

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

Teacher Guide
By Carla J. Courtney

Table of Contents

How to Use This Book and Other Supplementary Materials	4
Comprehension Questions	9
Answers to Comprehension Questions	37
Quizzes and Final Test.	45
Answers to the Quizzes and Final Test	58

How to Use This Book

This book is a part of the core curriculum in the 8th grade English class at Logos School. The chapters are of uniform page lengths, which makes it easy to schedule daily/weekly reading assignments.

History vs. Fiction

Historical fiction is a sub-genre of fiction. It features a storyline that is set within an actual location or historically factual series of events that have been previously recorded. The fictional nature of the work allows the author to take poetic license with the storyline, characters, and location. Quite often the major character is fictional, set within a historical set of events, drawing the reader into a historical time frame or event. A skilled author develops a story, complete with characters that gain empathy for the young reader. Readers drawn into a story in this fashion remember not only the story line itself, but the historical significance, vocabulary, and themes developed along with the story. This personalization of the story can raise the interest of both the reluctant and voracious reader. Works of historical fiction are available at many different reading levels from a variety of publishers.

There are causes for concern when reading historical fiction. Teachers must be aware of the blurring of the lines between factual and fictional events in the story. Guiding students to a correct understanding of true historical facts is essential in this genre. Authors who do not share your worldview or have revisionist tendencies in their writing can also be causes for concern. Distinguishing between the concept of literary romanticism and frivolous romantic liaisons should also be a concern when planning class discussions.

Selected themes you wish students to develop during discussions and compositions should reflect the curriculum goals of your school as set by your administration. In the case of the homeschool family, the parent is welcome to handle topics in a manner fitting the age of the child and family setting.

Black Leadership in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

In the years following the American Civil War, there were two prominent men who rose to the forefront in education leadership. A third man rose to prominence in the early 1900s to take over the leadership.

George Washington Carver (1864-1943) was born in the twilight years of the war in the border state of Missouri. He was locally educated until his desire and drive for education led him all the way to Simpson College and Iowa State Agricultural College, both in Iowa. He completed his master's degree at Iowa State. His doctoral degree was an honorary degree from Simpson College. His primary work was in agricultural development of the peanut and sweet potato for the benefit of southern farmers. He was the leading professor and agricultural researcher at Tuskegee University in Alabama. His strong Christian faith dominated his work ethic and guided his moral principles. After living a life of frugality, he donated his \$60,000 savings to establish the George Washington Carver Foundation to support a museum and future agricultural research.

Although Carver pursued higher education in the Midwest, he encouraged the Black farmers of the day to do their best work on the land they controlled, thus earning the respect of the local white population. In Taylor's story, Paul Edward Logan reflects Carver's message. Paul Edward purchased land and more land, working it appropriately, paying the bills and taxes on time. David Logan continues in his father's footsteps, maintaining and developing the land even though he had to take a job away from the family to keep the taxes and mortgage paid.

Booker T. Washington (1856-1915) was a gifted educator, author, and orator whose prominent voice in the southern Black community led many to seek educational opportunities, particularly in vocational and industrial programs. He was born a slave in Virginia, but after the emancipation he worked his way through Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute and attended Wayland Seminary (now Virginia Union University). He organized and promoted Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, rising to national prominence for his Atlanta Address of 1895. This speech, later rejected by the NAACP, called for a peace between blacks and whites over segregation. Washington desired the black community to put a stronger reliance upon the educational system of the day in order to achieve their goals of economic advancement. Washington's gift for navigating the political systems of the day gained him an audience with Theodore Roosevelt, the first president to invite a black leader to the White House for dinner. He valued his Christian faith and the work of the churches to promote healing and elevate the status of the black community.

Washington's value of education as the most important way of improving one's self

is reflected in both Mama and Big Ma's characters. Mama is a teacher who takes her job seriously; in fact, she is "lost" when she is fired. She studies with her children at the table after dinner, not only assisting them but preparing her own lessons. Big Ma's advice to Cassie is to ignore certain "ignorant white folk" and to focus on her education as most important.

W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1963) was a sociologist, civil rights activist, and author born and raised in Massachusetts. He was the first African-American to earn a doctorate degree from Harvard University, becoming a prominent professor at Atlanta University. He was one of the primary founders of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). DuBois opposed Washington's Atlanta speech. DuBois insisted on full civil rights for the black people, and he wanted better political representation. He believed this improvement would be brought about by the intellectual elite of the African-American community. Racism was the target of DuBois's political speeches.

