redmond. Unable to resolve their differences, the partnership is dissolved, John emerging the clear "winner," and Redmond is forced to face the continued taunting of John as well as the loss of an election to the state legislature to him. Eventually, Redmond kills John, and Bayard must return home to bury his father and confront the pressure from others to avenge the murder, through a duel with Redmond. As his father had done, Bayard goes to Redmond unarmed, and Redmond refrains from killing him.

The *Unvanquished* is clearly a novel of the coming of age of a young man, the capacity of humans to endure devastation and violence, and the understanding that, despite the conditions of a vanquished people, there remains within the human spirit the belief that life will move forward toward a better future. Even within the black community, this spirit emerges somewhat, though one is left with the understanding that the "new" south has little to offer the freemen.



# Ambuscade: Chapters 1-4

## Ambuscade: Chapters 1-4 Summary

Civil War has come to Mississippi. Colonel John Sartoris, a Southern planter, has formed a regiment, his second one. As was common with Southern regiments, members of a regiment may expel their colonel by a vote, and this had occurred with John's first. He returns home, in order to oversee the building of a hidden pen for his stock, so that the few animals he owns will be hidden when the Yankee soldiers come. At home are Bayard, his young son, cared for by Rosa Millard, his mother-in-law. Bayard's mother died in childbirth. Also on the plantation are a number of Negro slaves whose family has been on this plantation for generations. A young Negro boy, Ringo, is the same age as Bayard, and they have grown together as brothers. Continuing to prepare for the potential of a Yankee rout, the silver is placed in a trunk, which is then buried under cover of darkness. Bayard and Ringo sit on the upper stairs, listening to the conversation of the adults, and learn that Vicksburg has fallen to General Sherman. The boys determine to participate in the defense of the property.

For two days, Bayard and Ringo wait on the road until the Yankee soldiers are seen. Retrieving the old musket from the house, Bayard shoots at the first soldier he sees, drops the musket, and he and Ringo run for the protection of Granny Rosa, who hides them under her full skirts, as she sits in a rocking chair. A sergeant arrives with men to search the house, even though Granny insists there are no children living there. He is followed by Colonel Dick, a man who, facing a stalwart Granny, appreciates and respects her strong resolve and removes the men from the home. Returning the musket and accepting a glass of milk for refreshment, the Colonel leaves with the hope that this incident will be the worst she will ever have with the Union Army.

## Ambuscade: Chapters 1-4 Analysis

Life in the South, and specifically life on the Sartoris property, has been refined and peaceful. Because the War has not yet come to them, Bayard and Ringo live an idyllic childhood, playing war games in the dirt and getting their mouths washed out with soap for using curse words. While the Whites and Negroes clearly live separate lives, in vastly different living quarters, the reader is given the distinct impression that everyone on the property is a part of an extended family structure, despite the clear delineation of owner and slave. Bayard was nursed by Ringo's mother, after his mother died; Louvinia, Ringo's grandmother, speaks her mind and runs the household as a matriarch. Granny is clearly the head matriarch, however, with her personal strength of will and her ability to stand firm in the face of danger and threats from Yankee soldiers. With a father who is clearly absent most of the time, Granny will have perhaps the most impact on Bayard's development, but Ringo, who is shown to be smart and ingenious, will be an important factor as well.



# Retreat: Chapters 1-2

## Retreat: Chapters 1-2 Summary

As the War comes closer, John insists that Granny take Bayard to her sister's home in Memphis. Granny has the trunk of silver dug up by the Negro men and sets off with Bayard, Ringo and Joby, Ringo's grandfather. They pass through Jefferson, the nearby town, viewing Confederate soldiers, looking tired and worn, and meeting up with "Uncle Buck," a man who, having lost a poker game with his twin brother, Buddy, must stay at home while Buddy rides with John Sartoris. The twins are an unusual pair, owning a large plantation but living in a log cabin on the property, having given the manor house to their slaves. Theirs is a philosophy more in tune with Indians, that is, the land does not belong to people; people belong to the land. As well, they have developed a plan for freeing their slaves, based upon work performed, and for helping out the poor whites who live around their land.

Through four days of travel, Granny is met by Confederate troops who tell her to turn back and avoid the Yankees. Eventually, she meets up with Yankees, and the result is the loss of her mules. Bayard and Ringo, taking an old horse from abandoned property, set off to find the mules, leaving Granny in the wagon. They are subsequently found by John Sartoris, but Granny and the wagon are gone. As they head for home, the boys, on horses provided by John and accompanied by several of John's troops, overtake a Yankee camp, taking guns and clothing. Granny is found at home, with two strange horses pulling her wagon, and the silver is buried again. John has no time to remain at home, however, as there is now a price on his head, and he must flee the approaching Yankees. Loosh, Ringo's father, reveals the location of the trunk to the Yankees and then flees with his wife Philadelphia, having been promised a new free life. The final act of the Yankees is to burn the house, forcing Granny and Bayard to take up residence in Joby's cabin.

## Retreat: Chapters 1-2 Analysis

The War is obviously going badly for the Confederates, and perhaps the only hope is that it will end soon and that the Yankees will leave the territory they are now destroying. Southern whites are not the only victims of Union soldiers bent upon destruction; Negroes are encouraged to betray their masters, promised a new life of freedom, and then forced to fend for themselves once they have left their homes for "paradise." John Sartoris is a victim as well, of both the Union and the Confederate governments. Commanding a regiment is not an easy task, and the troops are not substantially supported by a government with limited resources. Further, as he is sought by Yankees, he may not spend time at home, providing protection for his mother-in-law and son, but, rather, must rely on his Negroes who may or may not remain loyal.



