



Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

Educator Resources

Text Information

Title: *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

Author: Mildred D. Taylor

Publication & Citation:

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

Text Complexity Information

- **Lexile: 920L** (appropriate for grades 4-8)
- **Moderately complex; features vocabulary that may be ambiguous to readers due to regional or archaic speech patterns**
- **Student knowledge and maturity should be considered when approaching sensitive topics**

ELA Common Core Standards Addressed (text)

- CCRA.R.1—Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- CCRA.R.2—Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- CCRA.R.3—Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
- CCRA.R.5—Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
- CCRA.W.4—Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- CCRA.W.9—Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Other standards, including History/Social Studies, are noted in Explore the Story/Additional Prompts. Nebraska-adapted standards are listed on the next page.

Common Core Standards / Nebraska State Standards Alignment

CCRA.R. 1	Nebraska LA 8.1.6.j Nebraska LA 8.1.6.n
CCRA.R. 2	Nebraska LA 8.1.6.b
CCRA.R. 5	Nebraska LA 8.1.6.g
CCRA.W. 4	Nebraska LA 8.2.2.a Nebraska LA 8.2.2.c
CCRA.W. 9	Nebraska LA 8.1.6.0
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH. 1	Nebraska SS 8.4.1.a Nebraska SS 8.4.2.a and b Nebraska SS 8.4.3.a and b Nebraska SS 8.4.5
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH. 2	Nebraska SS 8.4.2.a and b Nebraska SS 8.4.3.a and b Nebraska SS 8.4.5
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH. 7	Nebraska SS 8.4.5.c
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL. 7	Nebraska LA 8.1.6.g (partial)
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL. 9	Nebraska LA 8.1.6.b Nebraska 8.1.6.l
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST. 7	Nebraska SS 8.4.1.a Nebraska SS 8.4.2.a and b Nebraska SS 8.4.3.a and b Nebraska SS 8.4.5.a and b and c
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST. 8	Nebraska SS 8.4.1.a Nebraska SS 8.4.2.a and b Nebraska SS 8.4.3.a and b Nebraska SS 8.4.5.a and b and c
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST. 9	Nebraska SS 8.4.1.a Nebraska SS 8.4.2.a and b Nebraska SS 8.4.3.a and b Nebraska SS 8.4.5.a and b and c
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W. 3	Nebraska LA 8.2.2.a Nebraska LA 8.2.2.c
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL. 1	Nebraska LA 8.1.6.o
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL. 3	Nebraska LA 8.3.2.c
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL. 6	Nebraska LA 8.3.1.b

For students watching an adaptation or performance:
Nebraska Fine Arts Standards FA 5.5.3 and 8.5.3, FA 5.5.4 and 8.5.4

Scaffolding and support for special education students, English language learners, and struggling readers:

To ensure the support and engagement of ALL learners—not only the learners designated special education and ELL—differentiation is an excellent way to help scaffold everyone to achieve learning targets. Beyond differentiation, and thinking specifically of SPED and ELL learners, accommodations such as assistive technology or the use of a scribe can be employed. The various accommodations that can be made include how material is presented, how learners respond, where the learners are asked to write, and/or timing/scheduling accommodations. One accommodation is to provide the learners with an audio version of the book, or to view a theatrical performance. Also, extending reading experiences through during- and post-reading activities allow for a closer and slower exploration of the text.

Key Insights to Be Drawn From This Text

- The author’s literary craft, particularly:
 - Foreshadowing
 - Allusions
 - Extended metaphors
 - Symbolism
- The social, legal, and economic concerns of black people during the twentieth century; this text deals primarily with the American South, but students may see parallels to their own geographic region
- Theme
 - Coming of age
 - Loss of innocence
 - Triumph of the human spirit
 - Importance of place/ownership
- Meaning of the title
- Importance of the geographical / historical setting

Text-Dependent Questions

CHAPTERS 1–4

Recall and Reading Comprehension

1. What does T.J. want Stacey to do about Mrs. Logan's tests?

Get the answers before

2. Why does it take the Logans and their friends an hour to walk to school?

Only white children have a bus; black children do not.

