

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

**Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred Taylor**

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## Author/Context

Mildred D. Taylor was born on September 13, 1943 in Jackson, Mississippi. Her father, Wilbert Taylor, had grown up in the South, and though he loved the land and his neighbors, he was angry about the way black people like himself were treated by white people in the South. Soon after Mildred's birth, he got into a fight at work over a racial incident and decided to move his family north to Toledo. Still, the family returned to the South often, so Mildred was able to compare the two areas for much of her young life.

Mildred and her older sister Wilma loved their first house in Toledo, even though they were poor, because there was always family around. Much like Cassie Logan, Mildred valued the comfort and security of having a large family that was very close. Her aunts and uncles often felt like extra fathers and mothers. Even in the South, she felt supported by the community, though the fear of white cruelty loomed over her. Though it was less pronounced, she was not free of this fear in Toledo. As a young girl she attended a newly segregated school there and even through college, she was one of very few black women in her classes. Always interested in the fight against racism and injustice around the world, Taylor worked with the Peace Corps for several years, spending some time in Ethiopia.

Though Taylor has been writing since she was a young girl, she did not realize that she wanted to be a writer until 1973, when she entered a contest for minority writers. Her manuscript, a children's story called *Song of the Trees*, won the award and was published by Dial. Since then, all of her books have been published by that company, and all have been children's books. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, her first major publication, won the Newbery Award in 1976. It was published just a few months after her father died. Though she was saddened that he could not share in her triumph, he had been with her through every step of the writing process. The idea for the book first came about when Mildred wrote a short song with the title words in it. The song concerned perseverance in the face of racism. She immediately told her father that she would write a book using the poem as inspiration, and that the book would be a great success.

Taylor has often said that her writing is mainly inspired by her father. A wonderful storyteller, he could manipulate the emotions of his listener masterfully, whether he was telling a sad story or a happy one. He also provided her with a keen sense of justice and decency. Like David Logan, her father meant what he said and did. He talked to her honestly about racism and about morality. This perhaps is why she has been able to write so many of her books with the same even-handed directness. Much of Taylor can be seen in the character of young Cassie Logan, and other parallels are revealed in what she writes in the dedication of *Thunder*, "To the memory of my beloved father, who lived many adventures of the boy Stacey, and was in essence the man David."

Taylor continued the saga of the Logans with *Let the Circle be Unbroken*. This book takes place one year after *Thunder*, continuing some of the same story lines but mostly branching out to new ones. *The Road To Memphis* concerns a seventeen-year-old



Cassie, and *The Well: David's Story* takes the reader back in time, relating the adventures of the young brothers David and Hammer. Taylor has written several short stories as well. Like her novels, they have earned the admiration of critics from around the world, who find in her simply written works complex lessons about justice and injustice, cruelty and compassion.

### **Bibliography**

Crowe, Chris. *Presenting Mildred D. Taylor*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999.

Kutenplon, Deborah and Allen Olmstead. *Young Adult Fiction by African American Writers, 1968- 1993*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1996.

Taylor, Mildred D. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. New York: Puffin Books, 1976.



## Plot Summary

Nine-year-old Cassie Logan lives with her brothers Stacey, Little Man, and Christopher-John on a farm in Mississippi. Unlike most of the black families they live near, they own land, because their father has always believed in the power of owning one's own property. Even though the children come from a happy home and have more money than some of their neighbors, they are very poor and must endure constant insults and cruelties from the racist white people who live near them. In fact, the racial problems in their area seem to be getting worse: some of their neighbors were burned to death recently, for seemingly no reason at all. Their father has had to go to work far away just so they can have enough money to live on. He sends a friend, Mr. Morrison, to live with the children, their mother, and Papa's own mother "Big Ma" while he is gone. A white man has been trying to force them to sell their land to him for years.

The children try to ignore these realities, walking to school everyday with Stacey's friend T.J., who everyone else finds annoying. They are smart and mischievous. They get splashed by the white children's school bus every day, until they dig a hole in the road and cause an accident, so the bus can't be used for weeks. Still, this kind of revenge isn't always enough. Cassie goes to town one weekend and is insulted first by a shopkeeper and then by a white girl her age. She is forced to accept these insults, or suffer even worse punishment. The Logan children never want to accept such treatment, but their parents tell them that sometimes, they must, and T.J. seems accustomed to it. Cassie is able to get revenge on a white girl her age, but she cannot understand the more sinister violence that has plagued the lives of many black people around her, including Mr. Morrison, whose parents were killed by white people. Many of her neighbors are kept poor because their bosses don't pay them enough, which keeps them constantly indebted to their bosses, making the problem worse. With the help of a friendly white man, Mama and Papa try to organize a boycott of the store most of the black people in town are forced to shop at, but this angers most of the white people so much that they fire Mama from her teaching job. They threaten to put the black people in jail if they can't pay their debts (which none of them can.) Mama and Papa refuse to give up, however.

Meanwhile, T.J. has begun to steal and cheat, and has become friends with two older white boys, who only seem to like him because they can ridicule him. Many of the black people in town are worried that something very bad is going to happen soon: the white people are angry because of the attempted boycott (even though they managed to crush it) and T.J. is getting out of control. One night when Papa and Morrison are returning from shopping at the non-racist store, Papa gets shot at. He can no longer work, and has to ask his hotheaded brother Hammer for money. Hammer has always been easily angered by racism, and Papa worries that Hammer will lose his temper and provoke a white man into killing him. Papa, Mama and Big Ma manage to control Hammer, and he gives them enough money to pay their debts. Still, everyone is nervous, and they wait in fear for what the white people might do next. When T.J. robs a store with his two white friends, the white townspeople get their chance to attack. Refusing to believe that white boys could have helped T.J., they assume he robbed the



store and attacked the shopkeeper and his wife with two other black boys. Just as T.J. is about to be lynched, Papa sets fire to his own land. Since the white and black people are all neighbors, everyone knows that if the fire spreads everyone's property will be damaged. They are forced to forget T.J. for the moment and stop the fire. Though T.J. goes to prison and no one knows if he will survive or not, Papa has averted the danger for the time being. However, he had to sacrifice his beloved land to do it.



