

## Plot: What's Happening?



"You ain't never had to live on nobody's place but your own and long as I live and the family survives, you'll never have to."

—Papa, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

**R**oll of Thunder, Hear My Cry is the story of the Logan family, African-American farmers living in Mississippi in the 1930s. The Logans successfully battle racism to keep their land and stay together as a family.

When the story opens, nine-year-old Cassie Logan is walking to the first day of school. She's with her three brothers: Stacey (age twelve), Christopher-John (seven) and Clayton Chester (called "Little Man," six). The family owns four hundred acres of fine land. Half the land is mortgaged. This means the family had to borrow money from a bank to buy the land and now have to make a payment to the bank every month. Not until all the money is paid back, will the Logans own the land free and clear. Papa works on the railroad far away to pay the loan. Mr. Granger, a white man, wants to take the land from them. The land is very important to the Logans.

T.J. Avery, a thirteen-year-old troublemaker, tells how the Berrys, three black men, were burned—one killed—by the white Wallace brothers. A white boy, Jeremy Simms, joins the Logans as they walk to school. Jeremy goes to the white Jefferson Davis School while the Logan children attend the black Great Faith School.

Little Man and Cassie are so happy to get schoolbooks for the very first time! Their delight turns to rage when they get the tattered old books the white students had used for many years and thrown away. Cassie's mama is a seventh-grade teacher in the school. She understands how hurt her children feel, so she pastes paper over the inside covers of her students' books. These hide the pages that show that the white students had thrown the books away. Later, Papa returns unexpectedly from the railroad with Mr. Morrison, a big, strong man who lost his job. Mr. Morrison will be staying with the Logans. Papa tells the children to keep away from the Wallaces' store because people get in trouble there. Papa also knows the Wallaces have attacked other black families.

Little Man is upset because the white children have a school bus but the black students have to walk. After the school bus forces them into the mud, the Logan kids dig a deep trench. It fills with rainwater. When the bus falls into the trench, it is badly damaged.

Later, Mama takes the kids to visit the Berry family. Mr. Berry is burned very badly and cannot speak. "The Wallaces did that, children," Mama explains. "They poured kerosene over Mr. Berry

and his nephews and lit them afire.” To protest the attacks, Mama and Papa try to stop black people from shopping in the Wallace and Barnett stores.

T.J. and Stacey are in Mama’s class. T.J. gets Stacey into trouble by giving him cheat notes. Mama disciplines Stacey. Later, Stacey beats up T.J. to get even with him. Stacey realizes that T.J. is not a good friend. He knows that T.J. is going down the wrong path in life.

Cassie is happy to visit the Saturday market in Strawberry. But the day turns out badly. Cassie gets angry at the store owner when he helps white people and lets the black people wait. Furious, the storeowner tells Cassie to get her “little black self” back to waiting. Then Cassie bumps into Lillian Jean, a white girl, and is forced to apologize.

The Logan children are thrilled when Uncle Hammer comes to visit for Christmas. Hammer drives the family around in his beautiful new car. Mr. Morrison tells the tragic story about his family getting killed by an angry white mob. A few days later, Mr. Granger threatens to take away the Logans’ land if they don’t make people start shopping in town again.

Cassie beats up Lillian Jean until she apologizes for what happened in Strawberry. Mama catches T.J. cheating and fails him on a test. T.J. tells everyone that Mama pasted over the pages in the schoolbooks. The school board fires Mama.

Papa, Mr. Morrison, and Stacey go shopping in Vicksburg. On the way home, someone shoots at Papa. The bullet skims his head! In the fight that follows, Papa's leg is broken. At the same time, the bank demands that the Logans' whole loan be paid all at once! Uncle Hammer sells his car to pay the debt.

During the night, T.J. comes running to the Logans. He explains that he broke into the mercantile store with the Avery brothers. The brothers beat up the store owners and T.J. The Logan children take T.J., who is badly hurt, home.

A white mob gathers at the Avery house. They want to hang T.J. Papa and Mr. Morrison run to the Avery home. Soon, Mama notices the cotton is on fire! Mama, Big Ma, and the mob go fight the fire. It starts to rain, which puts out the fire.

Everyone thinks lightning started the fire, but Cassie realizes that Papa set it to stop the hangings. T.J. will likely be put on the chain gang where he could die. Cassie cries.

### **Thinking about the plot**

- Why is the land so important to the Logans?
- How do you know that the Logans stick together and help everyone?
- Which part of the story did you find the most exciting? Why?