

PinkMonkey Literature Notes on . . .

<http://monkeynote.stores.yahoo.net/>

Sample MonkeyNotes

Note: this sample contains only excerpts and does not represent the full contents of the booknote. This will give you an idea of the format and content.

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

by

**Mildred D. Taylor
1976**



MonkeyNotes Study Guide by Dr. Karen Ruff

<http://monkeynote.stores.yahoo.net/>

Reprinted with permission from TheBestNotes.com Copyright © 2003, All Rights Reserved
Distribution without the written consent of TheBestNotes.com is strictly prohibited.

KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

The story is set in Mississippi during the depression. It is an area where former plantation owners and their descendants have been forced to resort to sharecropping their land in order to continue some semblance of their pre-Civil War way of life. The Black families who had been freed by the war have had no where to go and no means of survival off the plantations. Thus they became the tenant farmers or sharecroppers, planting acres of cotton or other crops. The landowner took a percentage of the crop as his share, and the tenant farmer tried

CHARACTER LIST

Major Characters

Cassie Logan - protagonist. Nine year old daughter of David and Mary Logan. First person narrator. Faces problems of racism. She is the second oldest child in her family.

T.J. Avery - son of a black sharecropper family who is farming on the Granger land. Obnoxious know-it-all who commits serious errors in judgment in choosing his friends. Cheats on tests, makes fun of his friends, tries to get the Logan children to disobey their parents.

Stacey Logan - Cassie's older brother. Reasonably mature 13 year old. Cassie looks up to him for explanations on things she doesn't know yet. The oldest child in the Logan family.

Mr. Morrison - a guest who moves into a little shack on the Logan land. David brings him under the pretense of giving Mr. Morrison a job, but he really is there to protect the family when David is away

Minor Characters

Mama - Mary Logan, school teacher and mother to the Logan children. Soft spoken but not afraid to

Big Ma - Grandmother of the Logan children on the father's side. She actually owns the land but has it

Many additional characters are outlined in the complete study guide.

CONFLICT

Protagonist - Cassie Logan, a 9 year old girl in the Logan family wants to be able to go to school, choose her own friends, have nice books to read, and in general enjoy the rights and privileges—and receive the respect—that ought to belong to any human being. However, Cassie and her brothers live in the deep south during the depression in an area that suffers from racist attitudes in spite of the abolition of slavery nearly 75 years earlier. Although there.....

Antagonists - The antagonists are the white landowners, shopkeepers and their children with whom Cassie and her siblings must interact. If the Blacks do not behave as required, they can

Climax - The climax occurs when T.J. Avery gets involved in robbery and assault along with two white boys whom he regards as friends. When the boys go too far and T.J. tries to get out of it, they beat him up. The boys, who wear masks to conceal their identity, put the blame for the robbery all onto T.J. A group of.....

Outcome - The landowners and Logan family work together to put out the fire. The Logans are able to come up with the tax money and continue holding on to their land, but T.J. Avery is most likely going to.....

SHORT PLOT / CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

The story begins with the Logan children on their way to school. They walk to an all-black school and have to play a cruel game every day as the driver of the bus of white children enjoys racing the bus past the Logans just to see

them get covered with dust or mud, depending on the weather. The children try to time their walk so they can get up on a bank before the bus goes by, but usually they fail and are trapped between steep banks and the ditch.

This year is Little Man's first year of school. He is a very intelligent little six year old with a fetish for cleanliness and is frustrated from day one when the bus races by and sprays dust all over his best clothes.

He will start out in the same room as his 4th grade sister Cassie as the first grade teacher has not returned yet. The children start the year by getting new books for the first time—only the books aren't new, but are beat up cast-offs that have been labeled as suitable for the "nigra" children. Little Man first complains that the book is dirty, then sees the cover label and throws the book on the floor and stomps on it rebels. He refuses to pick it up at the teacher's order. Cassie sticks up for him and both children get a whipping. Their mother, also a teacher, sticks up for them and pastes brown paper over the school district label of the books for her own students as well as those of her children.

