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Response Journal

Reflections: A Student Response Journal



Roll of Thunder,
Hear My Cry
Mildred Taylor

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To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

Chapter 1

1. This novel is set seventy years ago in the southern state of Mississippi during the time of the 1930's Great Depression. It is a time of great hardship throughout the country because of lack of work, and, consequently, little money to pay for anything. Consider the portrayal of the Logan children in the beginning of the book. Suppose you were a visitor to the South and had met the children on their way to school; would you think they were rich, neither rich nor poor, or poor? Write about what your idea is of: rich, neither rich nor poor, and poor. Give examples of the things you think that people in these three categories would have owned seventy years ago, based on this book.
2. Mr. Logan, though the owner of his own land and a cotton farmer, had to go away to work to support his family during the years 1930-1933. Even today, people have to travel distances to work or even move their families to another place in order to work. Imagine that you had to leave the place where you live, your school, and your friends. Write the first letter that you would send to your best friend back in your old town telling what you miss most.
3. Mr. Logan feels very strongly about owning his own land and is willing to do anything to keep it, including going away to work to earn money for the payments and taxes on the land. Imagine that you are Cassie Logan and that you disagree with your father about the importance of owning land. Complete the dialogue below in which you tell your father of your feelings:

Cassie: Oh Papa, our land is only dirt and ugly rows of cotton balls. I hate it because it makes you go away. Can't...

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11. In this novel, we are treated to a picture of a loving and close southern black family. Though they are poor and suffer the indignity of being forced into segregation, they are an upstanding and highly principled family. Think of all the families you know from real life or the media whom you admire. Imagine you are a reporter assigned to write a feature article on one family that has impressed you. Write a headline for the article, which will appear in the Sunday paper.

12. The dialogue in this novel is written in a southern dialect. Select six sentences from Chapter 2 which are in this dialect. Copy them down exactly, one at a time. After each one, write the sentence exactly as it would be without any dialect and in standard English. Be sure each word of your re-written sentence is spelled correctly.

Chapter 3

13. As has been mentioned in previous chapters, the schools in the book are segregated. There is no school bus to take the black children to their school. There is one, however, to take children to Jefferson Davis, an all-white school. That driver and the children on that bus torment the Logan children as they pass them each day. Keeping in mind the time, the place, and the type of people acting so cruelly, relate what options you think the Logan family has to put a stop to the bus driver and the unruly children's behavior?

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20. T. J. Avery is Stacey's friend who causes trouble. In this chapter, we see that T.J. has snuck into Mrs. Logan's classroom to try to get hold of the test questions. He is seen when Stacey comes into the room. Cheating on exams is a big temptation in school life. Suppose your best friend has found out without a doubt that a classmate of both of you has gotten hold of the questions of an upcoming math exam and Xeroxed them. Complete the following dialogue you might have with your friend about whether or not to turn in the person who stole the exam questions:

You: What do you think? If we don't turn him in, what about all the kids that won't have the questions ahead of time. That doesn't seem fair.

Friend: I hate feeling like I'm ratting on anyone. Do you think maybe we could just get the questions back from him and burn them? That way no one will know, and the exam will be fair.

21. T. J. causes more trouble when he gives a cheat sheet to Stacey in order not to get caught with it during the math exam. Stacey is caught with it by the teacher, his mother. Of course, troublemaker T. J. does not confesses that it was his cheat sheet. Because he does not tell his mother that it was really T. J.'s answer sheet, Stacy is punished. Being unfairly blamed is a very unhappy experience. Relate a time when you or someone you know was unfairly blamed for something and what finally happened before the situation was finally over.
22. None of the Logan children are allowed to go to the Wallace store but Stacey goes anyway to find T.J. to pay him back for getting him in trouble. His sister and brothers follow him there. Stacey and T. J. get into a fistfight outside the store. Mr. Morrison finds them and puts them into the wagon to be brought home. Mr. Morrison tells them, "Ain't never no reason good enough to disobey your mama." Disobeying one's parent or guardian can lead to unforeseen consequences. There have been numerous examples of this in news stories over the years. From your own experience, from someone you know, or from the media, describe an example when disobeying an adult has led to a strong negative consequence.

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43. Stacey's troublemaking friend, T. J., is spreading rumors about Mrs. Logan. Now Stacey thinks that T. J. might be responsible for his mother being fired from teaching. T. J. is a good example of the saying that having him as a friend, one has no need of an enemy. Think about what true friendship means. Put your thoughts about friendship in the form of an eight line poem. It need not rhyme.

Chapter 9

44. In the first paragraph of this chapter, the author has written a lovely description of what spring is like in rural Mississippi. Using this paragraph as a model, write an equally lovely description of the arrival of spring where you live.
45. Cassie seems to be very sensitive to the beauty of nature. She even offers to work in the fields with her father and Mr. Morrison to be closer to nature instead of sitting in a stuffy classroom. Think back to a time when you have had an experience of being very close to nature. This could have been when you were on a camping trip, for instance, or even just lying on the grass watching the clouds by yourself in your own backyard. Write a paragraph about your feelings during this experience with nature.
46. Jeremy Simms, Lillian Jean's brother, is a gentle boy who wants to be friends with the Logan children. He does not seem to have many friends, and doesn't even like his own brothers. He tells the Logan children, "It'll sure be lonely without y'all." Write the entry that Cassie would make in her diary that night about her feelings about Jeremy and why he seems like a misfit with his family.