## Major Characters

**Cassie:** The only daughter of Mary and David Logan. Cassie is mature in regard to her sense of morality (she believes in justice and kindness, for example) but she is naïve. She does not understand the depth and cruelty of the racism around her. She expects to be treated as a real person, and white people in her town simply do not do this for a young black girl. Throughout the book, she learns from her loving parents about when to fight and when to keep quiet, and how to keep your dignity when the world seems set on taking it away.

**Little Man:** The youngest son of Mary and David Logan, Little Man is sometimes the most mature. He is rarely afraid of danger and loves adventure. He dislikes cruelty and lies--one reason why he hates T.J. He is also very neat: he worries constantly about his clothes and possessions becoming dirty.

**Stacey:** Cassie's older brother. Stacey tries to be a man but sometimes fails. He is brave and compassionate, but not always wise--T.J. tricks him into giving him his new coat, for example. He wants to take care of the farm by himself when his father is gone, so resents the presence of Mr. Morrison, who was sent by their father to protect them.

**Christopher-John:** Brother of Cassie, Stacey and Little Man. Christopher John is perhaps the meekest of all the children. He prefers to stay safe at home most of the time, and he loves to eat. However, he does not like to be left behind, so he often goes on adventures just for that reason.

**David Logan:** Husband of Mary and father of Cassie and her brothers. David, or 'Papa,' is kind and wise and hardworking. He loves his children and wants them to succeed and be good people. In turn, his children love him dearly. He wants to fight racism wherever it occurs, but he does not want his family to be hurt, and he sometimes worries about losing his land to the racist rich people around him.

**Hammer Logan:** David's hotheaded brother. Hammer would rather simply kill the white people who harass and attack him than try to reason with them. He doesn't think they deserve compassion, since they have given him none. He lives in Chicago and makes a good living, priding himself on living as an equal to his white neighbors.

**Mary Logan:** David's wife and mother of Cassie and her brothers. Intelligent, beautiful and strong, Mary has wanted to be a teacher all her life. She is committed to fighting for racial justice, no matter what it costs her. However, she desperately wants to protect her family, and worries they will be hurt.

**Caroline Logan:** 'Big Ma' is David's mother. She has worked the land since she was eighteen, and loves it as much as her dead husband did. She is good with medicine, and takes care of her family and neighbors. Strong and good-natured, she works in the fields like a young woman.



**T.J. Avery:** Stacey's best friend T.J. is a fourteen-year-old boy who everyone thinks is obnoxious. He talks constantly, loves to brag, won't obey his parents, cheats on tests, and lies. Later in the book he begins to steal from people, and finally gets in trouble for taking part in a robbery with two white boys who then accuse him of murdering the shopkeeper (which they did themselves).

### Minor Characters

**Harlan Granger:** Rich white man who lives near the Logans. His family owned much of the land in the area half a century ago, and now Granger wants to buy it back. He threatens the Logans in every way possible to try to get them to give it up.

**Claude Avery:** T.J.'s quiet brother, who allows him to do whatever he wants to him because he is afraid of him. Claude even takes a beating for T.J.

**Jeremy Simms:** A young sad-looking white boy who wants to befriend Stacey and the other children. Everyone is suspicious of him, because he seems to hate his own family and be willing to accept beatings from his family to be friends with the Logans, who often tell him to go away. He is always good-natured around the Logans, though.

**Lillian Jean Simms:** Jeremy's sister, who insults Cassie. Cassie tricks her into becoming friends with her, gets her to tell all her secrets, then beats her up. Lillian Jean is confused. She did not understand Cassie at all--she assumed that Cassie liked being treated as a slave.

**Daisy Crocker:** Cassie and Little Man's teacher. She accepts racism and teaches in an ignorant and boring way.

**Mr. Morrison:** A very strong man who comes to live with the Logans because he lost his job and Papa wants a man around to protect them when he is not there. Mr. Morrison has been terrorized by white people all his life, but he is not afraid of them. He is a quiet but brave man.

**Mr. Jamison:** A kind-hearted and just white man who offers to provide credit for any black person who wants to shop somewhere other than the racist Wallace store. He respects his black neighbors. He even tries to protect T.J. while endangering his own life. The Logans are grateful to him.



## Objects/Places

**school:** The Logan children have to walk for miles to reach their school, and are provided only with the oldest and most ignorant textbooks, while the white children ride to school on a bus and are given far better supplies.

**land:** Cassie slowly begins to understand why the land is so important to her father. The family has owned it for fifty years, and it keeps them from living in total poverty, because they do not have to depend on someone else to have a place to live. The land is beautiful, and it gives them freedom.

**Wallace store:** Though it is the only store where most black people can buy supplies, the Wallace store is run by vicious racists. When the Logans try to get their neighbors to boycott the store and shop somewhere else, the Wallaces and their friends (owners of the cotton fields the black people work in) lower wages and threaten to call in debts. This makes it impossible for the very poor black people to avoid the Wallace store.

**gun:** The gun is very expensive and ornate, and T.J. wants it more than anything in the world. Eventually, he steals it, and is caught and arrested by white men who want to kill him.



## Quotes

Quote 1: "Look out there, Cassie girl. All that belongs to you. You ain't never had to live on nobody's place but your own and long as I live and the family survives, you'll never have to." Chapter 1, pg. 7

Quote 2: "That's what you are." Chapter 1, pg. 26

Quote 3: "I would wait until the evening to talk to her; there was no rush now. She understood." Chapter 1, pg. 31

Quote 4: "Papa always meant what he said--and he swung a mean switch." Chapter 2, pg. 41

Quote 5: , "All y'all gonna be walkin' for at least two weeks by the time we get this thing hauled outa here and up to Strawberry to get fixed." Chapter 3, pg. 55

Quote 6: "It's...it's them again. They's ridin' tonight." Chapter 3, pg. 60

Quote 7: "Friends gotta trust each other, Stacey, 'cause ain't nothin' like a true friend." Chapter 4, pg. 77

Quote 8: "The Wallaces did that, children. They poured kerosene over Mr. Berry and his nephews and lit them afire." Chapter 4, pg. 98

Quote 9: "was something that wavered between the known and the unknown and to mention it outright...was not wise." Chapter 4, pg. 99

Quote 10: "Well, you just get your little black self back over there and wait some more." Chapter 5, pg. 111

Quote 11: "No day in all my life had ever been as cruel as this one." Chapter 5, pg. 116

Quote 12: "Big Ma didn't want you hurt. That was the only thing on her mind." Chapter 6, pg. 126