Loosh and Philadelphy are perhaps typical of slaves in Civil War South. The issue of slavery has played a major causative role in this conflict, and the undercurrent of unrest and belief that with freedom will come prosperity and a better life, has made them easy prey to invading Yankee soldiers, who encourage them to betray their owners and embark on a "journey" to a "promised land," knowing full well that the North will not necessarily embrace such a large migration. When Granny attempts to argue to Loosh that the silver is not his to give away, his response is profound: He was sold to the Sartoris family by a man who had no right to sell him, and yet the Sartoris family purchased.



# Raid: Chapters 1-3

## Raid: Chapters 1-3 Summary

Determined to find her mules and her silver, Granny decides to set off to find Colonel Nathaniel Dick, the first stop being Hawkhurst, home of her relatives, specifically, daughter Louisa and grandchildren, Drusilla and Dennison. As she and the boys travel toward Hawkhurst, they pass burned out homes, the owners of which are now living in former slave quarters. Camping at night, they hear the freed slaves running in groups, leaving their former homes for freedom, "going perhaps where they don't even know." They are moving north, to the "promised land," by crossing the "Jordan."

The home at Hawkhurst has been burned as well, and the railroad behind the property destroyed. Louisa, Drusilla, and Denny are living in the slave quarters, and, each night, the slave caravans can be heard, heading for the river to cross into the North and the promise of a new life. Drusilla, an accomplished horsewoman, has followed the Negroes and states that the Yankee Calvary is at the river and will not let the Negroes cross. Granny decides to take Bayard and Ringo with her the next day, as Drusilla leads them to this river, in the hopes of finding Colonel Dick and, ultimately, her mules and silver.

The boys, now thirteen, are particularly interested in the railroad and are distressed to find that it has been destroyed. Drusilla, however, tells them that the destruction did not occur before the first Confederate train made its run from Atlanta south, chased by a Union engine, which could not overtake it. To Drusilla, this was a significant victory for the Confederates, and it has deepened her resolve to become a soldier herself. She has cut off her hair and wears only male clothing, vowing to become a member of John's regiment. As well, Drusilla explains that life has finally become interesting. In the past, a young girl grew up in her parents' home, married an appropriate man, moved into the home once the parents had died, and continued to raise children just as she was raised. Now, there are no homes, no slaves, no silver, and no children to worry about, and life is not the boring blueprint of the past.

Drusilla has also heard the Negroes heading for the river at night, and knows that there is a union cavalry regiment at the river. Granny decides that Simon, Philadelphia, her mules and her silver might be there, and she, Bayard and Ringo follow Drusilla to the site the next day. At the river, masses of Negroes are attempting to cross and, in the chaos, Granny's wagon is pushed into the river, finally to be pulled to the other side by Yankee troops. There, Granny is able to find Colonel Dick, relating to him the tale of her missing items. As a result, she is given ten trunks of silver from the property storage, a large number of mules and Negroes who, frightened by the entire scene, decide they would rather return to their homes. As well, Colonel Dick presents a letter, signed by the Commanding General, stating that all items are the property of Rosa Millard and that, if she should be stopped by any other Yankee regiments, she is to be given any assistance requested. The caravan is then assisted across the river, and Granny



eventually arrives home with mules and silver, having sent all of the Negroes back to their former homes.

## Raid: Chapters 1-3 Analysis

Drusilla is presented as a unique character, certainly unlike the typical Southern young lady. Her father and fiance have both been killed in battle, and perhaps these traumas have transformed her. She has chopped off her hair, wears men's clothing, spends most of her time riding her horse, and insists that her goal is to join Bayard's father's regiment and fight for the confederacy. Granny's character is further developed during this section as well, and her assertiveness and steadfastness ultimately result in a "treasure trove" of items which should certainly assist in her attempts to provide for her grandson and her Negroes.

The Union Army is portrayed as somewhat empathetic in this section, as contrasted with General Sherman and his march across Mississippi, burning and looting homes and towns. Not only does Colonel Dick arrange for Granny to be given far more than her due, but, as well, presents her with a letter which will provide safe passage home, as well as additional assistance she might need. In fact, the presentation of this letter to two other groups of Yankee soldiers during her trip home results in food and horses, and Ringo is already planning how their good fortune can be multiplied.



# Reposte In Tertio: Chapters 1-4

## Reposte In Tertio: Chapters 1-4 Summary

Ab Snopes is a local man whom John Sartoris has asked to look after Granny and Bayard while he is away. Though not a completely trustworthy individual, Ab is the best available, most other men having enlisted in the confederate Army. He and Granny, along with the assistance of Ringo, have devised a scheme to turn her good fortune into much more. Ringo has managed, in the dark of night, to acquire about one hundred sheets of paper stamped with the official letter of the United State Forces Department of Tennessee, along with pen and ink, a rare commodity. He, Granny and Ab are now forging letters from the "Commanding General," which are then presented to Yankee regiment camps, stating that a certain number of mules are to be given her. At home, a large holding pen has been built to house the increasing number of mules on a temporary basis, as, once acquired, the mules are then taken and sold to a different Yankee regiment for cash. The operation is quite sophisticated. Gringo is used as a scout to determine the location of Union camps and has made a map so that every camp to which mules are sold or from which mules are acquired can be carefully recorded, so as never to return to the same camp twice. Ab is in charge of the sales, and Granny and Bayard have the job of presenting the forged letters to the camp officer in charge. After Ab takes his "cut," which both Bayard and Ringo think is padded, Granny receives the remaining cash, hiding it under a floorboard in the slave cabin she continues to share with Bayard, Joby and Louvinia. Over the course of the scheme, Granny, according to Ab, has accumulated well over \$6,000, although Bayard knows she does not have nearly that amount and is curious.

