

STEPPINGSTONE THEATRE PRESENTS

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

February 7 -
March 3, 2018



For Educators & Families

STUDY GUIDE

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**STEPPINGSTONE
THEATRE**
FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Dear Educators & Parents,

The power of storytelling resonates loudly within our world. In all cultures, stories are timeless links to tradition. They bring us to the core of experience, they connect us. They are how we draw meaning out of life.

Psychologist, Dr. Pamela B. Rutledge, says it best: “Stories are how we explain how things work, how we make and justify our decisions, how we persuade others, how we understand our place in the world, create our identities and teach social values.”

*Steppingstone Theatre is proud to present Mildred D. Taylor’s compelling work, **Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry**, the story of the Logan family navigating through the tumultuous South during the Great Depression.*

This is a particularly difficult story to tell. The hate and ugliness present in the language and environment of the play can be hard to process. However, that presents even more urgency to tell this story. We’re at the crossroads in our history where our past meets our present. Between the divide of our country, both with our morals and where we stand, it is important to refocus our intentions and morality while remembering how little has changed and how much farther we must go as a people.

This study guide is meant to assist you in facilitating the difficult conversations that will be prompted by our play. It includes pre-show and post-show discussion points and activities to engage your students in necessary conversation, as well as tools to assist in creating the safe space necessary to have those conversations.

Today, we are all a part of the Logan family.

Kory Laquess Pullam - Director

Emily Villano - Assistant Director

On Language

Language is powerful. Charged with emotion it can be used as a weapon. Words used as part of brutal attacks on black people in the 1930s, to capture the struggle of this era, are included in our production. This study guide, including the additional resources section, will help prompt discussion with young people about the power of language in our lives today.

PRODUCTION SYNOPSIS

Set in Mississippi at the height of the Great Depression in the Jim Crow South, this is the story of one family's struggle to maintain their integrity, pride, and independence in the face of racism and social injustice. And it is also Cassie's story—Cassie Logan, an independent girl who discovers that the world was not what she expected as she learns to draw strength from her own sense of dignity and self-respect. The land is all-important to the Logan family. But it takes awhile for Cassie and her brothers to understand just how lucky they are to have it. Having land gives the Logan children an emotional foundation as they begin to notice the difference between how white children and black children are treated. Like how textbooks are only issued to black children — labeled "nigra" in the book's inside cover — after they've been thoroughly used by white children. And it takes injustices such as these, and a turbulent year of intense racial prejudice, of night riders and burnings, to show Cassie just how important owning their own land is. Winner of the 1977 Newbery Medal and nominated for the National Book Award, the story is culled from author Mildred Taylor's own family's life. It not only stands as an important addition to the cumulative record of the African-American experience, but crafted with astonishing verisimilitude, it stands as an important contribution to young adult literature as well.

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry is recommended for **Grades 3 and up**

Run time: 110 minutes including one 15-minute intermission

Welcome to SST

Where is SteppingStone? All SteppingStone performances will be presented at our theatre: 55 Victoria St. North, Saint Paul, MN 55104 This is two blocks north of Summit Ave at Holly (just north of Mitchell Hamline College of Law).

When should we arrive? Please allow plenty of time to unload your buses or vans, and park. We recommend that you arrive at the theatre 30-minutes before show time.

Where do we park? Bus drivers may park and stay with their bus along Concordia (frontage road south of I-94). Busses may not park in front of the building, block the alley, or park along Portland headed westbound, as this is a fire lane. Paid parking for cars and vans is available at the Victoria Crossing Ramp (corner of Victoria and Grand Ave.) There are two handicap accessible parking spaces in our employee lot near the north entrance. Additional unmetered parking is available along the streets surrounding the theatre. Please respect posted parking restrictions.

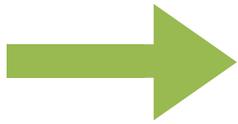
Seating for people with special needs: If you have accessible seating requirements and did not indicate your need when you ordered your tickets, please call our Front of House and Volunteer Manager, at (651) 225-9265. Our knowledge of your needs will enable us to serve you better upon your arrival to the theater.

SteppingStone Policies

- The use of recording equipment and cameras are not permitted during the performance.
- Food, drink, candy and gum are not permitted in the theatre.
- Should anyone become ill, suffer an injury, or have another problem, please escort him or her out of the theater space.

How can I prepare for my visit to the theatre? Discuss audience behavior expectations with students before you attend the performance. Use this study guide to prepare content-specific questions. At a performance, audience members are active participants. Their quiet attention, applause and laughter (both appropriate and inappropriate) are all heard by the young actors on stage and affects the performance in good or bad ways. The best way to show that you're enjoying the show is to listen attentively, laugh when something is funny and clap loudly following a scene or song you enjoyed!

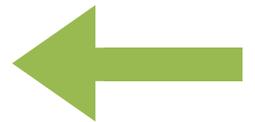
CONVERSATION STARTERS



On the ride there...

- 1.) There are moments in the play where the Logan family's safety is at risk. What makes you feel safe? What does safety feel like in your body? What makes you feel in danger? What does danger feel like in your body?
- 2.) Can you think of a time when you or someone close to you was treated unfairly? What happened? What did you or the people around you do?
- 3.) Have adults told you can't do something you wanted to do? What was it? How did it make you feel?
- 4.) What places in your neighborhood do you visit regularly? Are there places where you aren't allowed to go to or you rarely visit?