Quote 13: "There might be another way, Hammer...Wait for David. Talk to him." Chapter 6, pg. 138

Quote 14: "Seems to me if Stacey's not smart enough to hold onto a good coat, he don't deserve it." Chapter 7, pg. 142

Quote 15: "These are things they need to hear, baby. It's their history." Chapter 7, pg. 148

Quote 16: "We ain't never gonna lose this land." Chapter 7, pg. 152



Quote 17: "We Logans don't have much to do with white folks. You know why? 'Cause white folks mean trouble." Chapter 7, pg. 158

Quote 18: "I'm a Southerner, born and bred, but that doesn't mean I approve of all that goes on here, and there are a lot of other white people who feel the same." Chapter 7, pg. 161

Quote 19: "not wanting to believe that Lillian Jean didn't even realize it had been all just a game." Chapter 8, pg. 181

Quote 20: "I expect you'd best just forget about teaching altogether...then thataway you'll have plenty of time to write your own book." Chapter 8, pg. 184

Quote 21: "Got me better friends than y'all! They give me things and treat me like I'm a man and...and they white too..." Chapter 8, pg. 194

Quote 22: "He's got a need to show us where we stand in the scheme of things. He's got a powerful need to do that." Chapter 10, pg. 233

Quote 23: "I-I'm in trouble...I'm really in trouble." Chapter 11, pg. 244

Quote 24: "We want that thieving, murdering nigger of y'all's." Chapter 11, pg. 251

Quote 25: "Y'all decide to hold court out here tonight?" Chapter 11, pg. 254

Quote 26: "This thing's been coming a long time...and T.J. just happened to be the one foolish enough to trigger it." Chapter 12, pg. 259

Quote 27: "There's smoke coming from my forest yonder!" Chapter 12, pg. 271

Quote 28: "Folks thinking...that lightning struck that fence of yours and started that fire...it's better, I think, that you stay clear of this whole thing now..." Chapter 12, pg. 273

Quote 29: "What happened to T.J. in the night I did not understand, but I knew that it would not pass. And I cried for those thing which had happened in the night and would not pass." Chapter 12, pg. 276



# Topic Tracking: Family

## Chapter 1

Family 1: The entire family, even those like Hammer who don't live near the rest, is very close. They work together to keep the land, which they all own together. Cassie's father doesn't think of himself as the owner--he thinks of each of his family members, including the children, as owning a piece.

## Chapter 2

Family 2: The whole family works together picking cotton. When Papa comes home, the children forget their obedience to their mother and grandmother for once and run to meet him, climbing over the dangerous barbed wire fence. They all love him deeply, and wish he could stay with them forever.

## Chapter 3

Family 3: The four children work together, knowing that they can only trust each other to keep the hole a secret. Stacey doesn't even tell T.J., though T.J. is his best friend. That night, the family laughs about the bus crash over dinner, though the women don't know what the children have done.

## Chapter 4

Family 4: Even though Cassie and the others are frightened of the Wallace store and do not want to disobey their father by going there, they follow Stacey there because they do not want to leave him alone. Even the insults from white people at the store will not drive them away.

Family 5: For the Logans, family is tied to the land. Big Ma met her husband when he was just getting ready to buy the land. They had six children and raised them on the land, and four of them died on it. The last two still love and care for it. This is part of the reason why Big Ma will never sell the land to Harlan Granger: she thinks of the land as part of her family.

## Chapter 5

Family 6: Though usually Big Ma is a source of comfort for Cassie, this time she cannot help her. Cassie expects Big Ma to make everything all right, to make it so that she does not have to apologize to Lillian Jean. She is shocked when she sees that even though Big Ma doesn't believe it is right, she wants Cassie to apologize. Cassie feels betrayed and angry.

## Chapter 7



Family 7: In the Logan family, the children are punished in a way that will teach them morals and good sense. Thus, when Hammer finds out that Stacey gave away his coat, he realizes that beating Stacey will do no good. Instead, he lectures the boy so severely that Stacey shakes in fear. Hammer doesn't simply want to discipline Stacey--he wants to teach him.

### **Chapter 8**

Family 8: Cassie can depend on her father for reasonable, warm-hearted advice. He understands her and wants her to be happy, and he also wants to protect her. Because of him, she is able to get revenge on Lillian Jean without really hurting anyone. It is this kind of wisdom that makes T.J. angry, because he doesn't have it. When he is caught cheating on a test, he gets angry at the Logans, who would never cheat.

### **Chapter 9**

Family 9: The Logan family is extremely close. Stacey believes Papa's injury is his fault, but Cassie convinces him it isn't. Each child is terrified that their father could die. Each member of the family, especially the children, is bound to the rest, looking to the others for comfort and security. They discuss everything and keep few secrets from each other.

### **Chapter 11**

Family 10: Even though Cassie hates T.J., she will not leave Stacey to help him home alone. She wants to protect her brother. Likewise, Christopher-John and Little Man will not be left behind. The four children understand each other and have many of the same ideas about morality (as much as they hate T.J., they cannot reject him when he is hurt).



# Topic Tracking: Quiet

## Chapter 1

Quiet 1: Little Man has a quiet carefulness about him. Though he is only six, a neat appearance is very important to him. Though he doesn't argue with his older siblings, he stubbornly continues to walk slowly, even though they tell him to hurry.

Quiet 2: Cassie's father is a quiet and gentle man, but he is also very determined. He does not make a complicated speech, he simply says that he will not lose his land, no matter what. This is partly why Cassie respects him: in just a few words, he can say exactly what he thinks and make her believe him.

Quiet 3: Claude keeps silent about the cruelty T.J. inflicts on him, even when T.J. admits to it right in front of him. He is so afraid of his brother that he doesn't dare get him in trouble. Cassie is shocked at the way Claude accepts this treatment from his brother, but there is nothing she can do about it.

Quiet 4: Cassie and Little Man both refuse to use the racist books. At first, Cassie tries to reasonably explain why she is upset to her teacher, but when her teacher ignores her, she simply takes her punishment. She accepts that her teacher will not listen to her, though that angers her. Even Little Man refuses to cry when he is beaten.

## Chapter 2

Quiet 5: Papa only has to tell the children once not to go to the Wallace store. He does not give them a long list of the terrible things he will do to them if they disobey him. He just quietly promises he will punish them, and they understand he is serious. He is quiet, but he means what he says.