Ab and Ringo propose another trip to a new regiment, camped not far away. Granny does not feel good about this one but agrees nevertheless. Upon presentation of the forged letter, Granny, Ringo and Bayard are given the mules, which Ringo then takes into the woods, meeting Ab, in order to herd them home. As the Bayard and Granny set off for home in the carriage, they are chased and surrounded by the Yankee soldiers, the commanding officer having just read a letter from headquarters warning of her scam. To divert their attention, Ringo creates noise from the woods, the soldiers respond, and Granny and Bayard are able to escape on foot. As Granny and Bayard walk home, Ringo appears with a new carriage, and they successfully return home. The scheme, now, has come to an end.

Bayard eventually discovers the cause for the discrepancy between what Ab says Granny has made and the actual amount she now possesses. She has been doling out cash to needy residents around them, carefully recording how much to each individual and the purpose of the amount given. It had been her hope to continue the scam long enough to accumulate additional funds for her family, which now, of course, appears unlikely. As well, a Yankee Lieutenant as come and taken the remainder of her mule stock. Ab, however, has a new plan. As the Yankees have destroyed large sections of the South, they leave. In their wake, however, unscrupulous individuals have taken up



the slack. One such individual is Grumby and his "Independents," a small group of men who are preying on defenseless women and freed slaves, killing and taking whatever of value remains in the already desecrated territory. Ab knows that Grumby has three mares and a stallion, and the plan is to forge one more letter, from Yankee General Forrest, to obtain the animals. When Ab tells her that she will probably net \$1,500, Granny agrees, despite the pleas of Bayard and Ringo. Although all three go in the buggy, Granny insists that she go in alone, because the men will not harm her. In fact, however, she is shot, and the boys find her alone and dead, in a vacated shack.

## Reposte In Tertio: Chapters 1-4 Analysis

Ab Snopes is not a complicated man. He has not joined any Confederate regiment, most probably because he does not wish to place himself in harm's way, and prefers, obviously, to devise methods by which he can profit from the misery of the Civil War, no matter which side he may injure. Thus, he jumps on the scheme, probably wholly devised by the ingenious Ringo, and obviously pads his commission as well. Ringo and Bayard recognize Ab for what he is, but until the point of the scam's collapse, both boys are willing participants. Granny's motives are certainly unselfish, and she is willing to take amazing risk, despite her upbringing as a proper Southern lady, for the survival of her family and others in the surrounding area. Once she is killed, however, Bayard and Ringo realize the true treachery of Ab Snopes. It becomes clear that once the original scam was discovered and they were forced to cease the operation, the Yankee Lieutenant knew exactly where to go to find the hidden pen of the remaining mules. Only Ab could have informed him. As well, Ab, in the boys' eyes, was totally responsible for Granny's death, convincing her to engage in this new scheme. They are now bent upon revenge, against both Grumby and Ab.

Granny's death is a truly sad moment. Although the boys are now fifteen, and certainly capable of caring for themselves, the family matriarch who has held her family and community together is gone, and the loss is large. Given the title of the book, however, Granny represents, even in death, the "unvanquished" of her society who, faced with devastation, poverty, and loss of both family and property, nevertheless, find ways to survive and provide for themselves.



# Vendee: Chapters 1 - 4

## Vendee: Chapters 1 - 4 Summary

Fixated on revenge for Granny's death, Bayard and Ringo go to Uncle Buck, requesting a gun. Buck accompanies the boys to Ab's cabin, fearing that they may need more assistance. At the Snopes property, they encounter the three mares and stallion formerly owned by Grumby, but the woman who answers the door states that Snopes has gone to Alabama. Knowing this a lie, and knowing that Snopes would not have headed toward Memphis, they move in the only direction in which they believe he and Grumby have gone. It is now winter, and the travel is cold and wet. Further with only two mules, they must rotate riding, as they move forward, finding people who have been robbed, beaten and, in some cases, murdered. They are on the right track.

One evening, as they camp, a well-dressed stranger arrives, stating that he is looking for Grumby. Buck replies that they are looking for Grumby and Snopes. As the stranger leaves, he turns and takes a shot at Buck, hitting him in the arm. Despite the injury, they press forward, finding Ab Snopes tied to a tree. Confessing all, Snopes is then beaten by Bayard, who cannot bring himself to kill. Because Buck is in pain, Ab agrees to assist him in returning home. Bayard and Ringo are left on their own, with a gun, to find Grumby. Their travels result in the discovery of the stranger from the campfire, standing over Grumby. He is willing to give Grumby to the boys, as Grumby's actions of killing Granny mean that they will be the subjects of continued hunting. Now they must leave the area. Grumby grabs for his gun, first shooting at his fleeing former cohorts, but then turns the gun on Bayard. Bayard kills Grumby, loads him on a mule, and he and Ringo head for home.

Arriving home, Bayard and Ringo discover that the War is now over. Father and Drusilla, who had run away from home and joined his regiment, are now back.

## Vendee: Chapters 1 - 4 Analysis

Bayard now experiences events far more significant than simply surviving during wartime. His grandmother's death, while a result of the War, is, more specifically, the result of individual faults - the greed and treachery of Ab Snopes, Granny's own choices, and his and Ringo's inability to dissuade her. As well, he is obviously feeling guilt over the fact that he did not walk to the shack with Granny, though how he would have prevented her death is not known. His grief has turned to anger, his anger to the need for revenge and to somehow honor Granny by pursuing her killers. Once he has killed Grumby, in fact, he transports the body to lay on top of her grave, stating that now she can truly be at peace in the knowledge that her murder has been avenged.

For the first time in his life, moreover, Bayard is able to raise a gun and kill another human. Unable to kill Snopes just prior to this incident, he does not have difficulty



shooting at Grumby, perhaps because Grumby is prepared to shoot him and because Grumby fired the shot that actually killed Granny. Still, killing another person is a traumatic and major occurrence. Bayard feels neither remorse nor shock but, rather, satisfaction and vindication.