Mama was reading W.E.B. DuBois's book, *The Negro*, published in 1915. She was making an extensive study of his material, and she was implementing his work in the lessons at Great Faith Elementary. By the time this story takes place, Washington was deceased and Carver was not a figure of primary importance. DuBois was the primary spokesman for the African-American community of the time.

The influences of these three leaders in the African-American community are lost on many readers, but bear explanation to the young readers of our day.

Five Elements of Short Stories in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry is an excellent book for studying the five elements of stories. It offers an older reader the opportunity to study complex characters, plot twists, and a wide range of themes. As a teacher or teaching parent, you have many options to adapt these elements to your educational setting.

The characters in this book can be organized in many different ways, allowing young readers the opportunity to argue over quality of traits in each of the characters. Characters can be organized most obviously by race. However, great classroom discussions can be generated with the determination of protagonist or antagonist. Can a character in a story switch sides? How does one distinguish a protagonist from an antagonist? What type of conflict is generated in a story when one character crosses from protagonist to antagonist?

Remembering that the setting includes both location and time frame, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* is straight-forward on both. This work of historical fiction takes place in rural Mississippi in a fictitious county near the city of Vicksburg. The story takes place during the

1933-34 school year.

The plot in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* includes plot lines and sub-plots, complete with twists and turns. This gives the teacher and students the opportunity to discuss events in the story, taking opportunities to prioritize events and situations. In the final discussions of the book, the teacher can challenge the student to summarize the plot in the top twenty events, down to ten events, and even down to three events.

This story is rife with conflict, both internal and external. The internal struggles of individual characters are well-portrayed by the author on the issues of prejudice and obedience to parents. Stacey struggles over his friendship with TJ, while Cassie plots revenge against Lillian Jean Simms. The obvious external struggle of blacks vs. whites play a prominent role in the story. There are other personal conflicts in the story, such as the animosity Cassie holds against TJ.

The themes for interpretation are abundant in this story. The teacher or teaching parent is welcome to investigate my favorite themes or focus on other themes that support the curriculum of the school. One of the best themes in the book is family working together for the good of all. In the Logan family, everyone has a part to play in the success of keeping the land. Big Ma runs the house, while Mama teaches school, and Papa works for the railroad. Even the children play a part by helping in the fields, completing basic farm chores, and doing their best with what they have. A second theme prominent in the story is prejudice. The author does not hide the presence of race-based prejudice of some characters, nor does she hide the good-will shown crossing racial lines. True and false friendship is a third prominent theme in this story. Stacey and TJ must wrestle with these concepts as they learn important lessons in choosing their friends. The themes of loyalty and education play a significant role in the story as well. Students will have the opportunity to discuss the value of each of these characteristics in the lives of the characters. Loyalty is exemplified by Stacey as he assists TJ in his greatest time of need. Family loyalty is apparent when Uncle Hammer sells his car to pay the mortgage on the land. Mama highly values not only her education, but the education of her children and students. She reads books regarding the history of her people to prepare her lessons for school. She takes her work very seriously, leaving the house early and arriving home late. These and many other themes produce many opportunities for open and honest discussion with your students and children.

Grading and Accountability

No matter your school situation, record keeping is an important part of keeping track of student progress. Schools require more active record keeping on the part of the teacher, while homeschools may use simpler methods of accountability to prove student accomplishment.

There are some basic tools included in this teacher's guide to help grade the students. The first option is the list of discussion questions. These will help keep track of the important elements of the story. They can also be used as comprehension questions requiring a written response. Answers can be structured as brief statements or as complete sentences. A second option for grading is the set of quizzes. These are grouped reasonably and easily scheduled. Once again, brief answers or complete sentences can be used to assess student understanding of the storyline and concepts. A final option is the book test to be administered when the student has completed the reading. Using a variety of testing techniques, students can demonstrate their knowledge of the storyline basics as well as the development of themes. Opinion questions are offered as a way of allowing the student to formulate and support an opinion in response to the reading. These tools may be adapted to best meet your situation.

Writing is another tool for assessing student knowledge and skill ability. Character sketches allow students to descriptively express an understanding of the relationships built within the storyline. Essays allow students to organize their thoughts based upon story events. Chapter summaries allow a student to keep track of complicated plot lines while incorporating new vocabulary and applying grammar concepts learned in English instruction. Creative writing, such as poetry, interviews, and comic illustrations, offers additional opportunities to put pen to paper. Writing assignments are also flexible enough to allow the teacher or parent to determine a proper grading standard.

Author Biography

Mildred D. Taylor

September 13, 1943 – present

Mildred D. Taylor was born in Jackson, Mississippi, but lived most of her childhood in Toledo, Ohio. Her father moved the family to Ohio to pursue work and educational advantages his children would not have in the South. Taylor loved to hear the stories of her family in the Deep South. Her books reflect a love of the South as well as her admiration for the family members that struggled to overcome their adversities. All of her novels written about the Logan family are based on the stories of her own family history.

