

Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry

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Overview

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry is a powerful work of historical fiction set in rural Mississippi during the Great Depression, centered on the Logan family, one of the few Black families in the area who own their land. The story is narrated by nine-year-old Cassie Logan, who, along with her three brothers, must navigate the brutal realities of racism and segregation while learning the importance of family, pride, and resilience. The novel follows the Logans over the course of a single year, as they face threats from white neighbors, the night riders of the Ku Klux Klan, and economic pressures that threaten their land. Through Cassie's eyes, the reader witnesses the daily humiliations and dangers of Jim Crow South, as well as the quiet strength of her parents and grandmother in protecting their family and their dignity.

The central arc of the book is the Logans' struggle to hold onto their land, which represents their independence and self-respect in a society that denies both to Black people. When Cassie's father, David Logan, organizes a boycott of a white-owned store that cheats Black customers, the family faces violent retaliation. The climax comes when a white boy, T.J. Avery, is falsely accused of a crime and lynched by a mob, but the Logans and their neighbors manage to divert the mob to save him, though he is later taken away by the sheriff. The novel ends with the family's land safe for now, but the threat of violence and injustice remains ever-present.

This book matters because it offers an unflinching, child's-eye view of racism and its devastating effects, while also celebrating the strength of community and the importance of standing up for what is right. It is a classic of children's literature and a staple in classrooms, teaching readers about history, empathy, and courage. The novel won the 1977 Newbery Medal and remains a vital, moving, and relevant read for young and old alike.

Key Takeaways

- The Logan family's land is their greatest asset, symbolizing independence and self-respect in a society that denies both to Black people.
- Cassie's journey from innocence to awareness shows how children learn about racism and injustice through direct experience and family teachings.
- The boycott of the Wallace store demonstrates the power of economic resistance, but also the severe consequences that can follow.
- Family unity and love are the Logans' strongest defense against hatred and violence.

- The novel shows that even in the face of overwhelming oppression, small acts of resistance and courage can make a difference.
- The ending suggests that the fight for justice is ongoing and that the next generation must continue the struggle.
- The book highlights the importance of education and pride in one's heritage as tools for survival and empowerment.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1

The novel opens in 1933 Mississippi. Cassie Logan, a nine-year-old Black girl, and her three brothers—Stacey, Christopher-John, and Little Man—walk to school. They are harassed by a white school bus driver who splashes them with mud. At school, they receive old, worn textbooks from white schools, and Little Man refuses to accept a book with a derogatory label. Their teacher, Miss Crocker, punishes him, but their mother, Mary Logan, later confronts the school board about the unfairness.

Chapter 2

Cassie and her brothers learn about the night riders, white men who terrorize Black families. Their father, David Logan, is away working on the railroad. He returns home with a new car, which he uses to help the community. The family discusses the importance of their land, which they own, unlike most Black families. They also learn about the Wallaces, a white family who run a store and are involved in violence against Black people.

Chapter 3

The Logan children encounter T.J. Avery, a friend who often gets them into trouble. T.J. takes them to the Wallace store, where they see the Wallaces and their racist attitudes. Later, the children are caught in a rainstorm and take shelter in a white man's barn, but are discovered and forced to leave. Their mother, Mary Logan, is fired from her teaching job because she taught about slavery and injustice, which the school board deems inappropriate.

Chapter 4

The Logan family decides to boycott the Wallace store, encouraging other Black families to shop in Vicksburg instead. This angers the Wallaces, who retaliate by threatening the sharecroppers who support the boycott. The Logan family faces financial strain, but they remain determined. Cassie and her brothers are warned to stay away from the Wallaces and to be careful.

Chapter 5

Cassie and her brother Stacey go to Strawberry with their father and T.J. In town, Cassie is humiliated when she is forced to apologize to a white girl, Lillian Jean, for bumping into her.

Cassie is deeply angered by the injustice but must hide her feelings. She later plans a subtle revenge by pretending to be friendly with Lillian Jean to gain her trust.

Chapter 6

Cassie carries out her plan to get even with Lillian Jean. She lures her into the woods and beats her up, then threatens to reveal Lillian Jean's secrets if she tells anyone. Cassie forces Lillian Jean to call her 'Miss Cassie' and to treat her with respect. This is a turning point for Cassie, as she learns to fight back against injustice, even if it is in a small, personal way.

Chapter 7

The Logan family faces a crisis when their cotton crop is threatened by a fire. The fire is set by the Wallaces as retaliation for the boycott. The family and neighbors work together to fight the fire, but they lose much of their crop. The fire also reveals that the Wallaces are responsible for the violence against Black families. The Logans realize they must find a way to protect their land and their community.

Chapter 8

David Logan comes up with a plan to save the land. He and his friend Mr. Morrison start a fire in the woods to create a firebreak, hoping to stop the Wallaces' fire from spreading. The plan works, but it also endangers the community. The Logans and their neighbors are able to save their homes, but the fire reveals the deep divisions and dangers in their society.

Chapter 9

The Logan family's land is saved, but the community is still in turmoil. T.J. Avery gets involved with the Wallaces and is accused of robbing a store. The night riders come to lynch T.J., but the Logan family and Mr. Morrison intervene. They manage to divert the mob, but T.J. is taken away by the sheriff, and his fate is uncertain. The novel ends with the Logan family safe but aware that the struggle is not over.

Themes

- Racism and injustice
- Family and unity
- Land and independence
- Courage and resistance
- Coming of age
- Economic oppression

Notable Quotes

- "Roll of thunder, hear my cry, over the water, by and by." — This line is the title of the book and is part of a spiritual song that appears in the novel, symbolizing the hope and struggle of the Black community.
- "You have to know who you are, and what you stand for." — A lesson from Cassie's father, David Logan, as he teaches his children about pride and self-respect in the face of racism.
- "There is no shame in being poor, but there is shame in being poor and not fighting to better yourself." — A statement made by Cassie's mother, Mary Logan, emphasizing the importance of striving for improvement despite poverty.
- "We are a family of strong people, and we will not let them break us." — A declaration by Cassie's grandmother, Big Ma, reflecting the family's resilience against oppression.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry about?

It's a historical fiction novel set in 1930s Mississippi, following the Logan family, Black landowners, as they face racism and violence. Narrated by nine-year-old Cassie Logan, it shows her coming of age and the family's struggle to keep their land and dignity in the face of the Great Depression and Jim Crow laws.

Is Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry worth reading?

Yes, it's a powerful and moving classic that offers a vivid, child's-eye view of racism and resilience. It's widely taught in schools for its historical accuracy, strong characters, and timeless themes. It's a must-read for anyone interested in American history, social justice, or compelling storytelling.

How does Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry end?

Spoiler: The novel ends with the Logan family's land saved from foreclosure, but the community is shaken. T.J. Avery is falsely accused of a crime and nearly lynched by a mob, but the Logans and Mr. Morrison divert the mob. T.J. is taken away by the sheriff, and the family is safe but aware that the struggle continues.

Who should read Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry?

It's suitable for middle schoolers and up, as well as adults. It's an excellent choice for students studying American history, literature, or social justice. Parents and educators can use it to spark discussions about racism, empathy, and courage. Its universal themes make it a rewarding read for anyone.

How long does it take to read Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry?

The book is about 276 pages long. At an average reading speed of 250 words per minute, it takes roughly 5-6 hours to read. Most readers finish it in a few days, depending on how much time

they dedicate each day.