

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Timothy of the Cay by Theodore Taylor

## Book Information

Theodore Taylor, Timothy of the Cay  
Quiz Number: 9469  
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1993  
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161 Pages  
Book Level: 5.0  
Interest Level: MG

Having survived being blinded and shipwrecked on a tiny Caribbean island with the old black man Timothy, twelve-year-old white Phillip is rescued and hopes to regain his sight with an operation.

**Award:** ALA Best Book for Young Adults; Misc./Other

**Topics:** Adventure, Survival; Disabilities, Vision Impaired/Blind; Disasters, Shipwrecks; People, African American; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 6-8; READNOW - Renaissance Learning, RLI - Grades 6-8 (Theme: Surviving); Recommended Reading, NCSS/CBC Notable Social Studies; Recommended Reading, NY Publ. Library Best Books for the Teen Age

## Main Characters

Charlie Bottle a friend of Timothy's as he grew to manhood

Dr. Pohl a doctor who performs surgery on Phillip and restores his sight

Hannah Gumbs Timothy's foster mother

Jennifer Rankin a young girl who dies when a boat sinks during a hurricane; Timothy feels responsible for her death

Mama Geeches an old woman who lives near Timothy and is known for casting spells and chasing "jumbi"

Mr. and Mrs. Enright Phillip's parents

Phillip Enright a twelve-year-old boy, blinded when the ship he was on was torpedoed, who is eventually rescued from a small, uninhabited island.

Timothy Gumbs a young West Indian boy who grows old dreaming of owning his own boat; saves Phillip's life, but loses his own

Wobert Avril an old fisherman who Timothy thought of as a grandfather

## Vocabulary

**jumbi** an evil spirit

**plantain** a bananalike tropical plant

**sloop** a single-masted sailing boat

**stevedore** a person who loaded and unloaded ships

## Synopsis

This book tells the story of two people whose lives come together on a small, uninhabited cay in the Caribbean. It is the sequel-prequel to another book by Theodore Taylor called *The Cay*. The reader learns the story of Timothy Gumbs's life before he was on the cay and the story of Phillip Enright's after he was on the cay. Timothy's story begins when he is a boy in 1884. He is a poor West Indian boy who was raised by Hannah Gumbs as her own son after being abandoned by his mother. His dream is to become a sailor and to one day be the captain of his own boat. After facing racial discrimination and working many long, hard hours, he saves enough money to buy his own boat. It is probably the happiest moment in his life. He grows old and sells his boat. After two years, he decides to respond to government posters asking for able-bodied seaman to help in the war effort. He signs onto the "Hato" in March 1942. Timothy's part of the story ends when the "Hato" is sunk by an enemy torpedo, and Timothy is forced to swim to a raft.

Phillip's story is told in alternating chapters in the book and begins with his rescue from the cay where he has spent the last five months. Phillip had also been on the "Hato" when it was destroyed and was on the raft with Timothy. He suffered a blow to the head and went blind on the raft. When he is rescued, he hopes something can be done to restore his sight. His parents take him to a specialist who tells him about a dangerous operation that might restore his sight. Phillip chooses to undergo surgery despite the risks because he hopes to one day return to the cay and see it with his own eyes.

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Throughout Phillip's part of the story, the reader learns more about Timothy and their lives on the cay. Timothy taught Phillip to survive on his own. He gave his own life to protect Phillip during a hurricane. Because of this, Phillip loves Timothy and often dreams about him. He even sees and hears Timothy speaking to him. He refers to Timothy as his guardian angel. After the operation, Phillip's sight eventually returns, and he and his father begin their trip to the cay where Timothy is buried. The story ends when Phillip sees the cay with his own eyes and visits all the memorable places there. He once again hears Timothy's voice and knows he isn't dreaming.

## Open-Ended Questions

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

### Initial Understanding

Wobert told Timothy, "One ting I larned when I was a chicken boy--black hens lay white eggs." Timothy didn't understand what he meant. What do you think he meant?

*Before this statement, Wobert had been discussing slavery. He was probably comparing chickens to people. Even though a person was black on the outside, he was the same as anyone else on the inside.*

### Literary Analysis

Describe some of the differences between the stories of Phillip and Timothy, including how the author told them and when they took place.

*Phillip's story is told from his point of view, but Timothy's story is told by a narrator. Timothy's story takes place before he's been to the cay, and Phillip's story takes place after he's been to the cay. Phillip's story contains flashbacks of events that took place on the cay. Timothy's story covers almost his entire life, while Phillip's covers only a few months.*

### Inferential Comprehension

Timothy dealt with racial prejudice when his job as cabin boy was given to a white boy. Explain how Phillip had to deal with racial prejudice.

*He confronted his mother about her dislike of black people and tried to get to the root of her feelings. He had to explain to her how he could love a black person and defend his viewpoint, which differed from her own.*

### Constructing Meaning

Phillip thought Timothy was the wisest man he knew, even though Timothy had never been to school. After reading about Timothy's life, explain how Timothy could be so wise.

*Timothy learned what he knew from the people around him and from his many experiences. Hannah probably taught him about natural remedies for illnesses and injuries. He also learned how to be independent and the value of hard work from her. He probably learned about fishing, the birds and sailing from Wobert Avril. He knew about sailing in the Caribbean and hurricanes from first hand experience.*

## Teachable Skills

**Recognizing Setting** The story takes place in the Caribbean. Have students find the places mentioned in the book on a map. Students could research information about this area. They could also look for information on the native people--their customs, jobs, beliefs, etc. The history of the area during World War II might also make a good research project or topic of discussion. Some things are mentioned in the book; have students investigate further.

**Understanding Literary Features** One theme dealt with in the book is racial prejudice. Timothy faced it throughout his lifetime. Phillip had to deal with his mother's prejudices. He learned that the color of a person's skin wasn't important. His mother's prejudice stemmed from what she had been taught as a child. As a class, discuss other reasons that prejudices may develop. Sometimes

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one unfortunate incident involving one person or thing causes someone to form an opinion about an entire group. People often distrust changes that they don't understand. For example, many people were afraid of computers until they learned to use one. Students may want to discuss how their opinion changed after they learned more.

**Understanding Characterization** This book further develops the characters of Timothy and Phillip who were introduced in *The Cay*. Students may want to read *The Cay* to help them understand these characters more fully.

**Understanding the Author's Craft** The author combined the stories of two people whose lives came together in an unusual way. Timothy's story is told from the third person point of view, while Phillip's is told in the first person. Have the students choose a part of Timothy's story and rewrite it as though Timothy were telling the story.