

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Well: David's Story

by
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Book Information

Mildred D. Taylor, The Well: David's Story
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In Mississippi in the early 1900s, ten-year-old David Logan's family generously share their well water with both white and black neighbors in an atmosphere of potential racial violence.

Award: ALA Notable/Best Books; Canadian Library Association Honour; Jane Addams Book Award/Honor Books; NCTE Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts; Society of School Libr. International Best/Honor

Topics: Community Life, Helping Others; Community Life, Prejudice; Disasters, Droughts; People, African American; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 6-8; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 4-6; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 3-5

Main Characters

Charlie Simms son of McCalister Simms and neighbor to the Logans, who feel he is superior to all blacks and treats the Logans poorly

Joe McCalister a simple black man who works for the Simms on their farm and is also the caretaker of the church

Mama mother of David and Hammer; responsible for the family while Papa and the older brothers are away working

Papa a hardworking black man who has become a successful farmer

David Logan younger brother of Hammer; a ten-year-old boy who tells the story about his brother and the family well

Ed-Rose Simms brother to Charlie; he is also abusive to the Logans

Hammer Logan a thirteen-year-old boy who has difficulty sharing water with the white boys from the neighboring farm

Ma Rachel grandmother to David and Hammer; she frequently becomes caught up in memories of her slave days and her extreme dislike of white folks

McCalister Simms referred to in the book as Old Man McCalister Simms; he is the father of Charlie and Ed-Rose

Vocabulary

big-boned a person who has a large frame or bone structure

caretaker a person hired to take care of something

dwelling to think about at length

humiliation to hurt the pride or dignity of someone by making them seem foolish

salve an ointment applied to the skin to promote healing

Synopsis

David Logan is a ten-year-old boy who tells the story of a Mississippi drought and the Logan family well. The well on the Logans' land is the only one in the area with an abundant supply of water. The Logans, feeling that they have been blessed, are willing to share their water with both black and white neighbors.

David and his older brother Hammer find it difficult to share water with Charlie Simms, a white neighbor who treats the Logans poorly just because they are black. Hammer and Charlie become engaged in a fierce battle of pride and wills. Tensions between them build until the boys become consumed by rage and hate for one another. Charlie's behavior ultimately affects not only the Logan family, but all individuals relying on the water obtained from the Logan well.

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Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

What did Hammer mean when he said "Right now, I figure to stay here and give Ed-Rose and Charlie a hand with our water."

The correct answer should reflect the fact that Hammer in no way feels inferior to Charlie Simms and his family. Hammer is proud of himself and his family, and refuses to be treated unfairly by a person who has been given the opportunity to use the Logans' water.

Literary Analysis

Why were the Logans treated so poorly by the Simmses when black men had been free for some time and were no longer slaves?

Although slavery had been abolished many years before this story takes place, both blacks and whites had a difficult time accepting the other race. Southern white men still felt superior to blacks, and blacks were still resentful about the slavery issue. Many of these feelings and perceptions are still found throughout the United States today.

Inferential Comprehension

Old Man McCalister Simms never returned to the Logan well to get water. Why do you think he made this decision?

The actions of Charlie and Ed-Rose humiliated their father. He realized that the Logans had been very generous with their water, and his boys had seriously jeopardized the welfare of the community by poisoning the well. He was forced to hold his sons accountable for the things they had done.

Constructing Meaning

Think of a family member or friend who reminds you of Hammer. Describe how this person is like Hammer.

Hammer is confident, proud and strong. He tends to hold onto the anger that is deep inside of him, and is unwilling to use his mind to solve his problems.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Characterization Hammer and Charlie seemed to change roles throughout the story. Each acted as a protagonist and antagonist at different points in the story. Ask students to identify those situations in which the boys took on a specific role. Discuss the factors that motivated the boys to assume their roles at a specific point in the story. As a writing assignment, have the students describe situations in which they have acted in both roles.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors *The Well* is a story that takes place during a period of American history filled with conflict and hatred. Following the Civil War, the social, economic, and political structure of the United States drastically changed. Students may better understand the conflict that takes place in the story if they obtain information on the abolishment of slavery. Have students investigate how slavery began, where slavery occurred, the individuals who fought for abolishment and the events that followed the Emancipation Proclamation.

Making Predictions Throughout the story, Hammer refuses to accept the manner in which Charlie treats him. Hammer's strong will and sense of pride lead him to make decisions and react aggressively toward Charlie. Divide students into two groups. Ask one group to predict how Hammer's behavior may benefit him in the future. Ask the other group to predict how Hammer's behavior may create problems for him in the future. Remind students to think about the historic era in which this story takes place.

Recognizing Feelings In the story, Hammer and Charlie harbor deep feelings of hatred and anger

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toward one another. Although these feelings are directed toward each other, these feelings may have actually developed as a result of outside influences. Through discussion, have students identify the underlying events that may have encouraged these negative feelings to develop. Discuss ways in which the opinions of others can affect the way we feel about a particular person or situation. Encourage students to give examples of how this has happened in their own lives.