# Skirmish at Sartoris: Chapters 1-3

## Skirmish at Sartoris: Chapters 1-3 Summary

Aunt Louis and Drusilla are not reconciled. Louisa was appalled when Drusilla left home to join John's regiment and, now that they are home, she is convinced that Drusilla has shamed the entire family by sleeping with John Sartoris. Louisa has written to Mrs. Compson, a former friend of Granny's, and asked her to intervene on her behalf. Drusilla has taken her role as a re-builder of John's home, along with Bayard, Ringo and Joby. Having seen the living quarters in the former slave cabins, Mrs. Compson and other ladies of the town have determined that John and Drusilla are engaged in fornication. When Drusilla refuses to move into town with them, they inform Aunt Louisa by letter.

Aunt Louisa arrives, beating Drusilla and forcing her to wear dresses. The cabins have been divided between the men and women now, and Bayard is distressed that he only sees Drusilla at meal times. Further, Louisa is now demanding that John and Drusilla be married. John is busy with many other activities, however. He is re-building his home during the day and spending every evening in town, in order to oppose the election of Cassius Benbow as Marshall of their town. Benbow had earlier run off with the Yankees and is now back to claim his spot, by registering the newly-enfranchised Negroes as Republicans.

Wedding and election day are one and the same. John goes into town early, in order to vote and monitor the election process. Drusilla is to come to town later, so that they may be married, and Louisa is overseeing preparations for the reception to be held back at home. When John enters the polling place, manned by two carpet-baggers from the North, there is obviously an argument, and then shots are fired. John has killed the two election officials, stating that they drew guns first. It is announced that the election will take place on John's property, and Drusilla, named voting commissioner by John, carries the ballot box back to their house. A cut-up window shade provides the ballots, and Benbow is defeated by a one hundred per cent "no" vote. There is no wedding on that day, much to Louisa's dismay.

## Skirmish at Sartoris: Chapters 1-3 Analysis

The War's end at least allows an unsettled peace, and Southerners are busy rebuilding their homes and re-starting farms and businesses. The town of Jefferson, also being rebuilt, appears to be, as well, in the hands of Yankee "sympathizers" and carpet-baggers, who are attempting to place a Republican in the office of Marshall. John is obviously intent upon defeating their efforts, and the marriage to Drusilla is not his top priority. Drusilla probably shares John's view, believing that there are far more important concerns - rebuilding the house and thwarting the Republicans. Neither seems willing to thwart Aunt Louisa, however, as she has clearly won the battle with her daughter, and

Drusilla is now outfitted like a proper Southern lady, sleeping in gender-segregated cabins while the house is built.

# An Odor of Verbena: Chapters 1-4

## An Odor of Verbena: Chapters 1-4 Summary

This section finds Bayard attending college in Oxford, Mississippi, now twenty-four and studying law. His home outside of Jefferson has long since been rebuilt, and the marriage between John and Drusilla has occurred. John's sister, Aunt Jenny, is also residing at the family home and has a beautiful garden, full of sweet and strong-smelling verbena. Drusilla has taken to wearing sprigs of it in her hair, claiming that it is the only scent that can drown out the smell of "horses and courage." Bayard is now in his final year of law school, and is looking forward to taking a position of leadership and responsibility once finished.

John Sartoris has had a busy several years. He has organized a group of "night riders," to keep carpet-baggers from organizing the Negroes into insurrection and is determined to form a new South, governed by Southerners. He and business partner, Mr. Redmond, had decided to build a railroad, and, at first, the project went well. According to Bayard, however, father was dictatorial and Redmond stubborn. In the end, John bought out Redmond and completed the railroad himself. He then purchased a locomotive on credit and personally drove its maiden voyage into town, blasting the horn over and over as he passed Redmond's home. John had taken all of the glory for the railroad's completion and then ran against Redmond for a seat in the state legislature, winning the election by a landslide. Redmond has not adjusted to these defeats and humiliations well, and John continues to goad him, against the counsel of his friends.

Bayard has attempted to redirect his father as well, and John's eventual response is that it is time for Bayard to assume his leadership role. "I have accomplished my aim, and now I shall do a little moral house cleaning. I am tired of killing men, no matter what the necessity nor the end. Tomorrow, when I go to town to meet Redmond, I shall be unarmed" (p. 288). Evidently, Redmond was armed, however, and John is killed. Ringo travels to Oxford to inform Bayard, and, together, they travel home for the funeral. Arriving close to midnight, they are met by a flock of townspeople outside the home and Drusilla, engaging in hysterical fits of laughter and holding dueling pistols to present to Bayard. Against the advice of Aunt Jenny, Bayard determines to confront Redmond the next day.

Bayard enters Redmond's office, finding him seated at his desk, a pistol in his hand. As he moves toward the desk, Redmond aims the gun and shoots, purposely missing Bayard. He then walks out of his office, across the road to the arriving train, boards a car, and never returns to Jefferson. Bayard and Ringo return home, where the visitation and funeral are taking place, and discover that Drusilla is gone. She has taken the train to brother Denison's in Alabama. Not wanting to participate in the funeral activities, Bayard goes to the creek, followed by Ringo, and sleeps through the remaining daylight hours. The funeral over, Bayard returns to the house, passing Drusilla's empty room as

he enters his own. The scent of verbena is overwhelming. There, on his pillow, is a sprig of the plant.

