

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

by
Mildred D. Taylor

Book Information

Mildred D. Taylor, Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry
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276 Pages
Book Level: 5.7
Interest Level: MG

Warmth, humor and hard times prevail as a black family struggles to maintain dignity and independence in Depression-era Mississippi.

Award: ABA Children's Book Council; Boston Globe/Horn Book Award/Honors; Horn Book Fanfare; Jane Addams Book Award/Honor Books; National Book Award/ Honors; Newbery Medal; SLJ Best Book; Young Reader's Choice Award/Nominee

Topics: Adventure, Survival; History, Depression Era America; People, African American; Popular Groupings, Middle Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Power Lessons AR, Grade 5; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8; Recommended Reading, Coop. Children's Book Center; Recommended Reading, NCSS/CBC Notable Social Studies; U.S. States/Regions, Mississippi

Main Characters

Big Ma Cassie's grandmother whose aim is to keep the land her husband bought in the family and to protect her family from the threats around them

Cassie Logan a nine-year-old black girl through whom we see the story

Christopher-John Logan Cassie's seven-year-old brother who is hesitant to be involved in the events surrounding them and would rather be safe than get involved

Jeremy Simms a white boy who tries to be friendly with the Logan children and is the subject of ridicule by other white children because of his association with the black children

Kaleb Wallace a white man who runs the local store and practices unfair dealings with the blacks
Lillian Jean Simms Jeremy's sister with whom Cassie has a run in when she goes to Strawberry
Little Man (Clayton Chester Logan) Cassie's younger brother who likes to be clean and dress neatly, has strong self-esteem, and chooses to be part of the events around him

Mama Cassie's mother who sets an example for her children to be proud of who they are and to fight against the injustices around them with nonviolent methods

Mr. Avery and Mr. Lanier sharecroppers who purchase supplies through Papa at Vicksburg
Mr. Harlan Granger son of the man who sold part of the plantation land for taxes

Mr. Morrison a man who works with Papa at the railroad

Mr. Wade Jamison the son of the man who bought Granger land from Mr. Hollenbeck when the Grangers needed money to pay taxes after the war

Papa Cassie's father who, like Mama, wants the children to feel pride in who they are and to stand up for what they feel is right

R.W. and Melvin Simms brothers to Jeremy and Lillian Jean

Stacey Logan Cassie's twelve-year-old brother who is learning what it means to be a black man in Mississippi

T.J. Avery a friend of Stacey's who makes bad choices that lead him to major trouble

Uncle Hammer Cassie's uncle who lives and works in Chicago and is known for his quick temper, especially in dealing with the Mississippi whites

Vocabulary

condescending behaving as if one is superior to another person

malevolent wishing evil to others

tar and feather to pour heated tar over a person and then cover him with feathers

Synopsis

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Cassie Logan is a nine-year-old black girl with a good sense of self-esteem. She is growing up near a small Mississippi town in the 1930s. The time in which she lives is one of discord between whites and blacks. From her school experience, she knows there is different treatment of whites and blacks. The stories of the night riders, which she overhears, have no true meaning for her until Mama takes Cassie and her brothers to see a victim. Having grown up in a protected environment, Cassie gets a first personal taste of racial relations on a trip to nearby Strawberry.

She sees the example of her parents who will not stand for the injustices they see practiced against the blacks. Her safe world becomes threatened as her parents pay the price for their resistance when her mother is fired from her teaching job. They struggle to put together enough money to keep up with the tax payments on the land her grandfather bought.

Throughout the summer, she observes how her brother, Stacey, faces some tough decisions. When he goes against Papa's orders to stay away from the Wallace store, he admits his guilt to Mama while protecting his friend, T.J. He learns a hard lesson when T.J. tricks him out of a new coat, but he learns the hardest lesson when T.J. gets into real trouble with two white boys.

Overall, the story tells of one family's struggle to keep their land and to change the injustices they see in their lives.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Why did Uncle Hammer let T.J. keep the wool coat when he heard Stacey had given it to him?

He wanted Stacey to learn a lesson about how others could influence him to get what they wanted. We know Stacey learned his lesson when he ignores T.J.'s taunts about the flute from Jeremy.

Literary Analysis

The author gives us many clues as to what life was like for a black in the South during this period. List five ways their lives were different from those of the whites.

These may include having to walk to school, not having new school books, having to wait for whites to be served first in the schools, many not owning land, most whites thinking blacks were inferior, experiencing a different set of rules from the whites on the job and in the community, and crimes against them going unpunished.

Inferential Comprehension

Stacey matures throughout the book. Give examples to support that statement.

When Mr. Morrison says he will not tell Mama about finding him at Wallace's store, he chooses to tell her the truth. He does not let T.J. trick him a second time. When Little Willie tells him about T.J. talking about Mama to Mr. Wallace, he realizes he doesn't need to beat up T.J. for T.J. to be punished. He chooses not to go see Jeremy's treehouse in respect for his father's opinion. Even though he no longer considers T.J. a friend, he helps T.J. when he is in trouble.

Constructing Meaning

Think of someone that reminds you of Mama or Papa. What characteristics make that person like Mama or Papa?

Mama and Papa both stand up for what they believe to be right even though it makes life difficult for them. They do what they can to make a better world for their children.

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Teachable Skills

Recognizing Plot Have students cut out old magazine pictures that represent a conflict from the book, and make a collage of their pictures. They should be ready to tell about the conflict as expressed in the collage.

Understanding Literary Features Have students think about their feelings at the end of the book and what contributes to those feelings. Have them compare their thoughts with someone else who has read the book, and discuss how to change the ending to leave the reader with a different feeling.

Understanding the Author's Craft With the students, reread the events in the book that talk about the children and the bus and what they did to solve the bus problem. Have them write an entry from Cassie's diary that talks about her feelings and how they solved their problem.

Making Predictions The book gives the reader a good sense of the characters of Cassie, Stacey, and T.J. Have students choose one of these characters and write a biography of that character. The events of the biography should begin with the end of this book.