

Table of Contents

Introduction	ii
Background	iii
Unit 1: Chapter 1	1
Unit 2: Chapter 2	5
Unit 3: Chapter 3	9
Unit 4: Chapter 4	13
Unit 5: Chapter 5	17
Unit 6: Chapter 6	21
Unit 7: Chapter 7	25
Unit 8: Chapter 8	30
Unit 9: Chapter 9	34
Unit 10: Chapter 10	39
Unit 11: Chapter 11	43
Unit 12: Chapter 12	48
Closing Discussion	52
Writing Projects	53
Answer Key	54



Introduction

This guide is divided into twelve units of study, and includes the following components:

Pre-reading Discussion

This is a detailed section on the key elements that readers will encounter in the reading assignment. The Pre-reading Discussion centers on the literary elements of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and gives suggestions for provoking interest in the chapters ahead. The section ends with ideas for initiating class discussions about the important concepts in the book.

Study Guide and Vocabulary List

Each unit contains a study guide and vocabulary list, along with a corresponding reading assignment. Study guide pages are designed to be duplicated and distributed when the reading assignment is given. Students should answer the questions and study the vocabulary words. Each study guide contains a “Writing Forum” section, in which students are asked to write a brief explication of some textual element. You may want to choose one or all of the questions listed; students may keep the Writing Forum questions in a continuing notebook. The following day’s class session could begin with a review of the written work before proceeding to a discussion of the chapters.

Discussion Concepts

This section details the important concepts that students have encountered in their reading of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and may be used to initiate class discussions. Discussions should involve events in the story and their relevance to the characters, important themes, and comparing and contrasting actions and statements. Students should be able to find quotes to support their opinions when necessary. Teachers may want to ask students to practice note-taking periodically during this discussion.

Tests

Tests of comprehension and vocabulary are included in the *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* guide. Varied formats challenge students to think intently and creatively about the material.

Writing Projects

The writing projects at the end of the guide may be used as students progress through *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, or after the class has finished Unit 12.

Background

Type of Literature

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry is a novel of realistic fiction that concerns itself with issues of prejudice, courage, and self-respect. The types of events described in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* are characteristic of incidents that actually took place in the 1930's, but the characters and events are fictional.

Setting and Atmosphere

The setting of the story, or the time and place in which the events of the story occur, is a small town in Mississippi in 1933, during the height of the Depression. The events of the novel are set within the economic conditions and value systems present at this time in the American South.

The events of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* are appropriate in terms of the historic context in which they occur. An atmosphere of tension pervades the text, highlighting the volatility of the racial tension that forms the center of the novel.

Character Development

The characters in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* are developed through their words, actions, and feelings. The events of the novel are experienced through the character of Cassie, whose life is changed by the events that occur. Other characters who experience change are Stacey and T.J., who are set up in direct contrast within the issue of interracial relationships. Mr. Granger and Kaleb Wallace serve as antagonists to Cassie's family and to the ideals Mama and Papa have taught their children.

When the book begins, Cassie has been protected by her family from knowledge of the racial tension that surrounds her. Segregated schools and buses for white children only are simple facts of life. Cassie is shocked to learn that a black man is burned to death and another is tarred and feathered; however, she does not comprehend that these incidents are racial conflicts. It is the act of witnessing the caravan of cars driven by "night men" that triggers a change in Cassie's understanding. Cassie loses her naïveté about her racial environment and becomes more aware of the tension between blacks and whites; yet, in this process, she is forced to become less accepting of others. With the loss of tolerance comes mistrust of others, and Cassie is left wiser, yet scarred and disillusioned.

The picture of the three Simms brothers presents a strong statement about the nature of prejudice. R.W. and Melvin represent the tough, narrow, black-hating faction of the white population; yet their brother, Jeremy, stands for the type of fair, unbiased white person that can make a difference in the way blacks and whites relate to each other. Jeremy, as the white child who sees beyond racial barriers, symbolizes the same type of hope that Cassie, the black child who sees the same thing, represents.

Plot

The plot consists of the series of events that introduce, develop, and resolve the major conflict in the story. Conflict exists in every narrative, and may appear in various forms. Conflict may exist between one person and another, between one person and a group, or between one person and nature or the environment. Several major conflicts may exist within one story; these are subplots. Conflicts are resolved, though not necessarily happily, by the end of the text.

The plot of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* involves the conflict between the Logans and Mr. Granger, as he attempts to suppress the rights of blacks in the community. One subplot involves Cassie and her conflict with Lillian Jean; another addresses T.J.'s need to be respected and admired.

The many issues of racial equality discussed in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* coalesce in the major conflict of the novel, when Papa and Uncle Hammer must repay their loan in order to retain ownership of their land. This problem is resolved by the end of the book, and the land that allows the Logans their freedom and independence is saved. The subplot involving Cassie and Lillian Jean is resolved when Cassie avenges the humiliation Lillian Jean caused her, maintaining her self-respect as she moves forward in her understanding of racial barriers. The subplot that discusses T.J.'s conflict with racial boundaries is resolved unhappily, as T.J. fails to recognize who his true allies are. This failure underscores the major conflict of the novel, reiterating the lesson of independence, honor, self-respect, and community support that the Logans have taught their children.

Point of View

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry is told from the first-person point of view. The reader is allowed to see and understand only what Cassie sees and understands. In this way, the reader progresses with Cassie towards an awareness of the nature of prejudice.

Theme

The theme of a book may be either directly stated or implicit. In disseminating a text, the theme, or central concept of the story, becomes recognizable as a universally known idea.

The central theme of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* is the fight for racial equality, presented in terms of the events that take place in the Logans' community. When, in Chapter 5, Cassie is confronted with the threat of physical harm if she isn't subservient towards Mr. Barnett and Lillian Jean, the novel begins to focus on the escalating conflict between the blacks and the whites in the community. This initiates the series of events involving the Logans' fight for equality.

Other closely related themes function within this central theme. Integrity, self-respect, self-knowledge, and growing up are all issues that are part of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. As racial tension builds within the novel, Cassie begins the process of growing up by slowly becoming aware of the reality of her environment. When Cassie begins to function within the constraints of her society, understanding her father's admonition that "there'll be a whole lot of things you ain't gonna wanna do but you'll have to do in this life just so you can survive," she becomes aware of the increasing tension between the black and the white adults in her community. The conflict, marked by her mother's dismissal from school, her father's injury at the hands of white assailants, and the sudden recall of the bank loan as pressure designed to keep the Logans "in their place," educates Cassie in the kind of experiences she must accept in order to become an adult. Throughout these episodes, the themes of integrity, self-knowledge, and self-respect that pervade the text are reinforced as ways in which people retain their dignity in an oppressive society.