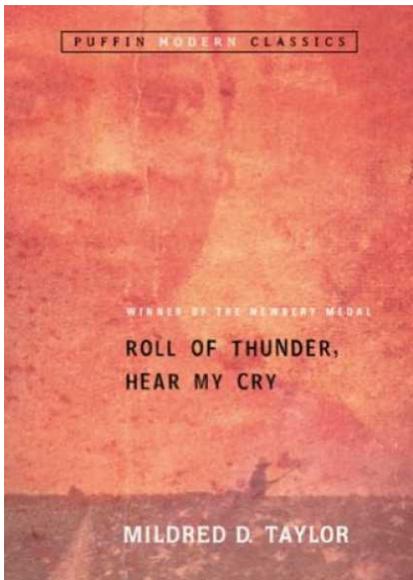


Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

by Mildred D. Taylor
A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit



About the Book

Winner of the 1977 Newbery Medal, this is a remarkably moving novel—one that has impressed the hearts and minds of millions of readers. Set in Mississippi at the height of the Depression, it is the story of one family's struggle to maintain their integrity, pride, and independence in the face of racism and social injustice. And, too, it is Cassie's story—Cassie Logan, an independent girl who discovers over the course of an important year why having land of their own is so crucial to the Logan family, even as she learns to draw strength from her own sense of dignity and self-respect.

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Book details:

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred D. Taylor.

Puffin Modern Classics edition: Puffin, 2004, ISBN 978-0-14240-112-5. Grades 5-up.

Other editions available; see <http://us.penguin.com>. Originally published 1976 by Dial Books for Young Readers.

Other formats: audiobook, 2005, ISBN 978-0-307281722.

Available through the State Library of Ohio Talking Book Program: <http://www.klas.com/talkingbooks/ohio>.

Available in audio through the Ohio eBook Project, <http://ohdbks.lib.overdrive.com/>.



Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry won the 1977 Newbery Medal, an annual award honoring the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children.

It was also a National Book Award finalist, an American Library Association (ALA) Notable Book, a Jane Addams Peace Association honor book, a National Council for the Social Studies / Children's Book Council Notable Children's Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies, and a Boston Globe-Horn Book Award Honor Book.

Other books by Mildred D. Taylor, with original publishers and publication dates:

Song of the Trees. Dial Books for Young Readers, 1975.

Let the Circle Be Unbroken. Dial Books for Young Readers, 1981.

The Gold Cadillac. Dial Books for Young Readers, 1987.

The Friendship. Dial Books for Young Readers, 1987.

Mississippi Bridge. Dial Books for Young Readers, 1990.

The Road to Memphis. Dial Books for Young Readers, 1990.

The Well. Dial Books for Young Readers, 1995.

The Land. Phyllis Fogelman Books, 2001.

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry tells the story of the Logans, one African American family fighting to stay together and strong in the face of brutal racist attacks, illness, poverty, and betrayal in the Deep South of the 1930s. Most of Taylor's novels center on the lives of this family. These books, in chronological order of the sequence of events in the lives of the Logan family, include:

The Land

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

Let the Circle Be Unbroken

Mississippi Bridge

The Road to Memphis

Song of the Trees

The Well: David's Story



About the Author

Mildred D. Taylor was born in Jackson, Mississippi, and grew up in Toledo, Ohio. After graduating from the University of Toledo, she spent two years in Ethiopia with the Peace Corps teaching English and history. As a member of the Black Student Alliance, at the University of Colorado, she worked with students and university officials in structuring a Black Studies program at the university. Upon receiving her master's degree, she worked in the Black Education Program as study skills coordinator. She currently lives in Colorado.

Mildred D. Taylor shares her story:

From as far back as I can remember my father taught me a different history from the one I learned in school.

By the fireside in our Ohio home and in Mississippi, where I was born and where my father's family had lived since the days of slavery, I had heard about our past. It was not an organized history beginning in a certain year, but one told through stories about great-grandparents and aunts and uncles and others that stretched back through the years of slavery and beyond. It was a history of ordinary people. Some brave, some not so brave, but basically people who had done nothing more spectacular than survive in a society designed for their destruction. Some of the stories my father had learned from his parents and grandparents as they had learned from theirs; others he told first-hand, having been involved in the incidents himself. There was often humor in his stories, sometimes pathos, and frequently tragedy; but always the people were graced with a simple dignity that elevated them from the ordinary to the heroic.

Those colorful vignettes stirred the romantic in me. I was fascinated by the stories, not only because of what they said or because they were about my family, but because of the manner in which my father told them. I began to imagine myself as storyteller, making people laugh at their own human foibles or nod their heads with pride about some stunning feat of heroism. But I was a shy and quiet child, so I turned to creating stories for myself instead, carving elaborate daydreams in my mind.