The Logan children are more fortunate than the rest of the children as their parents own the land which they farm rather than having to sharecrop the land as most of the area farmers do. As the school year progresses, other little complications occur among the children. Stacey finds a way to get even with the bus, and T.J. Avery, an obnoxious 14 year old, entices the Logan children into disobedient things that get them in trouble—until he fails his grade for cheating and drops out of school altogether. Furious at Cassie's mother for "failing" him, T.J. reports Mrs. Logan for "defacing" the school books and for teaching material that is not in the books. His actions cost Mrs. Logan her job. T.J. also begins to hang around with some trouble making white boys who promise they will get him anything he wants. He doesn't realize that they are just using him until it is too late.

In the meantime, the Logan family is struggling to hang onto their land. Papa takes a stand, however, when men of the Berry family are falsely accused of bothering a white woman and are dowsed in.....

THEMES

Major Themes

Friendship/Family - Cassie learns how disaster can result from choosing friends for the wrong reason as well as how to use false friendship to her own advantage. She and her siblings also discover that sometimes people who are not blood related are just as important as actual relatives. Part of growing up is developing an understanding of the things that really hold families and friends together.

Identity/Survival - An important element in being able to survive during hard times is.....

Additional themes are identified in the complete study guide.

MOOD

Somber, tragic, leaving the reader with a paralyzing sense of the injustice and cruelty inflicted on some of America's people. The protagonist also develops an understandable sense of bitterness.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY

Mildred Taylor was born in Jackson, Mississippi but grew up in Toledo, Ohio where her father had gone to find work. She attended the University of Toledo and spent two years in Ethiopia working with the Peace Corp. She then attended the University of Colorado where she received a Master's degree in journalism and was active in the Black Student Alliance.

In addition to Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry (first published in 1976), Taylor has written Song of the Trees which was named a New York Times Outstanding Book of the year 1975, Let the Circle Be Unbroken, The Road to Memphis and The Well. All five books continue the story of the Logan family. Roll of Thunder was produced as a three part television mini series in 1978. Let the Circle Be Unbroken, received a 1981 American Library

Association Best Book for Young Adults award as well as a 1982 American Book Award nominee in.....

LITERARY / HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The story takes place in Mississippi in the early 1900's. It is long after the Civil War, but long before integration. The southern states had been permitted to practice a "separate but equal" policy which really had nothing equal about it. Whites and blacks were separated in every way—separate schools, separate churches, designated water fountains, specific places to stand or sit in a market place, and so forth. Blacks had been freed by the Civil War but many had no place to go except back to the plantations they had left where they worked as tenant farmers. There they were at the mercy of the landlord who could take whatever percentage he.....

CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES / ANALYSIS

CHAPTER 1

Summary

The story opens with the Logan children on their way to school. They are walking which is usual, but as it is the first day of school, they are also wearing their best clothes and shoes. Usually they go to school barefoot. Little Man, the youngest is slowing everyone down because he is trying not to get any dirt on his clothes. The children are Little Man, Christopher John, Cassie, the main character of the story, and Stacey, the oldest boy. We receive a little background—information about the surrounding land which is occupied by tenant farmers in contrast to the Logan land which is actually owned by the family. Papa works out of town in order to make enough money to pay the taxes on the land.

Part way through the Granger land, the Logans are joined by T.J. Avery, son of one of Granger's tenant farmers. T.J. is repeating his class (which is taught by Mary Logan) because he had failed the previous year. On the way to school he informs the Logan of the "burning." Although he doesn't know "why," T.J. does know that on the previous night some white men had poured kerosene on the Berry men (another tenant family) and then lit a match to them.

Before the children can reach a crossroads where a bus load of white children regularly turns off toward the white school, the bus appears. The driver deliberately races by the children at an unreasonable speed so he can cover the Logans with dust. Attempts to get onto the bank in time to get out of the way are unsuccessful. They are dusting themselves off and cursing the bus when another friend, a little white boy named Jeremy Simms comes off of a forest path and walks as far as the cross roads with them.