3. What happens to the Berry family?

White men set fire to John Henry, Beacon and their uncle; John Henry dies and the other two are maimed.

4. Why doesn't Cassie like T.J.?

He's gets Stacey in trouble; he's a sneak and a cheat.

5. Why does the Great Faith School start later and end earlier than the Jefferson Davis County School? Because black children work in the fields from spring until fall.

6. How do the Logan children get back at the bus driver?

They dig a ditch which fills with rain; the bus breaks down.

7. Why does Stacey disobey Mama and go to the Wallace store?

To get T.J. who got him in trouble

8. How do the landowners and storekeepers take advantage of the sharecroppers? Storekeepers charge the sharecroppers more for their purchases and for charging them. The landowners already take half of the profit from the crops the sharecroppers grow. Between the two, sharecroppers rarely have any cash and can't break out of this cycle.

Interpretation and Analysis

9. Why is the land so important to the Logans?

Their land represents independence; it means that they can escape the sharecropper existence.

10. Why is Miss Crocker so pleased with the old, dirty books?

Because the school has never had any books; she is used to being treated poorly; she expects it.

11. Why does Miss Crocker say Mama is "biting the hand that feeds" her?

Mama doesn't appreciate the old books; she knows there are other things the school needs too.

12. Why does Mr. Grimes, the bus driver, go out of his way to get the black children dirty? He may be prejudiced; he thinks it's funny to do.

13. Why does Stacey say he'll tell Mama what happened at the Wallace store?

Because he believes it's the right thing to do; Mr. Morrison has let him make his own decision.

14. What problems do you predict for the Logans and others in the rest of the story? Student answers will vary.

Literary Elements of the Story

15. Voice: Who is telling this story? Cassie

Personal Response / Writing Prompt

16. How do you feel about the way black children in this story were educated in the 1930s?

CHAPTERS 5-8

Recall and Reading Comprehension

1. How does Mama want to retaliate for the attack on the Berry men?

She wants people to boycott the Wallace store.

2. What does Mr. Granger say to threaten the Logans?

He says they'll lose their land if they make trouble; the bank won't honor their mortgage. He says sharecroppers will get less money for their cotton and won't be able to pay their debts if they make trouble.

3. How does Mr. Granger take his anger out on Mama?

He gets her fired from her job.

4. Why does Stacey drop T.J. as a friend?

T.J. gets Mama fired; T.J. speaks badly of her because she failed him in class.

Interpretation and Analysis

5. Why does Big Ma take Cassie and Stacey to market?

She has to take T.J. and doesn't want to put up with him alone.

6. Why doesn't Cassie understand Mr. Barnett's behavior?

She thinks it is rude and unfair, but doesn't know this is how black people are often treated.

7. Why does Big Ma make Cassie apologize to Lillian Jean?

She's afraid for Cassie and wants to protect her.

8. What kinds of arguments do you think Mr. Morrison used to persuade Uncle Hammer not to visit the Simms? He may have thought Uncle Hammer would be hurt or killed; Mama or children might have been hurt; "Turn the other cheek."

9. How would you describe Uncle Hammer?

He might be described as proud, angry, resentful, tough, impulsive, hot-headed, defiant, generous

10. Why does Cassie think Uncle Hammer's tongue-lashing is worse than her father's whipping?

Uncle Hammer is very angry, gets cold look in his eye, shows his disgust with Stacey's stupidity. She's more sure of Papa's love.

11. Why will boycotting the Wallace store be dangerous?

Harlan Granger owns the land the store is on and gets part of the income. Accusing the Wallaces and asking that they be punished for burning and killing a black man.

Literary Elements

12. Mood: What is the mood of the story at the end of Chapter 7?

Ominous, dangerous, threatening, defiant

Personal Response / Writing Prompt

13. How do you feel about the way Cassie handles her problem with Lillian Jean?

CHAPTERS 9–12

Recall and Reading Comprehension

1. Who kills Mr. Barnett?

R. W. hits him with an ax.

2. How does Papa get Mr. Granger to stop the crowd at the Averys?

He sets the cotton on fire.