I do not know how old I was when the daydreams became more than that, and I decided to write them down, but by the time I entered high school, I was confident that I would one day be a writer. I still wonder at myself for feeling so confident since I had never particularly liked to write, nor was I exceptionally good at it. But once I had made up my mind to write, I had no doubts about doing it. It was just something that would one day be. I had always been taught that I could achieve anything I set my mind to. Still a number of years were to lapse before this setting of my mind actually resulted in the publication of any of my stories.

In those intervening years spent studying, traveling, and living in Africa, and working with the Black student movement, I would find myself turning again and again to the



stories I had heard in my childhood. One story in particular kept nagging at me, a story my father had once told me about the cutting of some beloved trees on our family land. I attempted to write it from the grandmother's point of view without success. Gradually as I struggled, new twists to the story began to emerge. At last I decided to tell it through the eyes of Cassie Logan, a spirited eight year old.

In ***Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*** (Dial 1976), I included the teachings of my own childhood, the values and principles by which I and so many other Black children were reared, for I wanted to show a different kind of Black world from the one so often seen. I wanted to show a family united in love and self-respect, and parents, strong and sensitive, attempting to guide their children successfully, without harming their spirits, through the hazardous maze of living in a discriminatory society.

I also wanted to show the Black person as heroic. In my own school days, a class devoted to the history of Black people in the United States always caused me painful embarrassment. This would not have been so if that history had been presented truly, showing the accomplishments of the Black race both in Africa and in this hemisphere. But as it was, the indictment of slavery was also an indictment of the people who were enslaved a people who, according to the texts, were docile and childlike, accepting their fate without once attempting to free themselves. To me, this lackluster history of Black people totally devoid of any heroic or pride-building qualities, was as much a condemnation of myself as it was of my ancestors. I used to sit tensely waiting out those class hours trying to think of ways to repudiate what the textbooks said, for I recognized that there was a terrible contradiction between what was in them and what I learned at home.

It is my hope that to the children who read my books, the Logans will provide those heroes missing from the schoolbooks of my childhood, Black men, women, and children of whom they can be proud.

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Author Resources:

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/

For publicity and speaking engagement inquiries:

For publicity materials, contact Penguin Young Readers Group:

schoolandlibrary@us.penguin.com

Please note that Mildred D. Taylor does not make author appearances.



Talk About it!

(Spoiler warning! Some discussion questions refer to key events in the book. Do not read if you don't want to find out what happens.)

- The book is about events in the 1930s, but was written in the 1970s. The title is a line from a song sung by slaves in the pre-Civil War American South. Why has Taylor chosen this particular title? Note the complete text at the beginning of chapter 11.
- As the book opens, the children are walking to school. This is the first day, and there are different responses from the children, most markedly between Little Man and Cassie. What is the dramatic purpose of this little scene? Note that this is an interesting family dynamic, telling us something about Cassie that might be important for the book.
- The ownership of land looms large in this book. Cassie tries to explain her father's response to the land as well as her own. She objects to her father having to leave to work on the railroad. Read his explanation and her response in chapter 1 (Puffin Modern Classics edition, p. 7). Read carefully the paragraph beginning, "*I looked at Papa...*" What does Cassie not understand?
- T. J. appears quickly and we get a rather unpleasant picture of him in chapter 1. Why does the author bring him in so early? Obviously he is to furnish a contrast by his behavior here. What is wrong with his behavior--in terms of a theme for the story?
- At first Stacey does not feel close to Mr. Morrison. Why? Then the incident of the fight at the Wallace store occurs. As a consequence, "*the distance between them fad[ed]*" (Puffin Modern Classics edition, p. 88). What does Stacey understand here? What is Mr. Morrison trying to make him understand?
- In Chapter 6, Big Ma returns from the trip to Strawberry. They are greeted with Uncle Hammer, obviously successful from his working in the North. Cassie has an ally in Uncle Hammer. Why is this character introduced right at this point in the book? Note the discussion between Mama and Cassie. What is Mama trying to impress upon Cassie?
- Jeremy Simms calls at the Logan home while they are celebrating Christmas. The episode is somewhat unpleasant for most readers. Certainly Taylor has her reasons for this episode. What can they be?



<http://oh.webjunction.org/ohctointro>

- Consider the importance of Cassie's talk with her father about Lillian Jean. What is the essence of his instructions to her? What is he warning against and what is he suggesting is right for her? Look at and analyze the symbolism in this scene.
- Papa, in spite of everything that T. J. has done to harm the family, sets fire to his own crops to stop the violence against him. Why?

