Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry Study Questions

Please double-space your answers.

Chapter 1

1. How do Cassie and her brothers react to the news of the Berrys’ being burned? Is their reaction as intense as you might expect? What does this reveal about the social environment they live in?

2. Who is Jeremy? Describe him. What is unique about him, and what role do you think he might play in this story?

3. How do the students react to the news that they’re going to have their own textbooks this year? What does this reveal about the conditions at their school?

4. Describe Cassie. What is her personality like? What is her attitude toward school, and why do you think she has this attitude?

5. Describe Little Man. What is his personality like? What is his first reaction to the book he is given? After he decides to accept it and opens it, what further reaction does he have? Why?

6. What is Mrs. Logan’s reaction to the news Miss Crocker brings about her children’s behavior? What does this tell us about her? What does she decide to do with her class’s books, and why do you think she does this?

7. What predictions can you make about possible future developments in the story?

Chapter 2

1. What are the Logan kids doing at the beginning of the chapter? What does this tell us about the family’s situation?

2. Describe Mr. Morrison. Based on what he says to Mrs. Logan, what kind of person does he seem to be? What is the real reason he was fired from his job? Why do you think Mr. Logan decided to hire him to work at their home?

3. What did the white mob say as an excuse for attacking John Henry Berry? What do you think is the real reason they attacked him? What is the sheriff’s reaction to the woman who tells him about the attack, and what does this tell us?

4. What does Mr. Logan tell his kids about the Wallaces’ store, and what does this show about him? What connection can you guess the Wallace store might have to the burnings of the Berrys?

Chapter 3

1. What attitude do Mama and Big Ma have toward the kids’ trouble with the school bus and resentment about not having their own school bus—what advice do they give the kids? What do you think of their advice?

2. What does Cassie realize about Jeremy? Knowing this, can you explain Jeremy’s personality and his kindness to the Logan kids?
3. How do the Logan kids decide to deal with the misery and humiliation of being splashed every day by the school bus? How do you feel about their prank? Do you think revenge is sometimes justified (“an eye for an eye”), or should we always “turn the other cheek”? Would you have handled the situation the same way? What other ways might there be to handle it?

4. What reaction do Mama and Big Ma have to the school bus’s “accident”? What does this show about them? How would their reaction have been different if they’d known what really happened? What does their relief that no one got hurt show about them?

5. What does Mr. Avery mean by, “They’re ridin’ tonight”? Why does Mama make the kids go to bed? How do they react to this, and what does this show about them? Why doesn’t Mama accept Stacey’s help? What does she mean when she says that Stacey does help her, more than he knows?

Chapter 4

1. Based on his words and actions in this chapter, describe T.J.’s personality. How do you feel about him? What things does he say and do to make you feel this way?

2. How do the Logan kids get T.J. to reveal what he knows about the “night men”? What does he say that makes them feel relieved?

3. Do you think T.J. is telling the truth about just wanting to read Mrs. Logan’s book about the ancient Egyptians? Why might he be interested in them? Think carefully—put yourself in his place.

4. Why do you think Stacey keeps his distance from Mr. Morrison at first—why is he so aloof? Why do you think he later changes his mind about Mr. Morrison?

5. Describe Stacey. What are his values (what is important to him), and what things does he do in the chapter to show this? Explain his “code of honor.” Would you have handled the problem with T.J. the same way?

6. Why do you think Mr. Morrison decides not to tell Mrs. Logan about the kids’ going to the Wallace store? Why do you think Stacey decides to tell her himself?

7. Based on her long conversation with Cassie, describe Big Ma. Why do you think she’s so determined not to sell the family’s land to the Grangers?

8. Why doesn’t Mrs. Logan punish the kids for going to the Wallaces’ store, and why does she take them to see Mr. Berry?

9. What does Mrs. Logan decide to do about the Wallaces? Why doesn’t she mention the burning of the Berries to anyone? What barriers are there to her plan’s success? What do you think she plans to do about Mr. Turner’s credit problem?

10. Based on the events of this chapter, what predictions might you make about what is going to happen later in the story?

Chapter 5

1. What does Cassie mean when she says that T.J. has already “wheedled his way back into Stacey’s good graces”? What do she and Big Ma think of T.J., and why?
2. What is Cassie’s reaction to Strawberry, and why? What expectations did she have, and why do you think she might have had such expectations?

3. Why does Big Ma park her wagon at the back of the field? What is Cassie’s reaction to this, and what does her reaction tell us about her?