...On the ride home



- 1.) How do you deal with conflict when someone is treating you unfairly? What were some peaceful ways the Logan Family dealt with conflicts?
- 2.) What are some large or small possessions, traditions, or rituals that are important to your family? Why is the land so important to the Logans?
- 3.) Do you think it was a good decision for Cassie to take revenge on Lillian Jean? Why or why not? Is it ever okay to do mean things if you feel you have been treated unfairly?
- 4.) In Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry, the Logans are a strong, resilient, loving family. How can you tell?

Additional Resources on Language (click the links or type into your web browser)

Carolyn Hax: Talking with a child about the n-word: https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/carolyn-hax-talking-with-a-child-about-the-n-word/2016/10/09/10a27330-8cc1-11e6-bf8a-3d26847eed4_story.html?utm_term=.454a7c7dd025

Neal A. Lester: Straight Talk about the N-Word: <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/fall-2011/straight-talk-about-the-nword>

Children's Book Tackles the N-Word: <http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/story?id=2653822&page=1>

Want more?!

Did you know SST can ignite theatre learning inside your classroom? Contact us to book a theatre arts residency on empathy-building, cultural competency, or arts integration with your curriculum.

SteppingStoneTheatre.org | 651.225.9265

CREATING A SAFE SPACE

for powerful discussion

- Everyone is respected and treated equally
- Everyone has the opportunity to speak without interruption
- Everyone tells their own stories and speaks from their own experiences
- Everyone refrains from negating or assuming anyone else's experience
- Value listening as equal to speaking
- No one should be forced to share their thoughts
- Honor challenging conversations and feelings
- Encourage discussion & debate when everyone feels safe. Redirect conversation when people are feeling unsafe.
- It's ok to not know the answer. Be transparent and say "I don't know" or "let me think about it and respond later".

UNDERSTANDING PRIVILEGE

EQUALITY vs. EQUITY *30-minute activity for Grades 3-5*

SET UP: In a space large enough to accommodate your class, lay four parallel tape lines on the floor. Lines should be collectively long enough for each student to find a space and stand comfortably. You will also need a large garbage bin or large basket/bucket and a stack of scratch paper.

- 1.) Instruct students to find a space on the line. They must stay at this spot for the entire activity. Hand each student a sheet of scratch paper. Ask: "Everyone participating is currently equal correct? Everyone is standing on a line and has a sheet of paper? Can anyone explain what 'equal' means?"
- 2.) Ask students to silently think of a goal they wish to achieve. Examples may be attending college, their dream job, or a place they'd like to travel. The sheet of paper will represent their goal. Ask students to carefully crumple their sheet of paper into a tight ball.
- 3.) Place the large basket in front of the four lines of students. Tell students the basket represents 'opportunity'. On the count of three, all students will attempt to throw their ball into the basket from where they're standing. If they make the basket, it will represent achieving their goal. Before counting to three, ask each row how they feel about their odds. Additionally, ask the row closest to the basket how they feel about what their less hopeful classmates are saying.

REFLECTION: What is the difference between 'Equity' & 'Equality'? What were some of the *unequal* and *inequitable* circumstances in **Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry**? Even though everyone in our activity was *equal* by standing on a line & having a sheet of paper, how could we make the activity more *equitable*, so that everyone has a fair chance of successfully tossing their paper into the basket. Brainstorm & try-out some of the ideas!

DEGREES of PRIVILEGE *30-minute activity for Grades 6-12*

SET UP: This is a "cross the room" activity. Be sure to have ample space. Playing in a gym or field is best. The questions outlined below are suggestions. Please adapt as needed to represent the dynamics in your class. Questions should focus on things students have little/no control over. Be mindful of the questions and do not ask anything that might be too sensitive or personal to reveal in a public setting in front of peers.

Students stand shoulder-to-shoulder on one side of the space. Ask the questions listed below. If a student's answer is "yes" they should take one step forward. If their answer is "no" they should stay put.

Take a step forward if...

- You got at least 8 hours of sleep last night
- You ate breakfast before school
- You have time to study outside of school
- You've got computer & internet access at home for homework
- You get a ride to school (not on the bus) or drive yourself to school
- The majority of the students at school share the same race or ethnic background as you
- You have teachers that are the same race or ethnic background as you
- The language you speak at home is the same language used at school
- The holidays you celebrate are also days you get off from school
- In school, you study or read about people who look like you
- You learn best by reading and writing

Look around the room and acknowledge the degrees of privilege. How far did you get across the room? Highlight the fact that all questions asked were things that students had little to no control over. People are advantaged or disadvantaged to varying degrees due to circumstances that are often difficult or impossible to control. Recognize that we should acknowledge our advantages and disadvantages and be cognizant of sharing our advantages and helping close the gap of disadvantage. It takes a group effort and everyone can contribute.

BONUS: if space allows, complete the activity by having students run a race from their position in the space. Add incentive by saying the winner receives a small prize. This race can represent "getting ahead in life". Ask students how they feel about their odds. How do they feel about their classmate's answers and observations.

REFLECTION: Discuss the difference between 'Equality' & 'Equity' (above). Injustices that happened in the past, as seen in **Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry**, still continue today. In what ways do you see injustice happening?