Interpretation and Analysis

3. In what ways are Mama and Papa brave?

They have a great deal at stake—their friends, their land, their safety, their lives, the lives of their children—to stand up for what's right and what's wrong.

4. Why does Papa defend Mr. Avery's and Mr. Lanier's decision to back out of the boycott? He

understands they too have a lot at stake—they could be sent to a chain gang; they are sharecroppers and don't own any land.

5. Why does Papa think Stacey should go with him when he asks people about Vicksburg? He

believes Stacey should be strong and learn how to handle himself.

6. How does Stacey grow up after the wagon accident?

He feels responsible and tries to shield his siblings from the harshness of the story.

7. Why is the revival so important?

It's a chance for people to get together, feast, reaffirm beliefs.

8. How does Uncle Hammer show that the land is important to him?

He sells his car to raise money for the mortgage.

9. Why does T.J. believe the Simms brothers care about him?

He isn't very bright; he wants to feel important; he thinks highly of himself.

10. List the events that happen to T.J. which lead to the mob invading his home. Does the text suggest the white men had a right to treat T.J. as they did?

Answers will vary.

Literary Elements

11. Character: Why does Stacey decide to help T.J. after the robbery at the Barnetts' store? He

understands that T.J. is in real trouble and feels responsible for T.J.'s safety; he's loyal.

12. Mood: How does the author create an ominous mood in Chapter 11?

Storm, thunder, lightning, heavy air

13. Point of View: How does the author create an ominous mood in Chapter 11?

Storm, thunder, lightning, heavy air

Personal Response / Writing Prompt

14. What is your response to the story's ending?

Explore the Story / Additional Prompts

- **As a group, create a menu for a meal that might have been served in the Logan household.** What ingredients may have been in common use at the time but are infrequently used now? How have kitchens changed since the 1930s?
(CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.1, RH.2, RH.7
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.7, WHST.8, WHST.9)
Some possible sources to explore with teacher or parent include:
 - <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/meet-mama-lena-celebrity-chef-and-creole-cookbook-author-180975085/>
 - <https://firstwefeast.com/eat/2015/08/an-illustrated-history-of-soul-food>
 - <https://www.si.edu/sidedoor/ep-8-americas-unknown-celebrity-chef>
 - <https://restaurant-ingthroughhistory.com/tag/jim-crow-restaurants/>
 - <https://www.atlasobscura.com/foods/chitlins-american-south>
 - https://kids.kiddle.co/Cuisine_of_the_Southern_United_States
- ***Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* is a work of historical fiction, published as a book. However, the book has been adapted into movies and now, a play.** Ask students to compare the book to the movie, using the handout at the end of this section, or ask students to write a movie or drama review, like one they might read in the newspaper or a magazine, following the conventions listed. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL7, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.1 and W.3)
- A pre-writing exercise may be useful for younger or less experienced writers. Sample questions for a pre-writing exercise for this activity are included at the end of handout. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1, SL.3, and SL.6). This exercise may also serve as a standalone activity for younger students.
- Younger students who do **not** read the book but watch the film/play can use the

Key Resources for Students and Teachers:

American Library Association Interview with Mildred D. Taylor

<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/resources/taylor>

Oprah Magazine Interview with Mildred D. Taylor

<https://www.oprahmag.com/entertainment/books/a30535291/mildred-taylor-roll-of-thunder-hear-my-cry-interview/>

Mildred D. Taylor page on Penguin site

<http://us.penguin.com/nf/Author/AuthorPage/0,,1000031974,00.html>

Mildred D. Taylor resources from the Mississippi Writers Page

http://www.olemiss.edu/mwp/dir/taylor_mildred/

Jim Crow history and tools

<https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/jimcrow/>

For teachers, an extensive unit from The Center for Learning features pre-reading exercises and surveys, vocabulary, worksheets, and activities around literary style

<https://www.mooreschools.com/cms/lib/OK01000367/Centricity/Domain/2786/4S1845DL.pdf>

Critical Viewing Guide

for film or stage adaptations AND book

Directions: Answer the following questions during the viewing

1. Do you notice any images that are seen several times? What happens when these images appear?
2. What are the main settings? How do characters respond to these settings?
3. Describe three differences you notice between the movie and the book?
4. Is there a difference between the plots of the movie or stage performance and the book?
5. Did you like the book better than the film or play? Why or why not?
6. Who would you cast, if you were to produce a new film of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*? Which scenes from the novel would you keep, and which would you eliminate from your film? Where would you film your movie?
7. What can movies and plays add that a book cannot? What do you notice as you watch that seems new?

