

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

by Mildred Taylor

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Notes

The setting for this story is rural Mississippi during the middle of the Great Depression (1932). Throughout the country, work is very scarce and money is very tight. If a person were lucky enough to find work in a factory in the North, he or she might earn several dollars a day. On many farms in Mississippi, laborers, if they could get work, were paid fifty cents a day (twenty-five percent of the population could not get work of any kind).

Added to these economic hardships, the blacks in the South were damaged by individual and institutional racism. While lynching and burning are not pleasant subjects, these things were part of those times, and the writer tells us of them. It is important that everyone of all races know of these injustices of the past so that people can work at eliminating injustices in the present and future.

This book uses the words “Nigger,” “boy,” “colored,” and other disparaging terms, but their use is alerting the reader to the feelings and prejudices of the times, and it is quite appropriate. Teachers should, however, be aware that some students may be offended.

All references come from the Puffin Book edition of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, copyright 1976.

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to

1. recall significant events in the narrative.
2. comment on and explain the function and importance of these literary techniques used by the writer:
 - Foreshadowing
 - Extended metaphors
 - Allusions
 - Symbolism
3. distinguish between two types of narration and comment on the advantages and disadvantages of each type:
 - First-person narration and third-person narration
 - First-person narration told in the present tense as opposed to first person narration told in the past tense
4. understand and describe the social, economic, and legal position of black people living in the South during the first seventy years of the twentieth century.
5. identify and trace the following themes in this novel:
 - Coming of Age
 - Loss of Innocence
 - The unquenchable human spirit, which refuses to be enslaved
 - The importance of “Land”
6. comment on the significance of the title of this novel and the novel’s ending.
7. infer information, which is not explicitly stated, about characters and events.
8. define and find he examples, where necessary, from the text of the following literary terms:
 - setting
 - round and flat characters
 - irony
 - theme
 - stereotype

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Define foreshadowing. State its function in the novel and use events in this novel to illustrate your point.
2. Define the term “allusion” and state why titles of novels are frequently allusions to the Bible, history, mythology, poems, songs, or other literary works.
3. State what a metaphor is and describe how an extended metaphor may become a symbol.
4. This award-winning novel is extremely popular. List at least five points about this novel which you think make it appealing to most readers. Come up with at least one reason each for plot, character, and theme.
5. The term flat character is used to describe characters that are one dimensional; for example, a character that is either all good or all bad. Because the character is just one way, he or she does not have to be a believable person. Rounded characters, however, have many sides; they have both faults and virtues. Which characters in this novel did you find who were close to real people? Were there any characters you would describe as flat? Why?
6. Describe the social context, the *where*, *when*, and *why* of life at the time this novel takes place. Indicate what, if anything, about this period of history is new to you.
7. Prove or disprove this statement: “This story is a first-person narration told in the present tense.”
8. A story somewhat similar to this one, yet unlike it, is *To Kill a Mockingbird*. If you are familiar with this story, draw a list of comparisons and contrasts between the two books.
9. By referring to incidents in the story, prove that a theme of this story is: “The human spirit is unconquerable and refuses to be enslaved.”
10. Stories in which young people are the heroes are usually called “coming of age” stories. They are usually one of two types: Loss of Innocence, or Rite of Passage:

State what kind of coming of age story you think this is, and support your opinion by referring to events and comments from the story.
11. Comment on the relationship that the last paragraph of this story has to a major theme in this novel.

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Chapter One

VOCABULARY

amiably – friendly
chignon – a hairstyle, like a bun
disdainfully – proudly
dismally – gloomily
dubious – doubtful
emblazoned – decorated
exasperation – frustration
flounced – walked in a showy manner
frail – weakened
imperiously – like royalty
jauntily – cheerfully
morosely – sadly
motley – jumbled mix of colors
murmured – mumbled quietly
penchant – a taste or liking for
pensively – thoughtfully
raucous – loud
reconstruction – the time immediately after the Civil War
reverberated – echoed
sheepish – embarrassed
tarpaulin – a covering; a tarp
temerity – boldness
threadbare – worn; ragged
towheaded – blonde
undaunted – not bothered or discouraged

1. At the beginning of this story, the children in the Logan family are introduced on their walk to school. Briefly identify each of them.

CHAPTER THREE

VOCABULARY

adamantly – stubbornly
flippantly – disrespectfully
haggard – weary looking
relent – to give in
resiliency – the ability to recover
sodden – soaked

1. As the children walk to school in the mud and rain, why do they continually look over their shoulders?

2. Of all the children, Little Man is the most angered about getting dirtied by the school bus. He says to Big Ma that if the bus driver would only slow down, or if the black school had a bus like theirs white school does, he would not get muddied. What is his mother's response?

3. What is the implied significance of the fact that Jeremy Simms never rides the school bus, no matter how bad the weather is?

4. Describe Stacey's plan for getting even with the school bus?

4. How does Mama explain Mr. Simms' racism to Cassie?

5. Mama then says, in effect, the family has only one choice about life. What is that choice?

6. How do you suppose Mama believes one makes the best of life?

7. What do you suppose the last line in this chapter indicates? What literary term is used in what Mama says?

CHAPTER TWELVE

VOCABULARY

flimsy – weak; without substance
fragile – easily broken
glint – gleam
oblivious – unaware
traipsing – walking with no purpose
wan – pale

1. As Papa prepares to leave his house with the shotgun, Mama begs him to get Harlan Granger to stop the mob and for him not to use the shotgun. What is she afraid of? What does he say about Harlan Granger?

2. In earlier chapters, Cassie has told us that when there is trouble Papa, unlike Uncle Hammer, does not lose his temper but thinks through the problem. Why does he not do that now?

3. Shortly after they leave, a fire breaks out in the family cotton field. How do the people assume that the fire starts?