The kids attend the Great Faith Elementary and Secondary School. Most of the children are from sharecropper families. The highlight of the first day of school is that all the children will have books this year. However, the books are 11 year old rejects from the white school. Little Man feels insulted and refuses the dirty, worn books. Cassie defends him and they both get paddled. After school, Miss. Crocker reports the incident to Mary Logan, whereupon Mary not only defends her kids, but pastes brown paper over the telling labels of the books for her own students.

Notes

This chapter not only introduces the major characters, but also sets up the complications that will unfold as the story progresses. Cassie, the protagonist, is a 9 year old girl who is just beginning to awaken to some of the injustices continually perpetrated against the sharecropper families around her. The school girl trivialities of who is going to sit where pale against the insult of being given a book labeled "nigra" after 10 years of white students had already used it. Stacey, age 13, is the oldest boy and looks after his younger siblings to the best of his ability. Little Man is characterized by his passion for cleanliness, an attribute which makes the dirty books that much more repulsive to him. Mary Logan is a soft-spoken woman who thinks things through before drawing conclusions. T.J., a rather cocky 14 year old and friend of Stacey's, is always bursting with new information and doesn't hesitate to make up a story to protect himself. He is not particularly honest, but he doesn't mean any harm to anyone either. His major

problem is that he has poor judgement and fails to recognize when white boys with whom he wants to be friends are merely using him.

CHAPTER 2

Summary

The Logans are in the field picking cotton when Papa appears coming down the road. He is home unexpectedly and has brought a guest, Mr. Morrison, with him. Mr. Morrison has lost his job on the railroad for fighting with white men; he says it was the white men's fault, but, of course, they did not lose their jobs. Cassie senses that Mr. Morrison is there for some reason other than a job.

After church the next day, Cassie listens to the adults as they exchange the neighborhood gossip. One of the Berry men have died; Mrs. Lanier says that the whole incident happened when the Berrys pulled up to a gas pump next to some white men and Henrietta Toggins claimed that one of the Berry men had been flirting with her daughter. The men chased the Berrys dragged them out of a house and set fire to them. As if changing the subject, Papa announces that the Logan family doesn't shop at the Wallace store which is where most of the sharecroppers do their shopping. Papa says that the Wallaces have been selling bootleg liquor to kids and that he doesn't want his children hanging around the Wallaces.

Notes

Taylor uses the church meeting and front porch chat as devices to tell what actually happened to the Berrys although she does not yet reveal who is responsible. Mr. Morrison is introduced as a "human tree in height," taller even than David Logan who is over 6 feet himself. Mary Logan also implies that things are going on which have not been revealed to the children, thus creating some foreshadowing for future crises.

CHAPTER 3

Summary

The end of October with the late fall rains has arrived. The children trudge to school in the mud, trying to get to the crossroads in time to prevent the Jefferson Davis school bus from spraying them with wet, red mud from the puddles. They are not usually successful. The next day the bus speeds by so close to the them that the children are forced to leap into the ditch to avoid being hit. Stacey figures out a way to get revenge and prevent the splashing from happening again, at least for awhile. At lunch time, he takes Cassie and the boys through the woods to the spot where the bus had splashed them that morning. Using pails and shovels, they dig a ditch all the way across the road and fill it with water. The plan works even better than they had planned, as continued rain and washout widen their ditch to the proportions of a small lake all the way across the dirt road. The bus driver barrels full speed into the ditch, breaking an axle and getting the bus stuck in the mud. The white children have to walk home in the rain.

That evening the children struggle with fits of giggles over their sweet revenge. Their revelry is brought to a halt when Mr. Avery arrives with the news that the night men are riding again. He mentions the bus driver which makes the kids think that someone knows what they did. They have a miserable, sleepless night, but nothing happens beyond a caravan of cars using their driveway to turn around.