## **An Odor of Verbena: Chapters 1-4 Analysis**

Bayard has reached adulthood amidst Reconstruction in the South and the response of his father to Northern occupation and control. Though not quite stated, it is possible that John's "Night Riders" may be a precursor to the Ku Klux Klan, given its purpose, and it is clear that John is committed to control of the South by pre-War leadership. His relationship with his own former slaves is not discussed, but one must wonder how he copes with free and enfranchised Negroes. As well, John is obviously dogmatic and dictatorial, and Bayard appears not to share his father's inflexibility. He appeals to John to stop inciting his enemies, particularly Redmond, and eventually demonstrates that he may perhaps have greater maturity than his father in this respect. In the end, however, an aging John decides that it is time to complete some "moral house cleaning," but not soon enough to prevent Redmond from killing him. Bayard feels a need to avenge his father's murder, though he is not enthusiastic about the prospect. It is certainly redemptive that Redmond decide not to shoot Bayard, and perhaps that act results in the final necessary growth for Bayard. He has no need to see his father again and, in fact, avoids the visitation and funeral altogether.

Drusilla's verbena is perhaps symbolic of the compromises one must make, in the reality of existence. The scent of this plant, she states, is the only odor which overcomes that of horses and courage, both essential elements of an earlier life, now given up. In his final words to Bayard, as well, John has come to realize that he must make changes too, as he reflects on his adult life of bullying, killing, and confrontation. Bayard will be a part of the new South, a different order with a different scent, and perhaps it will be less violent, less conflicted, and prosperous once again. Upon further reflection, then, the reader may also see the verbena as symbolic of maturity.





# Characters

## Bayard Sartoris

The *Unvanquished* is essentially the story of the "coming of age" of Bayard Sartoris. Born into a wealthy planter family in Mississippi, Bayard's life is idyllic, save for the absence of a mother who died during his birth. His grandmother, however, assumes the motherly role well, and, along with Ringo, son of a slave couple on the property, Bayard has a comfortable and nurturing childhood. The Civil War interrupts his early years, however, when his father, John, forms a Confederate regiment and is absent from home for most of the conflict. As the War continues, Bayard's home is destroyed, he becomes embroiled in scams and schemes of survival, and he must mature quickly in order to survive. He clearly idolizes his father, as well as cousin Drusilla, who rebels against traditional society by joining his father's regiment. The death of his grandmother, at the hands of criminals, exposes Bayard to the depths of evil and treachery of some men and the extreme and often destructive emotions of revenge.

As the War ends, and his father returns to become a political and business figure in their town, Bayard begins to see John as a man with faults, specifically, rigidity, dictatorial responses, and the capability of killing others who oppose him. Though not much is described about his college experience, it is obvious that Bayard is a successful student and will become a lawyer, but not before his father's actions have resulted in his murder at the hands of a former business partner. The tradition of avenging his father's death spurs Bayard to return home to confront Redmond, but in the end, no one is killed, and perhaps Bayard now understands that revenge in kind is not always the answer. As the story closes, Bayard does not grieve so much for his father as he does for the loss of Drusilla, who has gone to live with her brother. The redemptive ending, however, leaves the reader with the impression that Bayard will finish law school and use peaceful and legal means to resolve conflict.

## Ringo

Wily and ingenious, Ringo is the child of slaves on the Sartoris property, born at the same time as Bayard. They are fast friends throughout childhood, playing war games and worrying adults with potentially dangerous activities. Bayard claims that Ringo is smarter than he is, and this is probably true, at least in terms of creativity, planning and an innate sense of pragmatism. As the War comes to their life and property, Ringo certainly seems more suited to respond in innovative ways and assists the family in its survival, even at a young age. It is Ringo who, with Granny, devises the schemes which net them dozens of mules, the fraudulent sale of these mules to Yankee troops and the recovery of additional mules through forged documents. Ringo is also fiercely loyal. He supports Bayard in his efforts to avenge Granny's murder, placing his own life in danger. He remains with the Sartoris family, even after emancipation, when his ingenuity could probably have netted him prosperity as a free man. He is the one who travels to Oxford



to inform Bayard of his father's death, travels with Bayard to avenge that murder, and then remains at the creek with Bayard during the visitation and funeral. In another time, Bayard and Ringo would have perhaps been classmates and adult peers.

## Rosa Millard

The mother of Bayard's dead mother, Granny has remained on the Sartoris property to care for Bayard. Though raised and living in traditional Southern society, the War brings out Granny's innate intelligence and guile, allowing her to protect Bayard and Ringo, take on decidedly male tasks and activities, and use her stature as an old woman to scheme and scam the Yankees. She is also deeply committed to her community, as evidenced by the sharing of her ill-gotten gains with neighbors who have lost their property and possessions to the Yankees. Believing that she must atone for her "sins," Granny is careful to pray often, asking God's forgiveness for her lies and scams. One comes to see, however, that Granny believes she has God's favor, as she serves a family and community devastated by destruction and need.

## John Sartoris

A typical Southern planter, John is dedicated to his society and way of life. When the Civil War comes, he forms a regiment of volunteers to fight the invading Union forces, ready to die for the Confederate cause. He is a dictatorial, stubborn man, who is inflexible and determined to force his ways on others. The relationship between John and his son is not well-developed, and he is not seen as a loving, empathetic father, but rather a pragmatic, almost unemotional patriarch. He agrees to marry Drusilla because Louisa demands it, but it is unclear whether there is any true love in this relationship. He staunchly defends the rights of Southerners to establish their own post-War governments, and becomes heavily involved in politics, becoming, eventually, a state legislator. As a businessman, Sartoris appears to have undermined his partner, Redmond, and then finds the need to gloat, until Redmond responds by killing him.

## Ab Snopes

Snopes is a typical self-centered con man, who appears to have no moral compass. He is willing to "sell" himself to either side, based upon personal gain. As a result, he involves himself in Granny's mule scheme, pockets more than his share of the proceeds, and then places Granny in a situation which gets her murdered. He then supplies the Yankees with the location of the mule pen and runs off to become a part of Grumby's Independents, despite the fact that Grumby has murdered Granny. In the end, he is spared by Bayard, but one is not lead to believe that his basic nature will change.



