

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

by Mildred Taylor

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ISBN: 978-1-60389-632-0

Reorder No. 201562

Chapter 1

1. This novel is set seventy years ago in the southern state of Mississippi during the time of the 1930's Great Depression. It is a time of great hardship throughout the country because of lack of work, and, consequently, little money to pay for anything. Consider the portrayal of the Logan children in the beginning of the book. Suppose you were a visitor to the South and had met the children on their way to school; would you think they were rich, neither rich nor poor, or poor? Write about what your idea is of: rich, neither rich nor poor, and poor. Give examples of the things you think that people in these three categories would have owned seventy years ago, based on this book.
2. Mr. Logan, though the owner of his own land and a cotton farmer, had to go away to work to support his family during the years 1930-1933. Even today, people have to travel distances to work or even move their families to another place in order to work. Imagine that you had to leave the place where you live, your school, and your friends. Write the first letter that you would send to your best friend back in your old town telling what you miss most.
3. Mr. Logan feels very strongly about owning his own land and is willing to do anything to keep it, including going away to work to earn money for the payments and taxes on the land. Imagine that you are Cassie Logan and that you disagree with your father about the importance of owning land. Complete the dialogue below in which you tell your father of your feelings:

Cassie: Oh Papa, our land is only dirt and ugly rows of cotton balls. I hate it because it makes you go away. Can't...

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4. The description of the first day of classes at The Great Faith Elementary and Secondary School seems like the typical first day of school, even in our times. But the description of the school itself perhaps does not. Make a list of the things about the school which are described. Make a second list of these same kinds of things about the school which you attend. Make a third list of things which think could be improved about your school.
5. We read, “Now Miss Crocker made a startling announcement: This year we would all have books.” We also read Cassie’s thought, “I was somewhat excited. Although Mama had several books, I had never had one of my very own.” Imagine that your school had no books from which to learn. Write a letter of complaint about this to the Editor of the local newspaper explaining the way your were taught. Give details about why you think you could learn more if you had books to learn from. Begin your letter:
- To the Editor:
- In our school,...
6. At the time of the setting of this novel, all schools in Mississippi were completely segregated; white children went to separate schools from black children. The chart in this chapter tells a great deal about the attitudes toward African-American children in 1930’s Mississippi. Read the list carefully. Imagine that you are a lawyer who is bringing a law suit against the Mississippi Department of Education over books in black schools. Write a short speech that you would make to the jury about what the chart shows.

Chapter 2

7. In the last chapter, we met the following characters of the Logan family: Cassie, Little Man, Stacey, Christopher-John, Papa (David), and Mama (Mary).
Write a thumbnail sketch of each of the characters. Then, choose the character you like best and in complete sentences, write what it is you liked best about her or him.

8. The reunion scene when all the Logans are picking cotton in the field and Papa arrives unexpectedly is a lovely one. Think back to a time in your life when you have witnessed or been part of a reunion. Try to remember the exact details of what season, day or night of the week, who is present, what is said, how people acted, how you felt about the reunion then, and how you feel about it now.

9. The Logan family living room also serves at night as Mr. and Mrs. Logan's bedroom. It seems to be a warm and comfortable room "of doors and wood and pictures" where the whole family shares their lives. In a letter to a cousin who has never been to your home, describe your own living room in detail. Be sure to include colors, kinds of furniture, pictures, curtains or drapes, type of floor or carpet, and the special things about your living room that make you like it.

10. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* is written in the first person with the character of Cassie Logan as the narrator. This means that she is telling the story and all the action of the novel is seen through her eyes. Suppose you were to write a novel in the first person. Write a one paragraph description of the character who would be relating the story and action in your novel. Be sure to include age, physical appearance, what the family is like, where the home is, and what kind of a person your character is. You could begin your character description with the sentence:

The leading character in my novel would be a...

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11. In this novel, we are treated to a picture of a loving and close southern black family. Though they are poor and suffer the indignity of being forced into segregation, they are an upstanding and highly principled family. Think of all the families you know from real life or the media whom you admire. Imagine you are a reporter assigned to write a feature article on one family that has impressed you. Write a headline for the article, which will appear in the Sunday paper.

12. The dialogue in this novel is written in a southern dialect. Select six sentences from Chapter 2 which are in this dialect. Copy them down exactly, one at a time. After each one, write the sentence exactly as it would be without any dialect and in standard English. Be sure each word of your re-written sentence is spelled correctly.

Chapter 3

13. As has been mentioned in previous chapters, the schools in the book are segregated. There is no school bus to take the black children to their school. There is one, however, to take children to Jefferson Davis, an all-white school. That driver and the children on that bus torment the Logan children as they pass them each day. Keeping in mind the time, the place, and the type of people acting so cruelly, relate what options you think the Logan family has to put a stop to the bus driver and the unruly children's behavior?

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14. The Logan children think up and carry out a plan of revenge on those riding the Jefferson Davis School bus. Like many acts of revenge, it has unforeseen consequences. What is your opinion about revenge? Complete the following dialogue you might have with your best friend after you've been wronged and you want to find a way to get revenge:

You: No way. No way is that sneak going to get away with that.

Friend: So is it really that bad? I mean just because...

15. Sitting around their table that evening, the Logan children are gloating "in our hour of victory," as Cassie put it. Suppose Stacey and Cassie came to you gloating about what they had done. What would you say in a conversation with them about your feelings concerning their damaging the school bus?

You: But listen Stacey, someone could have been killed.

Cassie: You leave Stacey alone. He only got even with them for all their mean acts.

You:

16. A hickory fire and rain pattering against the house make for a cozy picture as the four children sit at their table doing their homework. What are your thoughts about an evening of doing homework? Complete a paragraph about this using one of the following sentences as a possible beginning:

A. Though I grumble to anyone who will listen about having to do homework, if the truth were known, I really don't mind that much. I think the reason I feel that way is...

OR

B. Will this grind of homework, homework, homework ever end? Just think, I keep telling myself, if I didn't have to spend three hours every night at this, I could be...