Notes

The "night men" are a group of self appointed enforcers who ride around at night terrifying the black families whenever they think one of them has gotten "out of line." Their continuous threat is one of the reasons David Logan has brought Mr. Morrison to their home.....

OVERALL ANALYSES

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Cassie Logan - Cassie is the protagonist of the story. She is a nine year old child when the story begins and is just beginning to recognize injustices in the situations of the people around her. Cassie is characterized from the start as a very intelligent little girl with a fierce sense of loyalty and protective instincts toward her siblings. She is a typical child whose life prior to the story has consisted of school, squabbles with other tenant farmer children over trivialities like where to sit in the classroom. Her worst problem has been how to avoid getting buried in dust or spattered with mud by the white school bus that passes them on their way to school every day.

The novel begins a new phase of Cassie's life. She is not only growing up, which children did much younger in days when they had to help the family survive, but is also becoming aware of differences between herself and other children, differences which are based on skin color alone, but which she has difficult time accepting. Her first "protest" happens in school when she backs up Little Man who has objected to the used books. Expecting to be punished by her mother when Miss Crocker reports to her, Cassie tries to get to her.....

Stacey Logan - Stacey is Cassie's older brother—13 at the opening of the story. Due to his age, he is more mature than Cassie, but as he is also a boy, he has had access to information that she has not. He serves as an example to her, although his decisions are not always correct. When he runs off to the Wallace store to beat up T.J. for putting the blame for cheating onto him, he is acting impulsively. However, since it is simply one black boy fighting with another, the whites don't care.

Stacey does know how to be careful when the conflict involves whites; he shows deliberate planning and strategy when he digs the ditch across the road and does his best to quiet Cassie when she speaks up in the store in Strawberry.

Stacey does have his own lessons to learn, however. He is sensitive about being teased by older friends and allows T.J. to talk him out of the coat given to him by Uncle Hammer. The coat does not look bad on him, but T.J. wants it for himself. The scolding given to him by Mr. Morrison was worse than any.....

T.J. Avery - T.J. is the son of the sharecropper who farms part of the Granger land which adjoins the Logan land. He is a weak character who wants to be treated as a man. He wants to "count" in a society where his color makes him second class. He likes to feel important, a characteristic portrayed early in the story when he visits the Logans with news he thinks they have not yet received and makes a major project out of the telling. He tries to act big by teasing the younger children and by trying to talk them into things their parents have forbidden.

T.J. does not have a high sense of integrity. He sees nothing wrong with cheating on a test or lying to Stacey to get his new coat away from him. He uses his friends the same way the Simms use him later on. He is also gullible, measuring friendship in terms of how much he can get. He does not understand that his.....

Mr. Morrison - Mr. Morrison is a static character, but his superhuman strength, his deliberate, measured self-control, and his example of courage and determination make him a pivotal character. Early on, he breaks up the fight between T.J. and Stacey, but does not scold Stacey for his actions—beyond noting that they had been told NOT to go to Wallaces store. Stacey initially does not like him, but the ice is broken when Mr. Morrison leaves it up to him to tell Mama why they had disobeyed. Stacey could have chosen not to tell at all, but.....

PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

The novel is structured in a linear plot with the story segments paced according to the calendar. It begins with the start of the school year and ends just before the start of another school period a year later. The primary conflict is internal for Cassie as she is growing up and beginning to be aware of adult issues which often make no sense. Events occur in chronological sequence with an occasional story telling segment as a strategy for explaining the background of certain adult characters. Another strategy used to provide Cassie with information that moves the plot forward involves the local gossip such as that which takes place at the church meetings and the news passed

along among the children.

In addition to chronology, the novel is structured around a series of problems and solutions, each problem a result of the previous solution. The problems and their complicating elements become more insurmountable as.....