4. Why is Cassie so interested in seeing Mr. Jamison? What does her attitude toward him tell us about her?

5. What foreshadowing is there in this chapter regarding T.J.? Why do you think he wants a handgun so badly, and what prediction can you make based on this?

6. Why do you think T.J. and Stacey don’t react more strongly to Mr. Barnett’s unfair treatment? Remember, they have been to Strawberry before. What attitude do they have toward whites’ prejudices against them? “I know it and you know it, but he don’t know it, and that’s where the trouble is.” (p.112)

7. How does Hazel (the woman who was next to the Logans at the market) react to Cassie’s situation, and what does this tell us? How would you have dealt with the situation if you were Hazel? Imagine that you’re in the same social context that they are.

8. Why do you think Lillian Jean is so mean to Cassie, and what does this tell us about the phenomenon of racism? Why is Jeremy’s attitude different? Do you think Jeremy shows a kind of bravery in this chapter?

9. What is the significance of this chapter for Cassie? Why is her experience so deeply traumatic?

Chapter 6

1. Why is Cassie angry with Big Ma? Why does Stacey tell her not to blame Big Ma?

2. Why do you think Uncle Hammer’s eyes sometimes have “a cold, distant glaze” even though he can obviously be a warm, caring man? Describe him based on what he says and does in this chapter.

3. Why do you think Uncle Hammer wanted to buy a Packard like Mr. Granger’s?

4. Why doesn’t Big Ma want Cassie to tell her story about the Simmses, and why do you think Mrs. Logan lets her tell it?

5. Why does Uncle Hammer laugh when Cassie tells him that she complained about Mr. Barnett’s unfair treatment of them?

6. What do you think Uncle Hammer means when he says, “You think my brother died and I got my leg half blown off in their German war to have some red-neck knock Cassie around anytime it suits him?”

7. What is “the way of things,” according to Mrs. Logan? How does she explain the existence of racism? Why does she say that people like Mr. Simms hold on to their racist beliefs so hard?

8. What do you think would have happened if Mr. Morrison hadn’t succeeded in keeping Uncle Hammer away from Mr. Simms?
9. Why does Cassie want her mother to fix her hair, and why is Stacey so excited about his new coat?

10. How does Uncle Hammer get away with crossing the bridge first even though the truck was already on it? Why do you think he does this?

11. What frightening instance of foreshadowing occurs at the end of the chapter?

Chapter 7

1. Why did Stacey give his coat to T.J.? What does this show about Stacey and T.J.'s personalities?

2. How does Uncle Hammer handle this situation (involving Stacey’s coat), and why do you think he does this—is it because he’s a mean person? What experiences might you guess Hammer has had to make him so wary of being taken advantage of by others? (p. 143: “...there’s a lot of folks don’t want you to make it.”)

3. Why does Mr. Logan allow Mr. Morrison to tell his story in front of the kids? What things does he tell the Logans about?

4. What evil scheme do the Wallaces have to do harm to the African-American community?

5. Why does Mr. Logan choose The Three Musketeers and The Count of Monte Cristo to give to Stacey and Cassie? What lesson do you think he’s trying to convey to them?

6. What things do the Logans enjoy at Christmastime—what are the sources of their happiness? Why do you think things like their Christmas meal and store-bought licorice are so important to them?

7. What significant thing does Jeremy do in this chapter, and why do you think he does it? What personality traits does this show?

8. State whether you agree or disagree with this statement, and explain why: Although Jeremy seems timid and fearful, he is actually rather brave.

9. What is Mr. Logan’s attitude toward Stacey’s friendship with Jeremy, and why do you think he has this attitude? What foreshadowing is there in his comments about blacks who hang around with whites?

10. What kind and helpful things does Mr. Jamison say and do in this chapter? What warning does he give them about Harlan Granger, and what explanation does he give for Granger’s dislike of the Logans and their crusade to punish the Wallaces?

11. Why does Harlan Granger visit the Logans? In what ways does he threaten them? What “secret” might he have at the end of the chapter? How do the Logans react to his threats?

12. Find three examples of figurative language in this chapter. Hint: Page 150 is a good place to look.

Chapter 8

1. Why do you think Stacey insists that no one tell anyone about how Cassie is dealing with Lillian Jean?
2. What does T.J. mean when he says that Cassie is “Uncle Tomming” Lillian Jean? *Hint: It has to do with the famous book Uncle Tom’s Cabin.*

3. Describe Mr. Logan’s philosophy of life based on the advice he gives Cassie.

4. What is Lillian Jean’s reaction to Cassie’s subservience? What does this show about her?

5. Why do you think T.J. gets so angry about being failed by Mrs. Logan and runs away?

6. Why do you think Cassie decides to get revenge on Lillian Jean? How is her plan cunning?

7. Why do you think Lillian Jean is so shocked about Cassie’s turning on her suddenly? How did Cassie expect she would react? *Hint: Her racist attitude has a lot to do with it.*

8. Why does Mrs. Logan continue talking openly about the truth of slavery after Mr. Granger and the other white men come into the room?