## Chapter 4

Quiet 6: The children keep their secret from T.J., even though they are very frightened. They also refuse to let him control them. He wants to talk constantly and always be the center of attention, but they are quiet people who will not let him indulge himself. Even when he tries his best to interest them, they ignore him.

Quiet 7: Mama knows that the best way to get things done is not always to be loud and forceful. Though everyone knows what the Wallaces did to the Berrys, she does not mention that when she tries to get people to stop shopping at the Wallace store. She only calmly explains why the Wallaces are bad for the community.

## Chapter 8

Quiet 8: In his own quiet way, Stacey figures out how to punish T.J. as severely as possible. He ignores him, and the rest of the students at their school follow his example.



With no one to brag or lie to, T.J. is deeply hurt. Stacey did not have to insult him or beat him up--he simply removed him from his life.

### **Chapter 10**

Quiet 9: Uncle Hammer is dangerous to his family, because he cannot keep quiet. No one wants to keep quiet about the racism and cruelty all around them, but they understand that trying to get revenge will most likely just get them hurt or even killed. Hammer doesn't understand the value of keeping quiet.

### **Chapter 12**

Quiet 10: Though Papa was tempted to solve things "Hammer's way," with his gun, he finally decided to resolve the fighting without using violence. He quietly set fire to his own land, never telling anyone outright. Rather than attacking others, he passively sacrificed himself.



# Topic Tracking: Racism

## Chapter 1

Racism 1: Cassie and her brothers are terrified to learn that anyone could treat black people the way the Berrys were treated. The idea that someone could want to hurt someone so badly just because of their skin color is very frightening to them. T.J., however, treats the event as simply an interesting story, even though he is black too.

Racism 2: The books that Cassie and the other students are using were used by white children until they were considered too worn out, then they were given to black children. The books even include the race of the student, using the word "nigra." Cassie and Little Man get angry, but everyone else, including the teacher, just accepts what they are given.

## Chapter 2

Racism 3: The black townspeople agree that white violence against them is getting worse. Mama is happy to have the strong Mr. Morrison living with them. Everyone worries about what could happen to them, since Mr. Berry was killed and nothing is being done about it.

## Chapter 3

Racism 4: As soon as the children think they have gotten revenge on the racist white people, they must give up their happiness and be afraid again, because they think their revenge is going to get them killed. The whole family, who laughed so readily at the bus in the ditch, is forced to be afraid for the rest of the night. They have no idea whether the "night men" will come for them or not. They simply have to wait and hope they can defend themselves.

## Chapter 4

Racism 5: Though the black community all agree that the Wallaces are racist and that no one should go there, let alone shop there, people like Mr. Turner have no choice, because they have no money. He can get credit at the Wallace store, but he can't get it anywhere else. He is supporting racism because there is nothing else he can do.

## Chapter 5

Racism 6: Cassie is overwhelmed by the racism she experiences in just one day at the market. First, her brother and T.J. submit to waiting and waiting as white people are served first in a store. When she tries to complain, she is yelled at or laughed at. Then, she has to apologize repeatedly to a white girl, humiliating herself in public. Not even her strong-willed, proud family can prevent these things from happening, and this hurts Cassie deeply.



## Chapter 6

Racism 7: Racism requires that every black person in their town must live in fear. Hammer tries to avoid this, expecting to be treated as an equal to the white people around him, but everyone is worried that he will get himself into trouble. He wants to spend his life fighting racism violently, but he does not think about what might happen to him because of his angry protests and jokes on white people. Mama worries that he will get himself killed or bring violence on the family.

## Chapter 7

Racism 8: When Jeremy tries to overcome the racism of his family, the Logans are uncomfortable and unsure of what to do. Finally, though, they accept that he is only trying to be nice. Stacey ignores T.J. when T.J. tries to turn him against Jeremy. Papa tries to protect Jeremy by sending him home before his parents miss him. However, Papa does not believe white and black people could ever really be friends.

## Chapter 8

Racism 9: Cassie can't believe that Lillian Jean's racism runs so deep that she believes Cassie could be happy being her "little colored friend." Cassie can't understand how Lillian could think that was real friendship. Lillian expects Cassie to actually want to be her little slave.

## Chapter 11

Racism 10: The white people of the town cannot imagine that a white boy could have beaten the shopkeeper and his wife the way R.W. and Melvin did. They are so sure T.J. must be to blame that they want to kill him right in front of their house. They do not care who is guilty, in fact, as is shown by the way they beat up T.J.'s family, including his younger brothers and sisters. They simply want to punish some black people, and they do so, because no one dares to stop them, and most people don't *want* to stop them.



# Chapter 1

Nine-year-old Cassie Logan and her brothers, six-year-old Little Man, twelve-year-old Stacey and seven-year-old Christopher-John, are walking to school. They live in the country in Mississippi, and the roads are dusty. Though their walk is long, Little Man won't walk fast, because he doesn't want to stir up dust and get his clothes dirty. Cassie worries that they will be late, and Stacey is annoyed with her. She knows Stacey is in a bad mood because he has to be in their mother's class that year. Christopher-John doesn't want them to fight--he just wants everyone to be happy.

Topic Tracking: Quiet 1

Cassie looks at the land around her. Most of it belongs to Harlan Granger, but a small part of it belongs to her family. Even that had belonged to Granger, until Cassie's grandfather had bought it in 1887 when the Grangers had to sell in order to pay their taxes. Even today Cassie's family owes mortgage on half their land. Money is scarce, so Cassie's father has gone to work on the railroad. It is now 1933, and he has been working on the railroad for several months out of the year for two years. Cassie hates that he has to go away, and once asked him why making payments on the land is so important. Her father tells her, "Look out there, Cassie girl. All that belongs to you. You ain't never had to live on nobody's place but your own and long as I live and the family survives, you'll never have to." Chapter 1, pg. 7 Everyone in the family, even her father's brother Hammer, her Mama and her grandmother, Big Ma, own part of the land and work for it. Hammer sends money from Chicago. Mama teaches at the school. Big Ma works as hard as a young woman picking cotton.

