



ROLL OF THUNDER, HEAR MY CRY: DISCUSSION GUIDE #1

Encourage critical thinking and support your students' literacy development by asking questions during reading. Here are some questions you can ask your readers to engage them in a discussion.



Chapters 1 – 2

Comprehension:

- Name the members of the Logan family. From which character's point of view is the story told?
The Logan family is made up of Papa, Mama, Big Ma, Stacey, Cassie, Christopher-John, and Little Man. The story is told from Cassie's point of view.
- Where does Papa work, and why?
Papa works on the railroad. Because the price of cotton has dropped, he's unable to farm and make enough money to live on and pay the mortgage for the land. The railroad helps pay the bills.
- Who is T.J., and what joke does he make to Stacey about the school year? How does Stacey react?
T.J. is Stacey's friend. He jokes that since Mama is their teacher this school year, Stacey can get the answers for tests beforehand. Stacey doesn't entertain T.J.'s joke and implies that cheating won't work in Mama's class.
- What news about the Berrys does T.J. share on the way to school?
T.J. tells the Logans that the Berry men were badly burned by some white men.
- Why does Stacey tell his little brothers and sister to get off the road?
Stacey tells his siblings to get off the road because the Jefferson Davis school bus passes and causes dust clouds. He also wants to keep them from being laughed at by the white kids on the bus.
- How do the Logans get to school? How is this different from the kids who attend Jefferson Davis County School?
The Logans and the other Black children walk to school because there are no buses for their school. The students who attend the Jefferson Davis County School ride buses.
- Why do most of the children at the Great Faith Elementary and Secondary School wear thread-worn clothes and shoes that are too small to wear?
Most of the children at the school come from poor families and work in the cotton fields, so their clothes are not in the best condition. Their nicest clothes are reserved for Sunday and the first day of school.
- Why are Little Man and Cassie angry about the books their teacher gives them?
Little Man and Cassie are angry after they see the chart inside the book that shows that white students used the books until they were no longer in good condition. At that point, the books are no longer good enough for the white kids to use, so they're given to the Black school. Little Man and Cassie realize it's not fair and they feel offended by this unfair treatment.



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- What reason does Papa give for coming home, and what does Cassie think is the real reason?
Papa says Mr. Morrison is having a hard time finding work and is going to stay with the family and work on the land. However, Cassie believes that Papa is reacting to the crime against the Berrys and brought Mr. Morrison to look after the family.
- When the Logans talk with their neighbors after church, they find out that Henrietta Toggins witnessed the crime against the Berrys. How did the sheriff respond to her report?
The sheriff responds to Henrietta Toggins by calling her a liar and telling her to go home.

Analysis:

- Why is Jeremy often ridiculed by the other children? Why do you think he continues to walk with Cassie and her brothers?
Jeremy walks with the Logan children in the mornings and afternoons, even though he has the ability to ride the bus to the Jefferson Davis County School. He's ridiculed because he associates with the Logan children, who are Black. Others see the friendship as unacceptable, but Jeremy ignores the racial attitudes because he likes Cassie and her brothers and enjoys spending time with them.
- How does Miss Crocker react when Little Man and Cassie are disappointed—and then angry—about the “new” books? How is Miss Crocker's response different from Mama's response? What does this show about the two teachers?
Miss Crocker thinks Little Man and Cassie should be grateful to get the books, even though they're in poor condition. She's appalled when Little Man asks for a book that's not dirty, responds coldly when Cassie points out the offensive word in the book, and whips them both for their defiance. Miss Crocker shows her disapproval as she reports the incident to Mama, and she's not satisfied when Mama responds calmly with questions. Mama glues paper over the charts in her seventh-grade books so the offensive information is not in her students' faces, which shows that she understands why Little Man and Cassie are upset about the books. Miss Crocker argues that Mama shouldn't do that because the books belong to the county and that she's messing the books up, but Mama is unconcerned. Miss Crocker states that the Logan kids have “got to learn how things are sometimes,” and Mama responds by saying “that doesn't mean they have to accept them.” The teachers are different because Miss Crocker is willing to accept the situation, while Mama believes they don't need to accept the unfair treatment and reality.