*Above discussion questions courtesy Dr. Janice E. Patten; from The Literary Link. Ed. Janice E. Patten.
<http://theliterarylink.com/>. Used with permission.*

- Why is it dangerous to boycott the Wallace store? Is the boycott worth the risk? Why or why not?
- What have you learned about how African American children were educated in the 1930s? How has the American system of education changed since then?
- T.J.'s fate is unknown at book's end. Discuss what you think happens to him and why.
- How does weather actually affect the events in the book? What symbolic significance does weather have? Identify scenes in which the weather and natural phenomena are integral to the plot, and discuss how weather and human experience are intertwined.



<http://oh.webjunction.org/ohcintro>

Learn & have fun!

Educators: These activities align to Ohio Academic Content Standards as indicated in parentheses after each activity. These are examples. Other content standards may also apply.

Teens, parents, and others: These ideas are useful for library programs, family activities, and other projects. Academic content standards define what students in K-12 should know and be able to do at each grade. They are included for teachers who want to use this book in school. For more information on the Ohio Academic Content Standards, see the Ohio Department of Education website at <http://www.ode.state.oh.us> and click on "Academic Content Standards" in the Educators section.

- Research the African American civil rights movement. Compile a list of events and situations in the book that were addressed in whole or part by reforms inspired by the civil rights movement. Is the civil rights movement still active? Is its work complete? Create a poster or slide presentation summarizing your research and conclusions, and present it to your class or group. (SS History 9-10 Benchmark F; SS People in Societies 9-10 Benchmark B; ELA Communications: Oral and Visual 5-7, 8-10; ELA Writing – Research 5-7, 8-10; T Technology and Communication Applications 6-8 Benchmark B)
- The book's title is taken from an African American "slave song". Research spirituals and slave songs, using online resources available to students through INFOhio (<http://www.infohio.org/>) and to all Ohio residents through Ohio Web Library (<http://www.ohioweblibrary.org/>). The website *Sweet Chariot: The Story of the Spirituals* (<http://ctl.du.edu/spirituals/>) also provides information plus audio clips of numerous songs. Use photographs, audio, and text to create a web page or slide show describing how African Americans used song to address their oppression. (SS History 6-8 Benchmark G; SS People in Societies 6-8 Benchmark B; ELA Writing – Research 5-7, 8-10; Library Technology Literacy 6-8, 9-12 Benchmark C)
- Plan and prepare a meal that might have been served in the Logan household. Or: organize a potluck for your group or class, using only ingredients that would have been available to the Logans. What ingredients may have been in common use at the time but are infrequently used now? How have kitchens changed since the 1930s? (SS Economics 9-10 Benchmark A; T Designed World 608 Benchmark C; T Technology & Society Interaction 6-8, 9-12 Benchmark C)
- **Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry** is a work of fiction based on a real-life story that Mildred Taylor's father told her. Interview a family member about an important experience in his or her past, then use the information to create a fictionalized account of the event. Read your story to your class or group and to the person whom you interviewed. (SS Social Studies Skills and Methods 6-8, 9-10 Benchmark A; ELA Writing Process 5-7, 8-10; ELA Writing Applications 5-7, 8-10)

Many additional extension activities and projects are available for **Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry**. See the "Explore More" section of this toolkit for links.



<http://oh.webjunction.org/ohctrointro>

Explore more!

A Reading Guide to *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

http://www.scholastic.com/kids/homework/pdfs/Roll_of_Thunder.pdf

This extensive guide from Scholastic Reference covers the plot, setting, themes, and characters, and offers study questions and extension activities plus further reading.

Cultural Pluralism in Young Adult Literature: *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

<http://learningtogive.org/lessons/unit19/>

A unit of three lessons, with role-play activities, that tackles discrimination in 1933 Mississippi and analyzes the effects of discrimination on community capital and self-worth.

The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/>

Online companion to the PBS series explores the system of government-sanctioned racial oppression and segregation in the United States. Includes a detailed timeline, video clips, historic documents, and interactive extension activities.

Remembering Jim Crow

<http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/remembering/>

Audio interviews, personal histories, and slide shows documenting the history of Jim Crow through the memories of Americans who lived through this era in the southern U.S.

eThemes: Decade of 1930-1939

<http://ethemes.missouri.edu/themes/1602>

A collection of links to sites about the history and events of the 1930s including the causes and effects of the Great Depression, from the University of Missouri's eThemes project.

Mississippi History Now

<http://mshistory.k12.ms.us/>

An online publication of the Mississippi Historical Society to encourage interest in and study of Mississippi history.

About Choose to Read Ohio

Choose to Read Ohio (CTRO) spotlights Ohio authors and promotes reading across Ohio. The State Library of Ohio, in partnership with Ohioana Library Association, developed this initiative to encourage Ohioans of all ages to share literature by authors native to, residing in, or associated with Ohio. CTRO is adaptable for use in classrooms, libraries, bookstores, by book discussion groups, families, and other community groups.

Explore Choose to Read Ohio resources & toolkits: <http://oh.webjunction.org/ohctrointro>.