Critical Viewing Guide

for film or stage adaptations only

Directions: Read these questions before the performance or viewing. It may help to take notes during the show to answer the questions later.

1. Who were the main characters of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*?
2. When and where is the story set? Is this important to the story?
3. What is the plot of this story? Be sure to list the central conflict and how it is resolved.
4. Directors of plays and film share their message with an audience through dialogue, but also through unspoken choices. What other elements do you notice as you watch—music, lighting, camera angles, length of the story, scene breaks, editing?
5. What scene from the story stands out to you? Was this your favorite part? How would you describe it? Was it scary, dramatic, funny, sweet? How did the director and actors make it scary, dramatic, funny, or sweet?
6. Did the story share a lesson with the audience? What was it? Write a paragraph or two about the lesson and how it might apply to your life or the life of someone you know

Write a Review

for film or stage adaptations

Directions: Read the following guidelines to learn about writing a review. Follow the steps listed to write your review, writing 5-7 sentences per paragraph.

Introduction

1. Include the film or play's title (remember to format correctly!), the production company, the release date or date of the showing, and the length of the production.
2. Use conversational language, telling a person you know about what you have just watched. Don't use slang or other informal language, though.
3. Explain who is the target audience for the production, and a general overview of the plot and characters, but don't give away spoilers!
4. As a thesis statement, give your overall opinion of the performance or film. (You'll develop this in the coming paragraphs.)

Paragraph 2

1. List main actors and their roles; list any notable roles that are pertinent to this performance, or awards they've won.
2. Did the actors fit the roles? Would you have cast them in the same role? Why or why not?
3. Were the acting performances, dialogue, setting, and other elements realistic? What characters were likable or unlikable? Were these things the same as in the book?

Paragraph 3

1. Help your reader understand the production by describing the setting and opening scenes. When is the story set? Where is the story set? What do we know about the characters when the show opens?
2. Give your readers a sense of the plot by explaining some of the rising action or important scenes. Explain why this story would be interesting to your audience.
3. Is the production's tone sad, dramatic, comedic, or suspenseful?
4. Does the film feature music? Who is it by, and what does it add to the production's tone?

Paragraph 4

1. If you're comparing the production to the novel, how is it the same, and how is it different?
2. If parts of the story or plot have been changed or eliminated, be careful not give away spoilers while describing the changes.

3. What themes are common to both the book and production? What should a viewer be watching for?

Conclusion

1. What did you like most about the production? What would you improve if you were in charge of the production? What did you not like or not understand?
2. Make a recommendation to your audience. Should they see this play or film? Is it one to rent or one to buy? Or should they simply buy the book? Is it a production to take the whole family to, or is it not suitable for some audiences—and if not, which audiences?

Pre-Writing Exercise—Developing Criteria for a Review:

Think, Pair, Share:

1. Talk as a large group or class about what criteria means. Define for students.
2. Ask students to think individually about a book, movie, or play they really like. What makes it so good? Write a list of all the good qualities you can think of.
3. With a partner or in a small group, talk about the items on your lists. Does your partner or group have similar lists? Are they different? Which items are the most important? Circle 3-5 of the most important qualities on your lists.
4. Share all of the qualities/criteria as a class by writing them on the chalk/dry erase/smart board. As a class, discuss which qualities/criteria work best for a book, play, movie, or all three.
5. For writing a review of the *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* stage adaptation, students can choose criteria from this list to help explain their evaluation of the performance, or the entire class can select criteria that they all agree to use, even if their assessment of whether or not the play met the criteria differs from their classmates.