Topic Tracking: Family 1

Topic Tracking: Quiet 2

Cassie wonders whether she will ever understand why the land is so important. Just then T.J. Avery and his brother Claude appear. The Avery family share-crops on Granger land. T.J. is a friend of Stacey's, and though he is a year older he will be in Stacey's class this year, because he failed last year. T.J. wants Stacey to help him cheat on tests, but Stacey refuses. Then T.J. brings up a "burning" that took place the night before. None of the children really like T.J. and they know he just wants to tell them a secret so that he can feel important, but they are curious anyway. T.J. explains that some white men burned one of their neighbors, Mr. Berry, and his two nephews, nearly to death. Mama Logan and Big Ma brought comfort and medicine to the Berrys. T.J. doesn't know anything else.

Topic Tracking: Racism 1

T.J. changes the subject, saying that Cassie almost got him in trouble by telling his mother that he went to the Wallace store, where the children have been forbidden to go. He lied to his mother, telling her that he was only there to pick up Claude, and Claude



had been beaten instead. Claude is so afraid of his brother that he didn't tell his mother the truth.

#### Topic Tracking: Quiet 3

Just then, a school bus full of white children drives by. Little Man doesn't move out of the way fast enough, and his clothes get covered in dust. T.J. laughs and everyone angrily tells him to shut up. Little Man asks why the bus didn't stop for them. Stacey tells him the white people like to see them get dirty, and that they don't have a bus of their own. Just then Jeremy, a white boy, runs up to meet them. No one really likes him, and his mean sister Lillian Jean told the Logan children that Jeremy gets beaten for being with black children, but Jeremy doesn't stop meeting them. No one knows why Jeremy likes them. After leaving Jeremy at the white school, the Logans move on and reach their own school. Most of the children at their school only come when there is no work to be done in the fields. Many of them will drop out before they graduate.

Cassie is left alone on the playground as her brothers run off to join their friends. She goes inside, and finds that her fourth grade class and the first grade class are combined, because the first grade teacher will be a few days late. Cassie takes a seat, annoying the principal's daughter, who wanted the same seat. Daisy Crocker, the teacher, is boring and cheerful in a fake way. Ms. Crocker surprises them by telling them they will have books this year. Most of them have never even touched a book other than the bible. Even Cassie is excited--until she sees that the books are badly worn, with writing all over them. Little Man refuses a book because he says it is too dirty. Ms. Crocker gets very angry, calling him ungrateful. Little Man reluctantly takes a book, but after flipping through it, throws it on the floor angrily. Cassie looks at the front of her book to see what made him so angry, and finds a chart that gives the condition of the book and the race of the student using it. Many white children had used her book, and the last entry reads, "nigra." Cassie tries to show Ms. Crocker, but when she sees the chart the teacher says, "That's what you are." Chapter 1, pg. 26 Little Man and Cassie both refuse their books, and they are both beaten.

#### Topic Tracking: Quiet 4

#### Topic Tracking: Racism 2

After school, Cassie runs to tell her mother what happened, but Ms. Crocker gets there first. Cassie listens outside the door as Ms. Crocker explains what happened. Mama listens and nods, but she busies herself with gluing paper over the upsetting chart at the front of each book. She ignores Ms. Crocker's protests. Mama has always been a little different from the other teachers at the school. Cassie thinks, "I would wait until the evening to talk to her; there was no rush now. She understood." Chapter 1, pg. 31



## Chapter 2

Together, the Logans pick cotton. Suddenly, off in the distance, Cassie sees her father coming down the road with another man. Overjoyed, the children run to him, then become shy when he introduces them to Mr. Morrison, who is very tall and strong-looking. Papa says that he can only stay until tomorrow, but that Mr. Morrison will be living with them from now on. Mama seems relieved to have a man around while her husband works on the railroad, and the children wonder why. The next day in church, someone announces that one of the Berrys has died. A woman explains why he was burned: he was buying gas when some drunken white men decided he had been flirting with a woman they knew. They attacked him on his way home and burned him and his relatives. Hearing this, Papa announces that no one in his family will ever shop at the Wallace store (a store owned by racist white people.) His children agree to obey him. "Papa always meant what he said--and he swung a mean switch." Chapter 2, pg. 41

Topic Tracking: Family 2

Topic Tracking: Racism 3

Topic Tracking: Quiet 5



## Chapter 3

The rain comes in October, and turns the dusty ground into mud. The white children's bus splashes the Logan children on purpose. Little Man is especially bothered by the cruelty of the bus driver. One morning he gets thrown into a ditch and covered in mud. The children run into Jeremy, who tries to talk to them, but they do not answer. They are all angry. Stacey has a plan, and tells the others to meet him outside at lunchtime. That afternoon, he tells them to dig a large hole in the road the bus takes to school. They then fill up the hole with dirty rainwater, so the hole is no longer visible. After school they hurry back to the hole and wait for the bus. Of course, the bus gets trapped in the hole. All the children have to walk home. The driver tells them, "All y'all gonna be walkin' for at least two weeks by the time we get this thing hauled outa here and up to Strawberry to get fixed." Chapter 3, pg. 55 At home that evening, Mama and Big Ma laugh happily about the incident as the children try to pretend they don't know how the hole ever got there.

Topic Tracking: Family 3

Later that night, the children try to study as they laugh about what happened. Then a neighbor comes to the door. He tells Mama, "It's...it's them again. They's ridin' tonight." Chapter 3, pg. 60 Mama looks afraid and tells the children to go to bed. They all listen from a nearby room, and hear that the bus driver is angry about something. Convinced that they have been caught and will be burned, the children are very frightened. Cassie forces herself to go to sleep, and when she wakes up, it's the middle of the night. She sneaks outside and sees several cars near the house. The people in the cars seem to decide this is the wrong house, and they drive away. Cassie sees Mr. Morrison hiding near the house with a shotgun. Frightened, she goes back inside and tries to sleep.

Topic Tracking: Racism 4



## Chapter 4

For a long time after that night, Cassie is so nervous she seems sick. Her mother worries about her. Cassie wanders around, helping with chores and listening to T.J. talk about how to get out of doing work. Stacey and the others ignore him, until he starts telling them about the "night men." Though they cannot help but be interested, they don't let T.J. know---they don't want him to lengthen the story just to get attention. T.J. explains that the night men were angry because a black man called one of them a liar. The Logan children are relieved that the trouble wasn't about the bus. Later that day, they catch T.J. looking for answers to a test. He tells Stacey, " Friends gotta trust each other, Stacey, 'cause ain't nothin' like a true friend." Chapter 4, pg. 77

Topic Tracking: Quiet 6

Cassie is interested in Mr. Morrison, but Stacey doesn't like him. Cassie knows this is because Stacey wants to be the man of the house while their father is away. At school soon after, Mama beats Stacey because she catches him with cheating notes. Everyone knows that he was only taking the notes away from T.J., but Stacey won't admit this to Mama, so she beats him. T.J. runs away, and Stacey chases him to the Wallace store. Though his brothers and sister are afraid, they cannot leave him, so they follow. The white people there insult them, but they will not leave without Stacey.

