

Focus **ON READING**

*Roll of
Thunder
Hear My Cry*

ROSEMARY SMITH

This is a sample not intended for classroom use.



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Introduction/Classroom Management

WELCOME TO *FOCUS ON READING*

Focus on Reading literature study guides are designed to help all students comprehend and analyze their reading. Many teachers have grappled with the question of how to make quality literature accessible to all students. Students who are already avid readers of quality literature are motivated to read and are familiar with prereading and reading strategies. However, struggling readers frequently lack basic reading skills and are not equipped with the prior knowledge and reading strategies to thoroughly engage in the classroom literature experience.

Focus on Reading is designed to make teachers' and students' lives easier! How? By providing materials that allow all students to take part in reading quality literature. Each *Focus on Reading* study guide contains activities that focus on vocabulary and comprehension skills that students need to get the most from their reading. In addition, each section within the guide contains a before-reading **Focus Your Reading** page containing tools to ensure success: **Vocabulary Words to Know**, **Things to Know**, and **Questions to Think About**. These study aids will help students who may not have the prior knowledge they need to truly comprehend the reading.

USING *FOCUS ON READING*

Focus on Reading is designed to make it easy for you to meet the individual needs of students who require additional reading skills support. Each *Focus on Reading* study guide contains teacher and student support materials, reproducible student activity sheets, an end-of-book test, and an answer key.

- **Focus on the Book**, a convenient reference page for the teacher, provides a brief overview of the entire book including a synopsis, information about the setting, author data, and historical background.
- **Focus Your Knowledge**, a reference page for students, is a whole-book, prereading activity designed to activate prior knowledge and immerse students in the topic.

The study guide divides the novel into 6 manageable sections to make it easy to plan classroom time. Five activities are devoted to each section of the novel.

Before Reading

- **Focus Your Reading** consists of 3 prereading sections:

Vocabulary Words to Know lists and defines 10 vocabulary words students will encounter in their reading. Students will not have to interrupt their reading to look up, ask for, or spend a lot of time figuring out the meaning of unfamiliar words. These words are later studied in-depth within the lesson.

Things to Know identifies terms or concepts that are integral to the reading but that may not be familiar to today's students. This section is intended to "level the playing field" for those students who may not have much prior knowledge about the time period, culture, or theme of the book. It also gets students involved with the book, increasing interest before they begin reading.

Questions to Think About helps students focus on the main ideas and important details they should be looking for as they read. This activity helps give students a *purpose* for reading. The goal of these guiding questions is to build knowledge, confidence, and comfort with the topics in the reading.

During Reading

- **Build Your Vocabulary** presents the 10 unit focus words in the exact context of the book. Students are then asked to write their own definitions and sentences for the words.
- **Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice** offers 10 multiple-choice, literal comprehension questions for each section.

Check Your Understanding: Short Answer contains 10 short-answer questions based on the reading.

After Reading

- **Deepen Your Understanding** is a writing activity that extends appreciation and analysis of the book. This activity focuses on critical-thinking skills and literary analysis.
- **End-of-Book Test** contains 20 multiple-choice items covering the book. These items ask questions that require students to synthesize the information in the book and make inferences in their answers.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Focus on Reading is very flexible. It can be used by the whole class, by small groups, or by individuals. Each study guide divides the novel into 6 manageable units of study.

This literature comprehension program is simple to use. Just photocopy the lessons and distribute them at the appropriate time as students read the novel.

You may want to reproduce and discuss the **Focus Your Knowledge** page before distributing the paperbacks. This page develops and activates prior knowledge to ensure that students have a grounding in the book before beginning reading. After reading this whole-book prereading page, students are ready to dive into the book.

The **Focus Your Reading** prereading activities are the keystone of this program. They prepare students for what they are going to read, providing focus for the complex task of reading. These pages should be distributed before students actually begin reading the corresponding section of the novel. There are no questions to be answered on these pages; these are for reference and support during reading. Students may choose to take notes on these pages as they read. This will also give students a study tool for review before the **End-of-Book Test**.

The **Focus Your Reading** pages also provide an excellent bridge to home. Parents, mentors, tutors, or

other involved adults can review vocabulary words with students, offer their own insights about the historical and cultural background outlined, and become familiar with the ideas students will be reading about. This can help families talk to students in a meaningful way about their reading, and it gives the adults something concrete to ask about to be sure that students are reading and understanding.

The **Build Your Vocabulary** and **Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice** and **Short Answer** activities should be distributed when students begin reading the corresponding section of the novel. These literature guide pages are intended to help students comprehend and retain what they read; they should be available for students to refer to at any time during the reading.

Deepen Your Understanding is an optional extension activity that goes beyond literal questions about the book, asking students for their own ideas and opinions—and the reasons behind them. These postreading activities generally focus on literary analysis.

As reflected in its title, the **End-of-Book Test** is a postreading comprehension test to be completed after the entire novel has been read.

For your convenience, a clear **Answer Key** simplifies the scoring process.

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Focus on the Book

Synopsis

Cassie Logan is a fourth-grade student living in Mississippi in 1933. She and her family are black, which causes the major conflict in the novel. Because of the time period and location of the story, Cassie and her three brothers face the segregation and racial discrimination that was common in the South after the Civil War and through much of the twentieth century.

