

**Reflections:**

*A Student Response Journal for...*

# *Inherit the Wind*

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## Playwrights' Introduction

1. The incident described in the play *Inherit the Wind* is based on an actual event that occurred more than 80 years ago. It was an emotional and painful battle between a teacher who wanted to introduce his students to the theory of evolution and the religious fundamentalists, who were faithful to the words and doctrines of the Bible and opposed to the teaching (or even discussions) of evolution.

By using a quote from the Bible as the inspiration for this play's title, explain to a classmate what mood you think the playwrights wanted to set. Consult a Bible, the Internet, or other resource and find two other Bible quotes that you think could be used as titles for the play, just by reading the Introduction.

2. The playwrights mention "Bryan and Darrow" (William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow). Both men were born during the American Civil War (Darrow in 1857, Bryan in 1860). The playwrights say, "The collision . . . was dramatic but it was not a drama."

Watch one of the "legal" dramatic shows on TV and analyze whether what happens seems real and whether it could happen in a courtroom. Explain why (from what you have observed of courtroom procedures) most trials, even the newsworthy ones, are not actually very "dramatic."

3. In addition to their borrowing from the Bible ("*He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind.*"), the playwrights state in the first paragraph of their Introduction that the true events of July 1925 are the "genesis" of the play but that it has "an exodus entirely its own."

Beyond the dictionary definitions of these two names of Biblical books, and before reading the play, write a sentence each for "genesis" and "exodus" that expresses what you feel the playwrights are hinting will take place in this play.

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4. Tennessee, where the historic trial and this dramatized trial took place, is often considered part of the “Bible Belt,” a description of the southern United States, especially the area dominated by religious fundamentalism.

Look up “Bible Belt” and write a newspaper sidebar (a short article usually accompanying a longer report about an important event or subject), explaining how the geographic location at this time (mid-1920s America) might have influenced the battle over the Teaching of Evolution.

### **Act I, Scene I**

5. One way a playwright can prepare us for what is about to happen later on, which is called foreshadowing, is by suggesting a mood in the stage directions, as early as the first scene. These playwrights feel it is important for the “*sleepy, obscure country town about to be vigorously awakened*” to loom above any scene in the play, including those in court.

Imagine you are the stage manager. Write an explanation of how you visualize the setting of the play, as if you were speaking to the actors and director. Do you feel the playwrights’ directions will make the audience feel manipulated? Are you grateful for these directions about where the playwrights hint they will transport viewers in the course of the play? Explain your feelings about the writers’ directions.

6. In many ways, the playwrights also put the town on trial. The home of the leading characters in the play is about to be judged by both sides, to support their positions in the trial.

From what you have been told about the background of this fight, which side (pro-Bible or pro-Evolution) is more likely to exploit the town (push the townspeople to act in a way to benefit one side or the other)? Write a few sentences to defend your conclusion.

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7. The play begins with two young characters, one of them a barefoot boy about to go fishing, the other a young girl who begins by teasing and almost flirting with him. But she expresses more argumentative opinions, while at first he appears disinterested and lethargic.

What does this say about how we might be persuaded to view the conflict about to arise? Write a few lines of dialogue for the young fisherman about the upcoming trial, as if the girl had not mentioned it first.

8. Melinda is disgusted with the worms that Howard is catching so he can go fishing, but she is even more horrified when he reminds her about what they've apparently both heard or been taught about the origins of life, including their own. Howard says, "[Y]ou and your whole family was worms." Using the information you already understand about evolution, write a short note to Howard, explaining how his statement is either true or false.

Howard asks the worm, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" This is obviously meant to be humorous. However, it reveals Howard's misunderstanding of what he learned in class.

Can evolution take place within a single generation? Look up and write a sentence or two about some change in behavior, appearance, or any other aspect of life that has affected anything during your lifetime. As an example, you might write about a disease that once was easy to treat, but has become more difficult to cure recently, or you could write about Earth's changing climate.

9. From her last name and her conversation with the bailiff Meeker, Rachel Brown, who enters after the younger characters exit, is obviously the daughter of Reverend Brown. She doesn't want her father to know she's been to see Bert Cates, the accused teacher.

Write a note to her explaining why a courthouse or jail is an improper place for a minister's daughter, especially at this time in a small town in the Bible belt.

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10. From the way Meeker speaks, what can you determine about his usual duties? What kinds of people are usually under his jurisdiction?

Write a monologue (speech by one person without a conversation with another) in which the bailiff in which he explains to himself how he feels about letting Rachel see the prisoner.

11. When she is given permission to visit him, Rachel begins to plead with Bert to say that he was joking about evolution.

Pretend that you are Rachel's oldest friend in Hillsboro. Write some dialogue for yourself and Rachel. Ask how she thinks her pleading would help his case, and explain to her why Bert won't do what she wants him to do.

12. The "Matthew Harrison Brady" that Bert is waiting for is based on the real person named William Jennings Bryan. Brady is not the one who will be defending Bert, however. What is surprising is that Bert, who has taken a radical stand, actually admits that he voted for Brady for President, "Twice." This implies that Bert is not truly a radical or someone wanting to overthrow the beliefs of his town.

As Bert, write an editorial for your local paper explaining why or why not you might have voted Brady, even though you completely disagreed with his views on other topics.

13. The conversation between Rachel, the daughter of the minister, and her boyfriend, the law-breaking young Bert Cates, and then the conversation between Cates and Meeker, the maintenance man for the Courthouse, may sound strained rather than honest and open. It is obvious that there are things being held back.

Write yourself into one of these two encounters as an observer, telling the characters how you feel they are or are not being completely honest with one another.

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14. You are a lifelong friend of Rachel Brown, and you think her father is much stricter than yours because he is a minister. But what Reverend Brown says publicly is close to what your parents tell you about religion and behaving in school, at home, in public, at work.

Write a letter to Rachel telling her how you feel about her friendship or romance with Bert. Be friendly, be specific, but be honest. Don't spare her feelings if you don't approve of how she's sticking by him. Be supportive if you agree with her in trying to persuade Bert to change what he will say in court.

15. Think about your first impression of the parade of people rushing to make money from what is presented as a spiritual crisis. The townsfolk led by Reverend Brown are posing as pure, good, and saved.

You're a reporter from an urban newspaper in a more sophisticated big city. Address your readers about what all this activity says about the people of Hillsboro and their religious cause.

16. The people in this town have been told to believe only what's in their Bible (which was translated into English only a few hundred years earlier): that everything—sun, planets, Earth, oceans, every animal and plant and rock and human—was created in the six days described in the Bible.

You're a participant in a demonstration on one side or the other. Write two or three expressive slogans for the picket sign or banner you're carrying.

17. You live in Hillsboro, and you want to describe what's happening there during battle for the townspeople's and their children's minds.

Imagine you publish a blog at the time of the trial. Explain what you observe. Be colorful and dramatic. Be informal, but report accurately.