Topic Tracking: Family 4

In the middle of the fight, Mr. Morrison appears. He takes them home, and tells them he will not tell Mama about their being at the store--because he trusts Stacey to do it. As they return home, they see Harlan Granger's car leaving their house. He has been trying to get Big Ma to sell the land to him again. She will never sell it, because her husband loved the land so much. Big Ma sits looking out at the pond and woods and farmland with Cassie, telling her a story she has heard many times before. She says that her husband bought the land and wanted to cultivate it with her. Though the Granger family tried to buy it from them many times, they would never sell. Then a white man, Mr. Jamison, sold Grandpa some more land, even though he could have gotten more money if he had sold it to Harlan Granger. Granger has always hated Jamison because of this. Big Ma had six children, but only Papa and Hammer are left. She has been with this land her whole life, and will never sell it.

Topic Tracking: Family 5

Stacey tells his mother that he went to the Wallace place. She is angry, but she doesn't punish any of them. They don't understand why until a few days later, when she takes them to see one of the Berrys who was burned very badly. The man cannot even speak, and the children are horrified. After they leave, their mother tells them, "The Wallaces did that, children. They poured kerosene over Mr. Berry and his nephews and lit them afire." Chapter 4, pg. 98 Then Mama goes from farm to farm, telling her neighbors not to shop at the Wallaces' store. She does not mention the Berrys. She only says that the



Wallaces drink and smoke there. She explains to Cassie that what happened to the Berrys "was something that wavered between the known and the unknown and to mention it outright...was not wise." Chapter 4, pg. 99

Topic Tracking: Quiet 7

Mama wants everyone to stop shopping at the Wallaces, but one man says he cannot go anywhere else, because he has credit at that store. He has no money, but the Wallaces will take a deduction from his salary from his boss in place of cash. Mama asks whether he would shop somewhere else if someone else would give him credit. He is quiet for a while, then says he would. Though he and the children wonder who could possibly do this, Mama says nothing.

Topic Tracking: Racism 5



## Chapter 5

One morning Big Ma brings T.J., Stacey and Cassie to the market. They are all surprised they are allowed to go. Cassie is excited about going to town, but when she gets there she is disappointed. Big Ma sets up her wagon full of eggs and dairy far behind wagons owned by white people, and this makes Cassie angry. After the market, Big Ma goes to see Mr. Jamison, telling the children to wait for her. T.J. immediately wants to run off, and the other two follow him. He shows Stacey a fancy gun, saying how much he wants it and how no one would bother him if he owned it. Then he asks the white shopkeeper to fill an order for his father. The man begins to do so, but gets distracted by other white people who need help. Cassie doesn't understand what is happening, though the other boys do and are embarrassed. Finally, Cassie approaches the man, asking him to help T.J. again, because they have been waiting for a long time. He says to her, "Well, you just get your little black self back over there and wait some more." Chapter 5, pg. 111 Furious, Cassie starts to yell, but her brother pulls her out of the store. He goes to get Big Ma, and Cassie is left alone to sulk. She bumps into Lillian Jean, who tells her to apologize. Cassie does so, but that isn't enough for Lillian Jean, who tries to force Cassie down into the road. Lillian's father then pushes Cassie off the sidewalk, into the road. Just then Big Ma appears, and though she looks unhappy, she tells Cassie to apologize. Cassie finally does, and they go home. "No day in all my life had ever been as cruel as this one." Chapter 5, pg. 116

Topic Tracking: Family 6

Topic Tracking: Racism 6



## Chapter 6

Back at home, Cassie is angry. Stacey tries to explain that Big Ma had no choice: she had to make Cassie apologize. They argue, and then they see a strange car in their barn. Uncle Hammer is visiting. The children are shocked to learn that he owns a car. Everyone is happy to see Hammer. When Cassie tells him what happened to her in town, he gets very angry. Though Big Ma pleads with him, he says he is taking his gun and going to see Lillian Jean's father. The women send Mr. Morrison after him. Mama explains to Cassie, "Big Ma didn't want you hurt. That was the only thing on her mind." Chapter 6, pg. 126 She explains that Mr. Simms believes that white people are better than black people, and though that might make Cassie angry, she has to realize that it is reality. She explains that slavery made so much money that white people convinced themselves that black people were not as good as they were--which made using them as slaves okay. Cassie's great-grandparents were slaves. Cassie goes to sleep, and the next morning she finds Hammer sulking over his coffee--Mr. Morrison brought him home after all. They all dress up and go to church in his car. He gives Stacey a fancy new jacket. They meet T.J. on the road and he makes fun of Stacey's jacket, which makes Stacey angry. As they pass the Wallace store, Hammer talks about setting fire to it. Mama and Big Ma beg him not to talk that way, even though they understand his anger. Mama says, "There might be another way, Hammer...Wait for David. Talk to him." Chapter 6, pg. 138 They reach a bridge that can only take one car at a time, and though a car full of white people has started to cross at the other side, Hammer pulls onto the bridge. Thinking that the fancy car belongs to Mr. Granger, the white driver backs off. When the white driver--one of the Wallaces-- sees Hammer, he is shocked and furious. Hammer is pleased at his trick, but Mama is worried they will one day be punished for it.

Topic Tracking: Racism 7



## Chapter 7

Mama asks Stacey to bring her his new coat so that she can tailor it. Stacey nervously tells her he gave it to T.J. because T.J. told him it looked silly on him. She tells him to go get it, but Hammer tells her, "Seems to me if Stacey's not smart enough to hold onto a good coat, he don't deserve it." Chapter 7, pg. 142 Stacey feels terrible, even though no one beats him.