Her most famous book is *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. It is actually a middle book in a planned nine-book series about the Logan family. She was awarded the Newbery Medal for her book in 1977. Only five of the books have been published to date.

Comprehension Questions

Name: _____

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

Chapter 1

1. Who are the four Logan children? What are their grades and ages? _____

2. Why is Stacey so unhappy on the first day of school? _____

3. How many acres do the Logans own? _____

4. Who did the Logans buy the land from? _____

5. When was the land purchased? _____

6. Why is Papa in Louisiana? _____

7. How does the family work together to save the money necessary to keep the land?

8. What is sharecropping? _____

9. What is Cassie's opinion of TJ? _____

10. What happens to Mr. Berry? _____

11. Why does Claude get into trouble for TJ's misbehavior? _____

12. How does Stacey confront TJ's sin? _____

13. Why do the Logan kids have to get off the road? _____

14. What is the name of the school for white children? _____

15. How does the school violate the US flag code? _____

16. What is the name of the school for black children? _____

17. What plantation farms are represented at the school? _____

18. What is the exciting news in the 1st-4th grade classes this year? _____

19. Why does Little Man refuse his book? _____

20. What does Mama do to her class books? _____

21. What do the teachers consider Mama to be? _____

Answers to the Comprehension Questions

Chapter 1

1. These are the Logan children, their grades in school, and their ages: Stacey (7th grade/age 14); Cassie (4th grade/age 9); Christopher-John (3rd grade/age 7); Little Man (1st grade/age 6).
2. Stacey is unhappy on the first day of school because he is going to be in his mother's 7th grade class.
3. The Logan family owns 400 acres of land.
4. The Logans purchased the land from the Granger family.
5. The Logans purchased 200 acres in 1887; they purchased an additional 200 acres in 1918.
6. Papa is working for the railroad in Louisiana.
7. Papa works summers laying railroad tracks; Mama teaches school; Big Ma works in the fields; the children wear clothes until they are threadbare to help save the money to pay for the land.
8. Sharecropping is an economic system of agriculture that allows a tenant to live and work on the land for a share of the crop which is shared with the landowner.
9. Cassie does not like TJ, and she doesn't understand why Stacey likes him.
10. Mr. Berry is badly burned in an act of violence.
11. TJ lies to his mother about why he was at the Wallace store, blaming his little brother Claude instead of taking responsibility.
12. Stacey tells TJ that what he had done was a dirty trick.
13. The Logan children have to get off the road because the school bus driver enjoys running them off the road in all kinds of weather.
14. The white children of the county attend Jefferson Davis County School.
15. The Mississippi flag is flying higher than the US flag, and that is a violation of the US flag code.
16. The black children of the county attend Great Faith Elementary and Secondary School.
17. The plantation farms represented at the school include Granger, Montier, and Harrison.
18. The exciting news this year is the real books for every student.
19. Little Man says that the book was dirty; he saw the word "nigra" on the book label.
20. Mama covers the offensive label with brown paper.
21. The teachers of Great Faith consider Mama to be a disrupting maverick.

Chapter 2

1. Cassie, Christopher-John, and Little Man climb up on the spikes to reach the tall cotton bolls.
2. The Logans have their cotton ginned at Mr. Granger's place.
3. Cassie is the first one to see Papa coming down the road.
4. Mr. Morrison comes home with Papa.
5. Mr. Morrison is taller than Papa (6'2"). He is muscular, with deep ebony skin, scars on his face and neck, some gray hair, and penetrating eyes.
6. Mr. Morrison lost his job on the railroad because he beat up some white men in a fight.
7. John Henry Berry dies of his burning injuries.

Quizzes and Final Test

Name: _____

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

Comprehension Quiz—Chapters 1-3

1. Who is the author?
2. When does this story take place?
3. Where does this story take place?
4. Who is Big Ma?
5. Which Logan child is in Mama's class?
6. Which Logan child is meticulously neat about his clothing?
7. Which Logan child is the friend of Claude Avery?
8. Which Logan child most dislikes TJ Avery?
9. Who is the white boy that walks with the Logan children?
10. How does Mama "fix" the new books?
11. Who does Papa bring home with him?
12. The Logan family does not shop at the _____.
13. Why doesn't Papa want the children to go to the store with their friends?
14. What does the bus driver do on the rainy day?
15. What is Big Ma's response to this incident?
16. How does Stacey take revenge against the school bus?
17. Who is out in the dark of night?