## Uncle Buck

One of twins, Buck loses a poker game to his brother, who then gets the right to join John Sartoris's regiment. Buck stays behind and is charged, along with Ab Snopes, with looking after Granny and Bayard. He is a fiercely loyal individual, who assists Bayard and Ringo as they seek revenge for Granny's murder.

## Drusilla Hawk

The daughter of John's sister-in-law, Drusilla loses both her father and fiancé in the early days of the War. These losses have radically changed her, moreover, and she comes to focus on riding her horse and dressing like a man, having chopped off her hair. She runs away and joins John's regiment, much to her mother's horror. After the War Drusilla and mother Louisa come to live at the Sartoris property, and Louisa insists that John must make an "honest" woman out of Drusilla, convinced that they have engaged in fornication in the field. Drusilla gives in and marries John, compromising her identity in so doing.

## Louisa Hawk

Drusilla's mother, Louisa typifies the wealthy Southern lady. Even in the face of War and destruction, including the loss of her husband, she maintains her "civility," and successfully gains control of Drusilla once the War has ended. She is seen as a rather shallow woman for whom appearances are a top priority.

## Mr. Redmond

A post-War business partner of John Sartoris, Redmond believes that he has been cheated by John and is angered by John's continued taunting of him. Finally, he kills John and knows that he will face young Bayard, who will arrive to avenge his father's murder. Redmond, however, understands that the killing must stop, deliberately shoots to miss Bayard and leaves town on the next train.

## Grumby

An outlaw who terrorizes defenseless Negroes and women, Grumby has a small band of men who ride through the South, killing and looting. When Granny presents him with a forged letter granting her his horses, Grumby kills her. Eventually, he is killed by Bayard, his remains placed on Granny's fresh grave, so that she may rest knowing that her murder has been avenged.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Yoknapatawphy County**

Fictitious county in Mississippi and setting of the novel.

### **Vicksburg**

Town in Mississippi which fell to the Union Army and began the siege of Mississippi.

### **Jefferson**

Town in Mississippi, just outside of which is the Sartoris property.

### **Hawkhurst**

Town in which Aunt Louisa and Drusilla live.

### **Granny's Receipt Book**

A record kept by Rosa Milliard of all that she had given and to whom and for what purpose.

### **Oxford**

Town in Mississippi to which Bayard has gone to study law.

### **Ku Klux Klan**

Group of men organized by John Sartoris to keep carpet baggers from organizing the Negroes into insurrection.

### **Verbena**

A plant with a strong scent.



## **Pokerry**

A berry, the juice of which was used in place of ink, because it was an expensive and rare commodity during the War.

## **Carpet Bagger**

A Northerner who, after the War, moved to the South to take over towns and businesses, often getting himself elected to local offices.



# Themes

## Human Capacity for Endurance

It is difficult for one to relate to the devastation that war brings when it comes to his own land, for, after the Civil War, no conflict has occurred on American soil. Certainly, modern media has brought war into the homes of most Americans who watch the death and destruction occur in places never visited and to people not known. Somehow, however, there is the belief that the human spirit can endure and, in fact, emerge victorious, in the face of horrific conditions, violence, and loss of property and loved ones. The story of the Sartoris family, and of Bayard in particular, is in fact a story of endurance. Faced with the complete destruction of their home and the absence of John Sartoris, Granny and Bayard find ways to utilize and, indeed, capitalize on existing resources. Ringo is a loyal and ingenious asset who devises and implements a host of schemes for survival; Granny analyzes her strengths and uses them to advantage, allowing her to gain mules and silver which she may then sell; Bayard remains willing to follow Granny and Ringo and to pursue justice for his murdered grandmother. Through it all, moreover, their strength of spirit prevailed, with deeply held belief that their current conditions would come to an end and the hope that life would improve. In this hope and belief, they represent humankind.

## Coming of Age

Perhaps the most pervasive theme of *The Unvanquished* is the coming of age, which all humans must accomplish, no matter their station in society. Bayard is born into a family of means and, although his mother has died, he lives in the protected innocence of a privileged childhood, unaware of both the social evils of slavery and the ever encroaching Civil War. Indeed, the War is a game to Bayard and his playmate Ringo, as they enact battles in the dirt. When the War comes into his personal life, he must depend upon Granny to keep him safe, as he experiences its reality first hand. While the traumas of his destroyed home and stolen wealth certainly have an impact, he does, nevertheless, summon the courage to participate in the change of lifestyle with a sense of adventure and occasional enthusiasm. The influences of both Granny, instilling in him a strong moral compass, and Ringo, an ingenious, more "worldly wise" friend, certainly serve to assist Bayard's personal development. The overriding influences, however, appears to be the sum of his experiences and his own analysis of the methods by which he must himself move forward into adulthood. Thus the reader comes to know the adult Bayard as a thoughtful adult, pursuing an "appropriate" career and rejecting violence as a means to resolve conflict.



## The Plight of the Southern Negro

Though concrete and open statements about slavery and the post-War conditions of the newly-freed blacks, there are undertones of Faulkner's position throughout the work. First, the reader is introduced to Ringo, an obviously bright, capable child, teen and young adult, who, if he were white, would have opportunities similar to those of Bayard. At the novel's end, however, Ringo is still serving Bayard as a friend, perhaps, but clearly in a still-subservient status. Loosh, the "traitorous" slave, who divulge the burial place of Granny's silver to the Yankees, echoes Faulkner's hatred of slavery. When Granny protests that her silver is not his to give away, he counters with the claim that he was not anybody's property to be given to John Sartoris, but was given nonetheless. As word of their emancipation spreads, slaves are encouraged to leave their former masters and migrate to the "promised land," ostensibly the North. Northerners did not welcome them, however, and their attempts to cross a river to Yankee-controlled territory were met with strong and violent resistance. The War's aftermath witnessed free blacks who faced new forms of tyranny and exploitation. Carpet baggers took advantage of their basic ignorance to gain personal power through voter registration; "night rider" terrorized blacks who attempted to vote or compete for jobs; blacks who migrated north faced discrimination and poverty as well. The black man was in a no-man's land - free from slavery but certainly not free to pursue his legally equal status.