Topic Tracking: Family 7

Cassie waits for her father to come home for Christmas, getting increasingly angry at the snobby Lillian Jean and the arrogant T.J. She plans revenge. When her father comes home, Cassie is overjoyed. Papa and Hammer talk about the tricks they played when they were boys. After supper, though, Mr. Morrison begins to talk about how when he was six years old his family was attacked by the night men. Almost everyone was killed, including his parents. Mama doesn't want her children to hear this, but Papa says, "These are things they need to hear, baby. It's their history." Chapter 7, pg. 148 Cassie eventually goes to bed, but wakes up in the middle of the night to hear Mama, Big Ma, Hammer and Papa talking about the Wallace store and the land. Mama believes that if they back their neighbors up at another store, offering to use their own land as credit if their neighbors can't pay their bills, then the townspeople will be able to close down the Wallace store. No one will have to shop there, as long as they have credit somewhere else--but no one has the money to provide them with credit except the Logans. The others tell Mama that if they do that, they will lose their land. Seeing Cassie in the doorway, Papa tells her, "We ain't never gonna lose this land." Chapter 7, pg. 152

The next morning, the children open their Christmas presents. Each of them gets a book, some candy and oranges. Later that day, Jeremy comes to the door. Hammer is uncomfortable, but Papa insists that Stacey be polite to Jeremy. Jeremy gives Stacey a flute he made, and then runs off, afraid that his family might be missing him. T.J. tries to insult the flute, but Stacey won't listen. Stacey thinks that Jeremy might be a good friend, but Papa says, "We Logans don't have much to do with white folks. You know why? 'Cause white folks mean trouble." Chapter 7, pg. 158 Nevertheless, Stacey puts the flute into his secret box.

Topic Tracking: Racism 8

Soon after, Papa beats the children for going to the Wallace store. Then Papa, Hammer, and Mr. Morrison drive off to town. That afternoon when they return, Mr. Jamison arrives. Cassie spies on the adults and learns that Big Ma is signing away her rights to the land to her sons. Then Mr. Jamison tells the adults that he will provide the credit for the black families who want to shop somewhere other than the Wallace store. He has enough money, and he wants to help these families. He says, "I'm a Southerner, born and bred, but that doesn't mean I approve of all that goes on here, and there are a lot of other white people who feel the same." Chapter 7, pg. 161 He goes on to say that he is



worried that Harlan Granger will still try to take their land, because Granger has a part in the Wallace store. If the store loses a lot of business, Granger will get angry and use the opportunity to punish the Logans any way he can, getting his land back in the process. Still, the Logans want to try to beat the racist system. Mr. Jamison hopes they can do it. A few days later, Granger comes to the house and threatens to call in the mortgage the Logans still owe him on part of their land. If they can't pay the mortgage, they will lose the land. He then threatens to lower the wages of his black workers. Papa and Hammer refuse to be intimidated.



## Chapter 8

Cassie starts flattering Lillian Jean, trying to be her friend. Her brothers are shocked, but they keep quiet. Cassie tells her father about Lillian Jean. Her father tells her that she has to decide which battles she is going to fight and which she will let pass. He tells her that she must not make such a big deal out of it that Lillian Jean's father gets involved, because then he himself will have to get involved too. Cassie forms a plan, and it works perfectly: she is so nice to Lillian Jean that the girl tells her all her secrets, as well as those of other girls she knows. After school one day, Cassie hears that T.J. has cheated on exams again, and been caught....again. T.J. runs off, angry and ashamed, and then Cassie goes off to find Lillian Jean. She leads her into the woods, promising a "surprise." When they are well hidden, she throws Lillian Jean's books down, and they begin to fistfight. She forces the girl to apologize for ever treating her in a racist way, then tells her that if she complains, she will tell all the secrets Lillian has been telling her all this time. The white girl is amazed that her "friend" could be so mean, and Cassie leaves, "not wanting to believe that Lillian Jean didn't even realize it had been all just a game." Chapter 8, pg. 181

Topic Tracking: Racism 9

Topic Tracking: Family 8

Soon after, Cassie is at school when she sees Granger and one of the Wallace brothers come to the school with another man. Pretending she has to use the bathroom, she follows them to her mother's classroom. That day, Mama is teaching about slavery, and what a terrible business it was. The men smirk and pick up a textbook. When they see that she is not teaching from the book, she explains that the "facts" in the book are not true. Granger replies, "I expect you'd best just forget about teaching altogether...then thataway you'll have plenty of time to write your own book." Chapter 8, pg. 184

Everyone realizes Mama has just been fired. At home that evening, Mama is very unhappy. She has always wanted to teach. The next day, Cassie learns that T.J. was the one who let the Wallaces know that Mama wanted to keep people from shopping at their store. T.J. had been angry Mama had failed him. Stacey and the others attack T.J., but he denies the story. Stacey knows he is lying, and tells him he will be punished--later. T.J. gradually learns that no one at school will speak to him. When he sees he is being rejected, he says, "Got me better friends than y'all! They give me things and treat me like I'm a man and...and they white too..." Chapter 8, pg. 194

Topic Tracking: Quiet 8



## Chapter 9

Spring comes, and school will soon let out. Jeremy tells the Logan children he will miss them, and though they don't understand him, they are somewhat touched. Jeremy reveals that his brothers, R.W. and Melvin, who are almost twenty, have befriended T.J.--though Jeremy can see they just keep him around to make fun of him. Later, Mr. Jamison comes to the house. He tells Papa that one of the Wallaces has been threatening to put a stop to his black customers shopping in other stores. Mama is scared, but Papa asks her not to worry. Soon after, Papa says he has to go back to the railroad, even though he worries something will happen with the Walllaces when he is gone. Then T.J.'s father comes to the house. He tells the Logans he can no longer shop anywhere but at the Wallace store, because Granger and Wallace are charging him more money and calling in debts he can't pay. This is true for many other townspeople also. Papa is disappointed, but he understands. He tells his children that they will not give up. That night, Papa tells Mama he is going into town to shop at the other store, and she asks him not to. She is afraid of what might happen. He says he will take Stacey with him, because he doesn't want Stacey to end up a cheating fool like T.J. T.J., it turns out, cannot be disciplined because his father is ill and he is stronger than his mother. Papa takes his son and Mr. Morrison to town to shop. Seven families are still refusing to shop at the Wallace store. When it is late, and the men have not returned, Mama gets worried. Just then Mr. Morrison carries Papa into the house. Papa's leg is broken. The children are sent to their rooms, and Cassie demands to know what happened. Stacey finally explains that on their way back from town, one of the wheels of their wagon came off. When they were fixing it, someone shot at Papa. The shot scared their mule and Stacey couldn't control him. The mule tried to run, and the wagon rolled over Papa's leg. Stacey is convinced what happened is his fault. The other children assure him that it isn't. He tells them that Mr. Morrison scared the white men--probably the Wallaces--away, and they came home. Everyone worries that Papa will die.

