

Song of the Trees

by Mildred D. Taylor

Classroom Favorites



Teacher's Guide by Barbara M. Linde

A Perma-Bound Production

Note to the teacher: This guide is not intended to be followed exactly. Feel free to pick and choose among the suggested activities based on the needs and interests of your particular group. You are encouraged to make adaptations, or to supplement the guide with activities of your own creation. Page references are followed by a T, M, or B, indicating the top, middle, or bottom of the page.

Objectives

1. Students will identify main ideas, recall details, predict outcomes, and discuss character traits.
2. Students will increase their vocabularies through the use of context clues, discussion, and various word games.
3. Students will use creative dramatization to re-enact portions of the story.
4. Students will use a variety of writing techniques to respond to the literature.
5. Students will use library resources to research information pertaining to the story.

Biographical Sketch

Mildred Taylor was born in Jackson, Mississippi, and later lived in Toledo, Ohio. She attended the University of Toledo for her undergraduate studies, and received a Master of Arts degree in journalism from the University of Colorado. Ms. Taylor devoted two years of her life to the Peace Corps. She now lives in Boulder, Colorado.

Another of Ms. Taylor's books, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, received the 1977 Newbery Award. She has also written *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, which is the sequel to *Roll of Thunder*.

Critic's Corner

Song of the Trees movingly tells the story of the strength of a young girl's convictions. It portrays, in a clear way, Cassie's sense of dignity and self respect, as well as her deep love for the trees. The poetic descriptions of the trees add a magical tone to the book.

Introductory Activities

1. Since this book has the same characters as *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* briefly discuss that book and the characters and setting.

2. Discuss the Depression era, especially its effects on workers.
3. Before reading, make a pre-reading chart with the class. Have the students list things they want to find out while reading. Record the answers as they are found in the text. Answers not found can either become a base for creative writing or library research.

Ongoing Activities

1. Record answers to the pre-reading chart questions as they are located in the story.
2. There are several places in the story where Cassie describes the trees. Have the students record these pages and refer to them later for art and writing activities.

Note to the teacher: This book is not divided into chapters. In order to facilitate teaching, the guide has been organized to cover approximately ten pages of text per section.

Pages 1-11

Synopsis: Cassie Logan lives with her family on a farm in Mississippi. It is the time of the Depression. Her father is working in Louisiana. Cassie overhears her mother and grandmother discussing their financial situation and her mother's illness.

Word Study: Use the first two vocabulary words to demonstrate the use of context clues while reading. Whenever possible, have the students use context first before referring to the dictionary. Encourage them to look up unfamiliar words as they are reading, instead of waiting until the end of a section. Horizon (p. 1M); cloak (p. 2M); glisten (p. 2M); emerald (p. 2M); kerosine (p. 5T); clabber milk (p. 5M); canister (p. 5M); depression (p. 6T); finicky (p. 6B); suspiciously (p. 10M); ambled (p. 11M); muggy (p. 11M). Find or draw pictures of the words.

Discussion Questions

1. LITERAL List the names and ages of the Logan children. Briefly describe each child. (*Stacey, age 11, is the oldest. He is the man of the house. Cassie, age 8, loves nature. Christopher-John is 7. He is short and pudgy. Little Man is 6. He is small, and is a finicky dresser.*)

2. **EVALUATIVE** How does Cassie feel then she overhears her mother and grandmother talking about the family's troubles? (*upset, concerned*)
3. **CREATIVE** Page 2 contains a poetic description of the trees. Take turns reading the passage aloud as Cassie might have said it.

Activities:

1. Make a Logan family tree.
2. Collect pictures of trees to display on a class bulletin board. Write descriptions similar to Cassie's description of the trees on page 2.

Pages 12-19

Synopsis: The four children have gone berry picking and are frolicking in the woods. They suddenly find strange white X marks on some of the trees.

Note to the teacher: See pages 16 and 19 for more of Cassie's descriptions of the trees.

Word Study: leisurely (p. 12M); pace (p. 12M); delved (p. 15T); annoyed (p. 16B); eerie (p. 19T). Work with a partner or a small group. List things that can be done at a leisurely pace. List places and/or things that are eerie.

Discussion Questions:

1. **LITERAL** How does Cassie describe the different trees? (*walnut: feather-like leaves, sturdy; pines: giant, old, wintry-smelling, sharp-needled; beeches: blue-gray, hickories: shaggy-bark*)
2. **EVALUATIVE** Why is Little Man annoyed? (*The other children could not catch Cassie, who is the champ*)
3. **EVALUATIVE** (prediction) Why are the X's on the trees? Who put them there? (*It is some kind of marking, possibly from hikers, builders, scientists. Accept any reasonable answer.*)

Activity:

1. Role play the scenes from pages 15-19, of the children playing in the woods and finding the X's on the trees.

Pages 20-30

Synopsis: After finding X marks on most of the trees, the children hide in the bushes. They hear two white men discussing their plans to force Big Ma, the owner of the woodlands, to sell the trees to them. When the men approach her with the idea, Ma is reluctant to sell. The men then imply that her son, David, (Cassie's father) may be hurt on the job if she does not do as they wish.