The Logan family, unlike many of the black families near them, own their own land. This gives them some security, but it also leads some people to begrudge them that security. The story begins with Cassie and her brothers learning that “night men” have burned three black men. As the story progresses, Cassie’s mother attempts to boycott a local store whose white owners, the Wallaces, are purported to be responsible for the heinous crime. Cassie’s mother is fired from her job as a teacher, and Cassie’s father is eventually unable to return to his job on the railroad because of injuries sustained when night men attack him. At that point, the mortgage on their land is called in; the white men in the area hope that the Logans will be forced to give up their land. Meanwhile, T.J. Avery, a sometime friend of the Logan children, has begun associating with the Wallaces. His “friendship” with the Wallaces turns out to be a false one, and he and the Logans become embroiled in a bitter and dangerous situation.

About the Author

Mildred D. Taylor was born in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1943 and spent most of her childhood in Toledo, Ohio. She graduated from the University of Toledo and then spent two years teaching English and history in Africa with the Peace Corps. She eventually earned her master’s degree from the School of Journalism at the University of Colorado and helped to establish a Black Studies program there.

Taylor’s inspiration for Cassie Logan came from an innocent and proud little girl who was untouched by discrimination. Most of Taylor’s books, which include *Song of the Trees* (1975), *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976), *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* (1981), *Gold Cadillac* (1987), *The Road to Memphis* (1990), and *The Well* (1995) are about the Logan family and have been highly regarded.

Historical Background

The setting of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* is southern Mississippi in 1933. The location and time period of the story have a major effect on the plot because the Logan family is black, and Mississippi was racially divided during that time.

The history of the Civil Rights movement began with President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation in 1862. This proclamation freed all slaves as of January 1, 1863. As the Civil War drew to a close, President Lincoln also declared the Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction, which was designed to help ensure rights for blacks and the restructuring of the Southern states. Despite the official abolition of slavery in Mississippi in 1865, the new government in the state created what were called the Black Codes, which imposed most of the same restrictions on blacks that they had suffered as slaves.

Besides being denied the rights that white people were entitled to, ex-slaves also lacked financial independence. Because the former slaves did not have their own money, most of them were forced to become sharecroppers or tenant farmers. Sharecroppers were provided with equipment and advanced credit by landowners, and they worked for a percentage of the crop. Tenant farmers sold the crops that they raised and paid a share of the profit as rent. In neither of these arrangements did the black farmers own their own land. The people who worked under these systems rarely made enough money to become financially independent.

Discrimination and violence also weighed heavily on African Americans even well after the close of the Civil War. During Reconstruction, several violent groups, including the Ku Klux Klan and the Knights of the White Camellia, were established. These groups used violence to prevent blacks from voting and to generally maintain white dominance over blacks. Between 1900 and 1920 alone, more than a thousand black people were lynched by such groups.

Segregation was also maintained throughout the Southern states for decades after the Civil War. Schools in Mississippi were segregated by law, and it was not until 1962 that the first college in Mississippi was forced to admit a black student. Public schools below the college level were not desegregated until 1964.

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Focus Your Knowledge

- Look up the term *segregation* if you do not know what it means. Think about whether or not segregation plays a role in life today. Could schools that were segregated by color (or any other quality) ever have been equal?
- Recall what you know about the Ku Klux Klan. What emotions do you think motivate followers of such terrorist groups? What emotions do you think people targeted by such groups feel?
- Think about what you know about the Civil War and the time immediately thereafter. What happened in the South? in the North? Which people gained power in each area of the country? Did the war achieve freedom and equality for all people?
- The Great Depression of the 1930s was a long period of general economic hardship in the country. Banks failed, people lost all their savings, and many people lost their jobs. How do you think this situation would have affected farmers who did not own their land? How would it have affected those who did own their land and farmed it for a living?

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Focus Your Reading

Vocabulary Words to Know

Study the following words and definitions. You will meet these words in your reading. Be sure to jot down in your word journal any other unknown words from the reading.

meticulously—very carefully

pensively—thoughtfully, often with some sadness

undaunted—not held back by fear

emblazoned—displayed brilliantly

gleaned—collected (often refers to collecting the last bits of grain)

reverberated—echoed

ebbed—weakened or lessened

temerity—foolish or rash boldness; recklessness

maverick—a person who takes an independent stand

formidable—causing fear or dread

Things to Know

Here is some background information about this section of the book.

In the past in many farming communities, students began the school year in October, later than today, so that they could help harvest crops.

Sharecroppers are people who worked on farms or plantations for a percentage of the money gained by selling the crops.

A **plantation** is an estate owned by a person or family who has workers who live on the land and help with the work.

Reconstruction refers to the process of reorganizing the Southern states after the Civil War.

A **Yankee** is a person from a Northern state.

The **Confederacy** refers to the group of Southern states that tried to secede, or pull out of, the United States in 1860 and 1861. Those states included Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

Memphis is a major city in western Tennessee.

Jackson is the capital of Mississippi.