Topic Tracking: Family 9



## Chapter 10

A week later, Papa and Mama talk about how much money they have left. They have very little, but they don't want to ask Hammer for any, because they don't want him to know what happened to Papa. If he found out, he would get very angry and probably get himself killed. They worry that Mr. Morrison might be hurt too, because of the way he beat up the Wallaces that night. Just then, Mr. Morrison says he is going to bring a planter to a neighboring farm, and the children go with him. On the way back, the Wallaces' truck appears, and they park it in the way of Morrison's wagon. Morrison won't listen to the Wallaces' taunts. He simply picks up the truck and moves it, to everyone's astonishment. Back at the house, Mama worries that Mr. Morrison has made the Wallaces even angrier. He wants to stay with the Logans and help them, though, so Mama says no more.

Several days later, Jeremy comes by to tell the children he is sorry about what happened to Papa. He asks about T.J., and although Stacey knows T.J. has become a thief, he says nothing. Jeremy says he would like to live in a tree--he already has a tree house. Jeremy tries to be friendly, but the children still do not fully trust him.

Mr. Morrison brings a note from Harlan Granger saying that the bank is calling in their debt. Not knowing what else to do, Papa calls Hammer, who says he will get the money somehow. Mama is angry, because since they are no longer bothering the Wallaces, Granger has no need to bother them. Papa tells her, "He's got a need to show us where we stand in the scheme of things. He's got a powerful need to do that." Chapter 10, pg. 233 Papa is still confident they will not lose the land.

Soon after, the weeklong religious celebration called the Revival begins. There is a huge feast and a party. One day as they are eating, they see Hammer coming down the road. He has sold his car to give the money to Papa. Hammer leaves a few days later, and though everyone misses him, they are also glad he is not around to make trouble.

Topic Tracking: Quiet 9

T.J. comes to the revival with R.W. and Melvin. He is dressed well, and everyone knows he has stolen the clothes. The white boys are obviously making fun of him behind his back. He announces that they are going to get him the gun he wanted. He seems upset when none of his black friends are impressed by this, and he leaves with the white boys.



## Chapter 11

A storm is coming. That night, Cassie wakes up and finds T.J. outside her door. T.J. tells her and Stacey, "I-I'm in trouble...I'm really in trouble." Chapter 11, pg. 244 He tells them that R.W. and Melvin beat him so badly he can't walk home alone. He explains that they beat him because he said he would tell people what happened that night. He finally tells Stacey what happened: he had broken into the shop to take the gun, but then the other boys had started breaking into many of the other cases, stealing things. When the shopowner appeared, R.W. hit him over the head, and he fell down, seeming dead. When the man's wife appeared, R.W. knocked her down too, and she also seemed dead. The boys had then beaten T.J. and abandoned him. T.J. begs Stacey to help him get home, and not to tell anyone. Stacey feels sorry for T.J. and decides to help him. Cassie and the two young boys will not let Stacey go by himself, so they all set out together in the middle of the night.

Topic Tracking: Family 10

T.J. just slips into his house when a group of cars pulls up and white men come pouring out of them. One of the Wallaces yells, "We want that thieving, murdering nigger of y'all's." Chapter 11, pg. 251 The Logan children watch in horror as T.J.'s whole family, even the young children, are pulled from the house and beaten. R.W. and Melvin are there, and they have told the other men that they saw T.J. with two other black boys robbing the store. Suddenly Mr. Jamison pulls up in his car and says, "Y'all decide to hold court out here tonight?" Chapter 11, pg. 254 The white men threaten Mr. Jamison, but he tells them to wait for the sheriff. When the sheriff arrives, however, he implies only that since T.J.'s family lives on Granger land, and Granger has said he won't stand for lynching on his land, they will have to go somewhere else. Jamison tries to stop them, and Stacey urges Cassie and the two little boys to run home and get Papa.

Topic Tracking: Racism 10



## Chapter 12

When they get home, their parents are relieved to see them. As soon as the children tell their story, their father gets his gun. He says, "This thing's been coming a long time...and T.J. just happened to be the one foolish enough to trigger it." Chapter 12, pg. 259 Mama begs him not to use the gun, but he says there is no other way--then he thinks for a moment. He runs off, and the women and children wait in terror. They smell smoke. The cotton fields are on fire, and they assume the lightning has caused it. Big Ma and Mama fight the fire, telling the children to stay inside. Jeremy appears later that night, and tells the children that everyone is fighting the fire--even R.W. and Melvin. He tells them their father and Stacey are all right. Finally, the rain comes. Once the fire is completely out, Little Man and Cassie go out to look around, but Christopher-John refuses to leave, since Mama told them to stay there. The two children see white and black people working side by side in the fields, but none of them talk to each other.

They return to their house and Mama and Big Ma come home. Mama tells them that T.J. was taken with the sheriff. There was no other violence, because everyone was busy fighting the fire. Cassie can see she isn't getting the whole story, so she waits until she can talk to Stacey alone, and then asks him to tell her everything. He says that Mr. Jamison tried to block the road with his car, but eventually the Wallaces and their friends just moved the car. Then Mr. Granger came running down the road yelling, "There's smoke coming from my forest yonder!" Chapter 12, pg. 271 So the men gave T.J. to the sheriff and went off to fight the fire together, so that all their crops wouldn't burn. Just then, Papa, Morrison and Jamison approach the house. Jamison tells Papa that the shopkeeper is dead. He says, "Folks thinking...that lightning struck that fence of yours and started that fire...it's better, I think, that you stay clear of this whole thing now..." Chapter 12, pg. 273 Cassie realizes that Papa started the fire, to stop the men from hanging T.J. without using his gun. Later, Papa tells the children that T.J. is in jail. He doesn't know if T.J. will be killed or not. Cassie is shocked. "What happened to T.J. in the night I did not understand, but I knew that it would not pass. And I cried for those things which had happened in the night and would not pass." Chapter 12, pg. 276

Topic Tracking: Quiet 10