Personal Connection:

- ▶ Little Man's face is “lit in eager excitement” about the book at school, but he's sorely disappointed when he sees the book's condition. Tell about a time you were excited about something only to be let down. Alternatively, tell about a time you were pleasantly surprised after having low expectations.
Student answers will vary.



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Chapters 3 – 4

Comprehension:

- What new challenges do the Logan children face on their way to and from school each day?
The Logan children deal with the soaking rain and the Jefferson Davis bus that zooms from behind and splashes them with the murky puddle water.
- Why does the Jefferson Davis County School's bus driver splash the Logan children with mud?
The bus driver likes to entertain his passengers—the white children—as he drives them to school.
- What is Stacey's plan for revenge against the school bus, and why isn't T.J. part of the plan?
Stacey comes up with the idea to leave school at lunch time to dig a ditch in the middle of the road and disguise it with mud and water. T.J. isn't part of the plan because he talks too much and wouldn't be able to keep the secret to himself.
- What happens to the bus and the children?
The bus drives into the ditch and breaks down. The children have to get off the bus and walk home in the rain.
- When Mr. Avery comes to warn the Logan family that the night men are riding, what are the Logan children initially afraid of? Who stands guard outside the Logans' house that night?
The Logan children are afraid the night men are coming after them because they caused the Jefferson Davis school bus to break down. Mr. Morrison stands guard outside.
- Why do Mama and Big Ma suspect something is wrong with the children?
The children are listless, quiet, and not eating or sleeping well. On a Saturday morning, they'd normally be out playing, but instead, they're as "quiet as church mice."
- Why are the Logan children relieved after learning about the man who was tarred and feathered?
The children are relieved to learn that the night men were not searching for them after the bus incident.
- Why does Stacey feel differently than his siblings do about Mr. Morrison's presence?
Stacey thinks Mr. Morrison isn't needed to take care of things and protect the family. Stacey is convinced that he could handle the work and job of protecting the family.
- Why does Stacey get whipped in school, and why does he accept the punishment even though he's not guilty?
Stacey gets whipped because Mama, his teacher, catches him with cheat notes during the history examination. Although Stacey had ripped up T.J.'s cheat notes, T.J. made himself a new set and handed them over to Stacey in the middle of the test. Stacey accepts the punishment because he doesn't want to get T.J. in trouble.



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- How does Mama learn about Stacey's fight with T.J. at the Wallace store?

Stacey confesses that he had been fighting T.J. at the Wallace store.

Analysis:

- Why do you think Big Ma responds with tough love to Little Man's complaints about his dirty, muddy clothes? What lesson do you think she's trying to teach?

Big Ma recognizes the reality of the world they live in. Even though she doesn't accept it, she knows that complaining and fretting about it does no good in the moment. She's trying to teach Little Man to be strong and keep his head up, even when he's humiliated, frustrated, and angry.

- Why do you think Mr. Morrison gets the children from the Wallace store and doesn't tell Mrs. Logan? How is Stacey impacted by Mr. Morrison's words, decisions, and actions?

Mr. Morrison gets the children from the Wallace store to keep them from getting into bigger trouble, but he leaves it up to the children to tell Mama about their disobedience. He explains that the Wallaces "got no respect at all for colored folks" to reiterate that it's not safe for them to be at the store, and he says that they owe it to Mama and themselves to tell the truth. This resonates with Stacey because he's beginning to understand the realities of his community, and he makes the mature and thoughtful decision to tell Mama about the fight.

- What lesson do the children most likely learn when Mama takes them to visit Mr. Berry instead of scolding or whipping them? Why do you think this was a more powerful consequence?

Mama takes the children to visit Mr. Berry in order to show them what the Wallaces did. Mr. Berry's current condition serves as a powerful visual message about what the Wallaces did and how they're behaving now, which highlights just how bad the Wallaces are. The children now have seen firsthand what the Wallace's can and will do, which makes this a more powerful consequence than scolding or whipping.

Personal Connection:

- ▶ Little Man says that "it ain't fair" when the bus dirties his clothes yet again. Tell about a time you felt frustrated or angry because you—or someone you know—were treated unfairly.

Student answers will vary.