To **gin** cotton is to remove seeds from it.

Focus Your Reading (continued)

A **bale** is a large bundle of goods, such as cotton or hay, that is compressed, bound, and sometimes wrapped.

“**The war**” in this book refers to World War I.

Nigger is a derogatory term for a black person. It is considered to be inappropriate today because of the history of racial hatred and bigotry that the word implies.

Lynching refers to the act of a mob of people murdering a person who has not been given a trial.

Questions to Think About

The following questions will help you understand the meaning of what you read. You do not have to write out the answers to these questions. Instead, look at them before you begin reading, and think about them while you are reading.

1. Why is owning land so important to the Logan family?
2. The Berrys’ burnin’ is mentioned several times in this section of the book. How can you tell that the Logan children are nervous about this?
3. What does the condition of the schoolbooks show about the attitude toward the Great Faith Elementary and Secondary School in the county?

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4. Why do you think Mary Logan glues the books she has for her class?
5. Why do you think that Papa has brought Mr. Morrison to stay with the Logan family?

Build Your Vocabulary

Read the sentences below. On the line, write your definition of the word in bold type. Then, on another sheet of paper, use that word in a new sentence of your own.

1. “Always **meticulously** neat, six-year-old Little Man never allowed dirt or tears or stains to mar anything he owned.”

meticulously: _____

2. “Christopher-John’s whistling increased to a raucous, nervous shrill, and **grudgingly** I let the matter drop and trudged along in moody silence, my brothers growing as **pensively** quiet as I.”

pensively: _____

3. “‘Ain’t no need gettin’ mad,’ T.J. replied **undaunted**. ‘Jus’ an idea.’”

undaunted: _____

4. “In the very center of the expansive front lawn, waving red, white, and blue with the emblem of the Confederacy **emblazoned** in its upper left-hand corner, was the Mississippi flag.”

emblazoned: _____

5. “But even so, after today a number of the older students would not be seen again for a month or two, not until the last puff of cotton had been **gleaned** from the fields, and eventually most would drop out of school altogether.”

gleaned: _____

6. “As the last gong of the bell **reverberated** across the compound, I swooped up my pencils and notebook and ran inside.”

reverberated: _____

7. “My anticipation at having my own book **ebbed** to a sinking disappointment.”

ebbed: _____

8. “‘Dirty!’ Miss Crocker echoed, appalled by such **temerity**.”

temerity: _____

9. “Although Mama had been a teacher at Great Faith for fourteen years, ever since she had graduated from the Crandon Teacher Training School at nineteen, she was still considered by many of the other teachers as a disrupting **maverick**.”

maverick: _____

10. “But now, gazing upward at the most **formidable**-looking being we had ever encountered, we huddled closer to Papa.”

formidable: _____

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Check Your Understanding

Multiple Choice

Circle the letter of the best answer to each question.

- On the way to school, why does Little Man walk so slowly?
 - He doesn't want to go to school.
 - He doesn't want to get dirty.
 - He is mad at Cassie.
- Where is Papa working?
 - Mississippi
 - Texas
 - Louisiana
- Why is Big Ma often called to other people's houses at night?
 - She is good at medicines.
 - She likes to visit her friends.
 - She can't sleep.
- What has Cassie told her mother about T.J.?
 - that he is mean to the other children
 - that she doesn't like him
 - that he works at the Wallace store
 - dancing room
- How long does it take the Logan children to walk to school?
 - five minutes
 - half an hour
 - one hour
- What new supplies will the students of the Great Faith School have this year?
 - books
 - desks
 - art supplies
- What causes Little Man to throw his book on the floor and stomp on it?
 - the color
 - the title
 - the chart on the inside cover
- What does Mama do to the seventh-grade books?
 - She throws them away.
 - She decides that she won't give them to the children.
 - She glues paper over the chart on the inside cover.
- Why can't Papa stay home any longer than Sunday evening?
 - He doesn't want to.
 - He might lose his job.
 - Mr. Morrison says he should leave then.
- Where does Papa warn the children they are not to go?
 - to school
 - to play with T.J.
 - to the Wallace store

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Check Your Understanding

Short Answer

Write a short answer for each question.

1. Why does Papa go to work on the railroad?
2. What does T.J. tell the Logan children about the Berrys?
3. Why doesn't the bus stop to pick up the Logans?
4. Why is Miss Crocker teaching the fourth-grade students and the first-grade students for the first few days of school?
5. What is wrong with the books that the Great Faith School has for the students?
6. Why does Miss Crocker think that Little Man can't read the inside cover of the book?
7. How does Miss Crocker punish Little Man and Cassie?
8. Why doesn't Cassie talk to Mama after Miss Crocker leaves Mama's room?
9. Why does Mr. Morrison get fired from the railroad?
10. What does the sheriff do when Henrietta Toggins reports what she saw happen to the Berrys?

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Deepen Your Understanding

The events that together make up a story are the *plot* of the story. One important part of any plot is conflict, or a problem that the characters face.

The first two chapters of the novel show that Cassie and her family live in an area where there is much friction between the white people and the black people. Find at least two specific examples of this conflict, and explain why you think this conflict exists.

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