# Style

## Point of View

The tale of the Sartoris family, its Negroes and its relatives, during the Civil War and its aftermath in Mississippi, is told by Bayard Sartoris, only son of John Sartoris, Southern planter turned confederate regiment commander. Through Bayard's eyes, the reader witnesses the devastation of warfare fought on one's own land, the struggles of those who lose property, possessions and family members, and the ability of humans to endure the worst and emerge not victorious, but at least strong in the belief that their lives will move forward in a better way. The War begins as Bayard is a child, not fully understanding the concept until it comes to his own home. Because he is a child, moreover, the reader is given a child's response, both in thought and action. As the War continues, and Bayard experiences additional hardship and traumas, including the death of the grandmother who raised him, the reader looks for strong emotional responses amidst a youthful mind. Instead, Bayard appears almost unemotional as he seeks revenge for Granny's murder, but his actions serve to portray what his thoughts do not. As a young adult, Bayard must face the murder of his father and the pressure of others for him to seek revenge. It is during this section that one is given more insight into the thoughts of Bayard and the great maturity that has occurred. He is able to analyze his father realistically, seeing him as a man with many faults that certainly contributed to his death. He sees the futility of violence. In the end, Bayard shows himself as the hope of the South's true reconstruction, for the white male at least.

## Setting

Like all of his novels, Faulkner sets his tale in the South, specifically the South of the Civil War and Reconstruction, and geographically in the fictional county of Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi. Because Faulkner chose to address themes of human endurance, coming of age, the plight of Southern blacks, and the futility of violence, the setting becomes critical. The idyllic lifestyle of well-to-do Southern whites is completely destroyed by the invading Union troops, burning, looting and killing their way through the land. The response of Southerners, especially women, children, and Negroes, as they cope and struggle to survive the destruction, is key to the strong statement Faulkner makes about the ability of humans to endure horrific trauma. The path of Bayard's development into a rational, mature young adult is certainly enhanced when it is viewed through the struggles and traumas of his younger years, spent in an environment of violence, war and loss. The fact that Ringo, freed from slavery and certainly a bright, creative individual, has no hope for opportunity, can only be demonstrated in the post-War era of continued oppression for all blacks. Though the chronology of a few specific battles is not historically correct, the impact of the work is not harmed, for it is foremost a tale of the human condition.





## Language and Meaning

The use of language in *The Unvanquished* is perhaps as important to the validity of the work as is the setting. Faulkner is able to give his white planter population the type of correct grammar and usage they certainly would have used, as the cultured, educated class. At the same time, the dialect of black slaves is produced phonetically, so that the reader is able to pronounce words as they would have actually sounded. Thus, Louvinia says, "Whyn't you leave hit here where hit hid good and I can take care of hit? Who gonter find hit...Hit's Marse John they done called the reward on; hit ain't no trunk..." As well, the reader is reminded of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, as the conversations between Bayard and Ringo occur, bantering with one another, using curse words when they think Granny is not present, and planning their schemes with Ab Snopes or their tracking of Granny's killer with Uncle Buck. The poor whites have a language that falls somewhere in between the planter and the slave, often using incorrect grammar and slang expressions. The rich diversity of the language, then, serves to enhance the believability of all characters as Faulkner develops them.

## Structure

The plot is chronological, by necessity. It is essentially the story of Bayard as he progresses from childhood, through the impulsiveness of youth, and ultimately to the mature young man who must now assume his position as the head of the Sartoris family. In the first section, Bayard is a child, and the war has not yet come to his county, though it has obviously begun. His father is absent, having formed a Confederate regiment. In the second section, war comes to the Sartoris land, the home burned and the precious mules and silver taken. Undaunted, Granny, in the third section, vows to find her silver and mules, loading Bayard and Ringo into the wagon and heading for Bayard's aunt's home. Successfully retrieving much more than she lost, Granny returns home with the potential to thrive during the remainder of the War. Section four finds Granny in conspiracy with Ab Snopes and the boys to scam the occupying Yankees, as the War is all but over. The final three sections occur during the War's aftermath and allow the reader a clear picture of the continuing struggle of white Southerners to rebuild and freed blacks to find a place in a society which either rejects exploits them. The reader is thus left with both optimism and pessimism, understanding that, while Bayard has emerged unvanquished, others will not share his station, certainly not Ringo.

## Quotes

"...Ringo and I had been born in the same month and had both fed at the same breast and had slept together and eaten together for so long that Ringo called Granny 'Granny' just like I did, until maybe he wasn't a nigger anymore or maybe I wasn't a white boy anymore, the two of us neither, not even people any longer: the two supreme undefeated like two moths, two feathers riding above a hurricane. (p. 21)

Then I began to smell it again, like each time he returned, like the day back in the spring when I rode up the drive standing in one of his stirrups - that odor in his clothes and beard and flesh too which I believed was the smell of powder and glory, the elected victorious but know better now: know now to have been only the will to endure, a sardonic and even humorous declining of self-delusion which is not even kin to that optimism which believes that that which is about to happen to us can possibly be the worst which we can suffer. (p.25)

That's how Ringo and I were. We were almost the same age, and Father always said that Ringo was a little smarter than I was, but that didn't count with us, anymore than the difference in the color of our skins counted. What counted was, what one of us had done or seen that the other had not, and ever since That Christmas I had been ahead of Ringo because I had seen a railroad, a locomotive. Only I know now it was more than that with Ringo, though neither of us were to see the proof of my belief for some time yet and we were not to recognize it as such even then. (p. 107)