9. What is the real reason that Mr. Granger has Mrs. Logan fired? What justification does he give for firing her? Why do you think Mr. Wellever obeys them?

10. Why is losing her job especially painful for Mrs. Logan?

11. What terrible thing do the Logans find out T.J. has done? Why do you think he did it? How do the Logan kids react to his betrayal? What reaction does T.J. have?

Chapter 9

1. What is ironic about Cassie’s statement that she “volunteered to sacrifice school and help” her father and Mr. Morrison plow the field?

2. Why doesn’t Jeremy like his brothers and sisters? Why is this shocking to Stacey? What good personality characteristic of Jeremy’s does this show?

3. According to Jeremy, how do R.W. and Melvin treat T.J.? Why is Stacey concerned about this treatment?

4. According to Mrs. Logan, why do R.W. and Melvin hang out with T.J.? Why does T.J. hang out with them?

5. What foreshadowing occurs after Mr. Jamison’s visit?

6. What is Mr. Logan waiting for before he goes back to his railroad job? For what reasons does he decide to leave?

7. What measure taken by the white landowners, and what threat made by the Wallaces, make Mr. Avery, Mr. Lanier, and others withdraw from the plan to shop in Vicksburg?

8. How does Stacey react to Mr. Avery and Mr. Lanier’s decision? How does Mr. Logan react to this?

9. What does the little fig tree overshadowed by the larger trees symbolize for Mr. Logan—what lesson does it hold for the Logans? (pp. 205 & 206)

10. Why does Mr. Logan insist on taking Stacey with him to Vicksburg, and why does Mrs. Logan object?
11. What foreshadowing is there regarding T.J. in the Logans’ conversation about going to Vicksburg?

12. What does the attack on the Logans show about their characters vs. those of their attackers?

Chapter 10

1. How does Stacey feel about his father’s injury, and how does Mr. Logan react to this? What does Stacey’s blaming himself tell us about him?

2. Why do you think Mr. Morrison decides to move Kaleb Wallace’s car off the road the way he does?

3. Why does Mr. Morrison insist on staying with the Logans despite the danger he’s in? What does this tell us about him?

4. Why can’t the Logans report the Wallaces’ attack to the police?

5. How would you describe the Logan kids’ relationship with Jeremy?

6. Where does Jeremy spend a lot of time and even sleep? Why do you think he does this—who does it tell us about him?

7. What bad news does Mr. Morrison bring to the Logans? Why has the bank done this? Do you think such a thing could happen today?

8. How do the Logans manage to pay off the loan and keep their land? What does this tell us about Hammer?

9. Why do you think Hammer lives in Chicago now? Why does David insist that he go back there after making the payment to the bank?

10. Describe T.J.’s appearance and behavior when he stops by the Revival. How do the Logans react to him? Why do you think he wanted to come by? What things does T.J. not understand that make Cassie feel sorry for him?

Chapter 11

1. Interpret the song that Mr. Morrison is singing at the beginning of Chapter 11.

2. Explain the deviousness of R.W. and Melvin’s plan to let T.J. take the blame for what happened at the Barnetts’ store. Why shouldn’t the plan have worked, and why did it work? What is the irony of their going to the Avery’s house to “arrest” T.J.? What do they intend to do before Mr. Jamison arrives?

3. How does Cassie explain Stacey’s lifelong friendship with T.J. and his willingness to help T.J.?

4. Do you think that any of the members of the lynch mob would have killed T.J. by themselves? What does this tell us about the nature of racism and hate?

5. What is the sheriff and Mr. Granger’s attitude toward the lynch mob’s activities?
Chapter 12

1. What does Mr. Logan mean when he says, “This thing’s been coming a long time, baby, and T.J. just happened to be the one foolish enough to trigger it”?

2. What is significant about the way the people of the community put out the fire? Why do you think Mildred Taylor chose to plot the story this way?

3. How did Mr. Logan save T.J.? What sacrifice did he make to save him? Why did he choose this way of dealing with the situation?

4. What do you think will happen to T.J.? What will happen to R.W. and Melvin? Why?

5. What do you think the fire, the rain, and the land could be symbols of?

6. Why do you think Mildred Taylor chose to end the story right after the night of the lynch mob and the fire?