THEMES - THEME ANALYSIS

Friendship/Family - Cassie develops a more adult understanding of what friendship is as well as what it isn't. Little Jeremy Simms is, at least for the present, a real friend, perhaps because he is something of an outsider among his own people and family. Nevertheless, he never rides the bus, but chooses to walk through the woods and join the Logans. He shares his concerns about T.J. in a manner that is not merely gossip. He brings Christmas presents without expecting any in return, and the flute he gives to Stacey, he had made with his own hands. He invites them to his treasured spot—his tree house, and hastens to get help when he discovers the smoke. Jeremy is a friend who gives of himself without setting conditions on that gift.

Two false friend relationships in the story parallel each other with different outcomes, that of.....

Identity and Surviving - A second theme is one of preserving identity—not so much individual for the protagonist as the identity of a family with a heritage and traditions, and the intertwining of the identity with land ownership. The conflict between the Grangers and the Logans is not personal until the Logans make it so by taking customers away from the Wallace store and shopping in Vicksburg. David Logan understands that Granger does “have.....

Additional themes are analyzed in the complete study guide.

POINT OF VIEW

The story is told in first person, entirely from Cassie's perspective. The author uses gossip and story telling as devices to provide Cassie with information that a nine year old would not usually have. She also does things that a child would do such as following her brother to the forbidden store, making an

IMPORTANT QUOTES - QUOTATIONS AND ANALYSIS

1. *“To all our little first grade friends only today starting on the road to knowledge and education, may your tiny feet find the pathways of learning steady and forever before you.”*

Attribution/Analysis - Miss Crocker on the first day of School. The teacher means well, but has learned to conform to what is expected of her by the white school board. In spite of what she says, education is given to these children grudgingly and with many inaccuracies. (pg.19)

2. *“12.....September 1933....Very Poor.....nigra.”*

Attribution/Analysis - This is from the label inside the “new” books. Eleven children have used the books and worn them out before they were handed over to the black schools. Cassie and Little Man are outraged to be considered only good enough to handle the very worst of the white castoffs. This was typical of black schools throughout the south prior to integration. (pg. 25)

3. *“Yes'm, he can. He been reading since he was four. He can't read all them big words, but he can read them columns. See what's in the last row. Please look, Miz Crocker.”*

Attribution/Analysis - Cassie is defending her little brother regarding the books. Miss Crocker at first refuses to look, and then says “that's what you are.” Perhaps it is self-preservation, but Miss Crocker is.....

STUDY QUESTIONS: Comprehension and Discussion (secondary questions are discussion)

1. What white child meets the Logans on the way to school every day? (Jeremy Simms)
 - 1a. How does Jeremy pay a price for his persistence?

- 1b. Why does Stacey try to discourage Jeremy from walking with them?
2. Whom does Papa bring home with him from the railroad? (Mr. Morrison)
3. How did Mr. Morrison lose his railroad job? (Fighting)
- 3a. Mr. Morrison says that he was not the one responsible for starting the fight, but that he was the only one fired as the other men were white. Discuss actions and characteristics of Mr. Morrison that indicate that he is telling the truth.
4. What is wrong with the school books? (They have labels indicating that they are white discards)
5. What does Mama do to help the children feel better about using the books? (Covers the labels with brown paper)
- 5a. In addition to the books, describe other indications that education of the blacks is not.....

VOCABULARY

Words to know - Define each of the following terms and/or tell how it is culturally significant in the context of the story.

- Sharecropper
- Credit
- “nigra”
- Racism
- Freedom....

ESSAY TOPICS - BOOK REPORT IDEAS

1. Define friendship and use examples from the story to differentiate between real friends and false ones.
2. Write a character analysis of Cassie showing what kind of person she is at the beginning of the story and the ways in which she changes by the end of the story.
3. Write a comparison between Uncle Hammer and Mr. Morrison. Why is Mr. Morrison safer to have around? Pretend you are a 1930's tourist who happens to be visiting the store in Strawberry on the.....

END OF SAMPLE MONKEYNOTES EXCERPTS

<http://monkeynote.stores.yahoo.net/>

Copyright ©2004 TheBestNotes.com.

Reprinted with permission of TheBestNotes.com. All Rights Reserved.

Distribution without the written consent TheBestNotes.com is strictly prohibited.