Because wars are wars: the same exploding powder when there was powder, the same thrust and parry of iron when there was not - one tale, on telling, the same as the next or the one before. So we knew a war existed; we had to believe that, just as we had to believe that the name for the sort of life we had led for the last three years was hardship and suffering. (p. 124)

We didn't hear, we didn't even listen; we sat there in that cabin and waited and watched that railroad which no longer existed, which was now a few piles of charred ties among which green grass was already growing, a few threads of steel knotted and twisted about the trunks of trees and already annealing into the living bark, becoming one and indistinguishable with the jungle growth which had not accepted it, but which for us ran still pristine and intact and straight and narrow as the path to glory itself, as it ran for all of them who were there and saw when Ringo and I were not.. (p. 126)

The money was in new bills. Granny folded them carefully and put them into the can, but she didn't put the can back inside her dress right away (and she never put it back under the loose board beneath her bed while Ab was about the place). She sat there looking at the fire, with the can in her hands and the string which suspended it looping down from around her neck. She didn't look any thinner or any older. She didn't look sick either. She just looked like somebody that has quit sleeping at night. (p.155)



"But I did not sin for gain or for greed," Granny said. "I did not sin for revenge. I defy You or anyone to say I did. I sinned first for justice. And after that first time, I sinned for more than justice; I sinned for the sake of food and clothes for Your own creatures who could not help themselves - for children who had given their fathers, for wives who had given their husbands, for old people who had given their sons to a holy cause, even though You have seen fit to make it a lost cause. What I gained, I shared with them. It is true that I kept some of it back, but I am the best judge of that because I, too, have dependents who may be orphans, too, at this moment, for all I know. And if this be sin in Your sight, I take this on my conscience too. Amen." (pp. 186-87)

Father's troop (like all the other southern soldiers too), even though they had surrendered and said that they were shipped, were still soldiers. Maybe from the old habit of doing everything as one man; maybe when you have lived for four years in a world ordered completely by men's doings, even when it is danger and fighting, you don't want to quit that world: maybe the danger and the fighting are the reasons, because men have been pacifists for every reason under the sun except to avoid danger and fighting. And so now Father's troop and all the other men in Jefferson, and Aunt Louisa and Mrs. Habersham and all the women in Jefferson were actually enemies for the reason that the men had given in and admitted that they belonged to the United States but the women had never surrendered. (pp. 234-35)

For four years we had lived for just one thing, even the women and children who could not fight: to get Yankee troops out of the country; we thought that when that happened, it would be all over. And now that had happened, and then before the summer began I heard Father say to Drusilla, "We were promised Federal troops; Lincoln himself promised to send us troops. Then things will be all right." That, from a man who had commanded a regiment for four years with the avowed purpose of driving Federal troops from the country. Now it was as though we had not surrendered at all, we had joined forces with the men who had been our enemies against a new foe whose means we could not always fathom but whose aim we could always dread. (p. 247)

"This war ain't over. Hit just started good. Used to be when you seed a Yankee you knowed him because he never had nothing but a gun or a mule halter or a handful of hen feathers. Now you don't even know him and stid of the gun he got a clutch of this stuff in one hand and a clutch of nigger voting tickets in the yuther." (p. 249)

...I smelled the verbena in her hair as I had smelled the rain in it and in Father's beard that night four years ago when he and Drusilla and Uncle Buck McCaslin found Grumby and the came home and found Ringo and me more than just asleep: escaped into that oblivion which God or Nature or whoever it was had supplied us with for the time being, who had had to perform more than should be required of children because there should be some limit to the age, the youth at least below which one should not have to kill. (pp. 274-75)

I thought how the War had tried to stamp all the women of her generation and class in the South into a type and how it had failed - the suffering, the identical experience (hers and Aunt Jenny's had been almost the same except that Aunt Jenny had spent a few



nights with her husband before they brought him back home in an ammunition wagon while Gavin Breckbridge was just Drusilla's fiancé) was there in the eyes, yet beyond that was the incorrigibly individual woman: not like so many men who return from wars to live on Government reservations like so many steers, emasculate and empty of all save an identical experience which they cannot forget and dare not, else they would cease to live at that moment, almost interchangeable save for the old habit of answering to a given name. (p. 284)

I had not looked at him again. I had started to before I left the house but I did not, I did not see him again and all the pictures we had of him were bad ones because a picture could no more have held him dead than the house could have kept his body. But I didn't need to see him again because he was there, he would always be there; maybe what Drusilla meant by his dream was not something which he possessed but something which he had bequeathed us which we could never forget, which would even assume the corporeal shape of him whenever any of us, black or white, closed our eyes. (pp. 313-14)



## Topics for Discussion

Discuss the relationship between Ringo and Bayard. Give examples from the novel to support your view of their relationship, as it progresses through time.

Contrast Granny and Aunt Louvinia relative to their responses to the challenges they face during the War.

Granny is portrayed as deeply religious and yet engages in outright theft and scams. How does she justify this?

John Sartoris can be characterized as a principled man who nonetheless has fatal flaws. What were his flaws? Give concrete examples of these from the story.

At what point do you believe the plot reaches its climax? Support your answer by showing how it is the true turning point of the story.

While the Yankees are clearly violent enemies, there are examples of their kindness and sympathy. Cite at least three examples of these types of act.

As a first person narrator, Bayard does not seem to give the reader much comment on his internal emotional reactions to major traumas, such as the destruction of his home and the deaths of Granny and his father. Why do you think Faulkner chose to do this and does it prevent the reader from gaining a complete picture of Bayard's personality? Why or why not?