

# ***Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry***

## ***Study Guide***

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*For the novel by Mildred D. Taylor*



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## Synopsis

*“ . . . but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts. . . . ”*  
—Romans 5:3–5

The Great Depression was a difficult time for most Americans, and the difficulty was magnified if you were black and lived in the South.

Although many of the black families around Strawberry, Mississippi, are sharecroppers, the Logan family owns the land they work. Their independence allows them to help other families in need, but also draws unwanted attention from their white neighbors. Another black family has been attacked by murderous “night men,” and the Logans begin to worry about their safety.

At school, Cassie Logan and her three brothers, Stacey, Christopher-John, and Little Man, battle a different kind of injustice. Each day as they walk to school, the bus driver from the white school swerves to splash them with mud or drive them off the road while the white children laugh. Tired of the daily mud-bath, the Logan children formulate a plan for revenge. The children’s satisfaction is short-lived, however, when the night men ride out again, and Cassie spends a sleepless night terrified that their actions have brought trouble to the family.

Cassie’s parents hope to teach her how to respond to the injustice she experiences, and when the night men come after a family friend, the Logans must find a way to stop the injustice without causing more violence. Through it all, Cassie comes to understand why the land is so important to her family, and she learns the value of perseverance in the most difficult times.

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**Questions:**

1. What does Stacey do with the coat Uncle Hammer gave him? Why?
2. Explain Mama's plan for encouraging other families to stop shopping at the Wallace store? How does Mr. Jamison help?
3. What does Big Ma do to ensure that Harlan Granger can't get the Logan land after she is gone?
4. How does Cassie take revenge on Lillian Jean? What is your opinion of Cassie's actions?
5. How does Mama lose her job?
6. What does T.J. say about his new "friends" at the end of Chapter 8?

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**Thinking About the Story:**

7. In Chapter 7, Mr. Morrison tells the Logans his family's history. Mama becomes concerned about letting the children hear the story, but Papa says they need to hear it because "it's their history." What does he mean by this?
  
8. A *symbol* is an object in a story that is used to represent an idea. Consider how the author stresses the importance of the land to the Logans. How has their land helped them survive? What might the Logan's land *symbolize*?
  
9. What lesson do you think Stacey learned from the incident with the coat? Later in Chapter 7, how does he demonstrate what he learned?
  
10. Papa said, "Far as I'm concerned, friendship between black and white don't mean that much 'cause it usually ain't on a equal basis." Do you think Papa was wrong in discouraging Stacey's friendship with Jeremy Simms? Why or why not?

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11. Harlan Granger tells the Logans, “This is a fine community. Got fine folks in it—both white and colored. Whatever’s bothering you people, y’all just tell me. We’ll get it straightened out without all this big to-do.”

Do you think Mr. Granger is serious about solving the problems? Why or why not? What do you think is his true motivation for paying a visit to the Logans?

12. An *allusion* is a reference to a literary or historical person, place, or event with which the reader is assumed to be familiar. In Chapter 8, T.J. uses a literary *allusion* when he speaks of Cassie’s actions as “Uncle Tomming.” Explain this *allusion* and what it means.

13. A *flashback* is a plot device in which an author pauses in her narrative to present a scene that occurred earlier in the story or before the story began. What scene from near the beginning of Chapter 8 is presented as a *flashback*?

**Dig Deeper:**

14. When Cassie tells Papa about the incident in Strawberry, Papa says “You know the Bible says you’re s’pose to forgive these things. . . . S’pose to turn the other cheek.” Read Matthew 5:38–48. Summarize what Jesus teaches about forgiveness in these verses.

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Write about a time when you forgave someone who wronged you. How did things turn out in the end?

15. Papa tells Cassie,

“If I’d’ve gone after Charlie Simms and given him a good thrashing like I felt like doing, the hurt to all of us would’ve been a whole lot more than the hurt you received, so I let it be. I don’t like letting it be, but I can live with that decision.

But there are other things, Cassie, that if I’d let be they’d eat away at me and destroy me in the end. And it’s the same with you, baby. There are things you can’t back down on, things you gotta take a stand on. But it’s up to you to decide what them things are.”

How do you, personally, tell the difference between the things you need to let be and the things you need to take a stand on?

**Optional Writing Exercise:**

Write a narrative essay in which Cassie demonstrates what is taught in Matthew 5:38–48 instead of taking revenge on Lillian Jean.

## *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry Study Guide Answer Key*

### *Dig Deeper:*

13. These verses teach us to abstain from revenge but to repay wrong acts with good ones. The passages from Romans teach that revenge is to be left up to God. Answers will vary. Cassie enjoyed the taste of revenge for a short time. Later, however, when she sees the night men, she worries that they were coming for the family because of what she and the boys had done to the bus. She realizes that taking revenge can have serious consequences.

14. Answers will vary. These verses tell us that when we are afraid we can trust in God because He will protect us.

15. Answers will vary.

### *Chapters 5 & 6*

#### *Vocabulary:*

1. persuade or cajole by flattery; 2. slender and elongated; 3. roofed porches or balconies that extend along the outside of a building; 4. leisure walking as a social activity; 5. a store, or any place where a merchant plies his trade; 6. expressionless; dull; 7. evilly, intending harm; 8. strolled; 9. threateningly, menacingly; 10. a roll or knot of hair worn at the back of the head; 11. adequately; as much as is needed; 12. feeling or showing anger.

#### *Questions:*

1. Market day is the day when all the farmers bring their goods into town to sell them. Big Ma brought milk, butter, and eggs to sell.

2. Cassie likes Mr. Jamison because he comes to visit the family, because he is straightforward, and because he is the only white man she knows who addresses Mama and Big Ma as “Missus.”

3. T.J. admires the pearl-handled gun.

4. Although Mr. Barnett began helping fill T.J.’s order when T.J. handed him his list, he continually stopped to help other white people before finishing. When Cassie complains, he insults her and tells her that she needs to learn her place.

5. Cassie bumped into Lillian Jean on the sidewalk.

#### *Thinking About the Story:*

6. Answers may vary. Mr. Barnett believes that in the social order, white people come before black people, and that Cassie needs to learn this.

7. Answers may vary. Stacey means that the trouble isn’t as much with Mr. Barnett’s actions, but rather with Mr. Barnett’s beliefs. If he truly believes he is better than Cassie, arguing with him or explaining won’t help.

8. T.J. doesn’t seem to realize that the way they are being treated by Mr. Barnett is wrong. Big Ma knows that Mr. Simms is wrong to demand an apology from Cassie, but she makes Cassie apologize anyway so that Mr. Simms won’t hurt Cassie or do something worse to the family. When Uncle Hammer hears about the incident he becomes angry and drives off in his car intending to harm Mr. Simms in some way.

9. Answers will vary.

10. Answers may vary. Mama tells Cassie that Mr. Simms thinks Lillian Jean is better than Cassie because Lillian Jean is white. Mama also tells Cassie that Mr. Simms is “one of those people who has to believe that white people are better than black people to make himself feel big.”