Word Study: emerged (p. 22M); mournfully (p. 24B); familiarly (p. 25M); clenched (p. 26T); haughtily (p. 26M); pierced (p. 26M); haggle (p. 29T); venomously (p. 29T); curtly (p. 29M). This chapter contains many words that are root words with endings. Review the concept of root words and endings. Have the students work in pairs on a given page to list all of the words that have a root plus an ending. Circle the root and underline the ending. Extend the activity by drawing a tree on a large piece

of paper. Make sure the roots are visible. Write all of the root words from the list on the tree roots. Put the endings on branches. Write the completed words on leaves.

Discussion Questions:

1. **EVALUATIVE** What do you think of the way Mr. Andersen approached buying the trees? What kind of a person is he? Give examples from the story to support your answer. (*He is a harsh, seemingly unfeeling man who cares mostly about money. - p. 24, 26. He is prejudiced - p. 23.*)
2. **EVALUATIVE** (prediction) What can Papa do when he returns? (*Accept any reasonable answer. Possibilities may include hiring a lawyer to help, fighting with Mr. Andersen, cutting the trees down himself, asking for more money.*)

Activities:

1. Pretend to be Mr. Andersen trying a nice way to persuade Big Ma to sell the trees. Write a letter to her. Tell her all of the benefits of selling the trees.
2. Use a map of the southern United States to find the route Stacey will take to find his father. Note: This will be a general route, as the specific cities are not mentioned in the book.

Pages 31-37

Synopsis: The family members are waiting for Stacey and Papa to return. Meanwhile, they watch the trees being cut and their beloved forest destroyed. **Note to the teacher:** See pages 34 and 35 for another of Cassie's moving descriptions of the forest.

Word Study: hovering (p. 33T); ancient (p. 33M); fling (p. 34B); fleeing (p. 35T); foreign (p. 35T); ballads (p. 35T). Write sentences for three of the words, leaving blank lines for the words. Trade papers with a partner and fill in the words on each other's papers.

Discussion Questions:

1. **EVALUATIVE** What could be wrong with Mama? (*Accept any reasonable answer. Possibilities may include anemia, tuberculosis, poor nutrition, depression.*)
2. **EVALUATIVE** How do Mama and Cassie feel as they walk in the forest and see the fallen trees? (*They are sad and angry.*)

Note to the teacher: This is a good place to introduce the use of a thesaurus. If "sad" is the only word the students use to describe the feelings, have them find alternatives in the thesaurus.

Activity

1. Draw two pictures of the forest. Show the scene before the trees were cut and the scene after they were cut. Under each drawing, list words that describe the scene.

Pages 38-45

Synopsis: The children go into the forest to witness the devastation, even though they have been restricted from doing so. They are harassed by the lumbermen. Little Man retaliates, and the other children join in.

Word Study: accused (p. 38M); listlessly (p. 38M); reluctantly (p. 38B); skirting (p. 43B); elude (p. 44M). Play charades with the words. Act out a word and have the other students guess the word.

Discussion Questions:

1. **EVALUATIVE** What did Little Man do with his clothes? (*He folded them and put them by a tree.*) What do you know about him that helps you to understand why he did so? (*He is a meticulous dresser. He is also clever, and would figure out that the men would have a harder time catching him without clothing to grab.*)
2. **EVALUATIVE** Discuss the confrontation between the children and the lumbermen. Should the children have gone into the forest? Should Mr. Andersen have pushed Little Man? What did you think of the way the adults acted? (*Accept reasonable answers. There appears to be some evidence of wrong doing on each side.*)
3. **EVALUATIVE** What will Papa do next? (*Possibly beat up Mr. Andersen, reprimand the children, sit and talk to Mr. Andersen*)

Activity:

1. Conduct a mock trial in the classroom. First try Mr. Andersen and the lumbermen for mistreating the children. Then try the children for disobeying their mother and for fighting with the adults. (This extends discussion question #2.)

Pages 46-52

Synopsis: Papa arrives in time to rescue the children from a whipping by Mr. Andersen. Papa is carrying a strange black box. He tells Mr. Andersen that he has set dynamite throughout the forest, and he will detonate it if the lumbermen do not leave immediately. After some tense moments, Mr. Andersen leaves and the rest of the forest is saved.

Word Study: plunger (p. 49M); cunningly (p. 50T); ventured (p. 50M); incredulously (p. 51B); hollow (p. 52M). Write a paragraph using at least two of the vocabulary words. Try to use all five. Possible topics are: finding something in a hollow log; a place you ventured (real or make-believe); an animal or person who acted cunningly.

Discussion Questions:

1. **EVALUATIVE** Would Papa really have blown up the forest? What part of the story supports the answer? (*He probably would have. He had the dynamite ready. He stated that "a black man's always gotta be ready to die" on p. 49.*)
2. **EVALUATIVE** How does Cassie feel at the end of the story? (*She is happy that the trees have been saved. She is also proud of her father.*)
3. **EVALUATIVE** (prediction) What will Papa do with the cut trees? What will he do with the remaining forest? (*Accept any reasonable answer. Possibilities include selling the trees himself, keeping the wood for his own use, giving it to friends, selling the forest to someone else, or planting new trees.*)

Activities:

1. Brainstorm uses for the newly cleared land.
2. Write a newspaper article about the main events in the story. Create a headline that tells the main idea.

Culminating Activities

1. Research other groups of people protesting to save the environment. Contact organizations such as Greenpeace, the Sierra Club, and the Appalachian Trail club. Most areas also have local environmental groups.
2. Research different kinds of trees. Divide the class into groups. Have each group research a particular tree, focusing on the trees mentioned in the story. Give short reports to the class.
3. Retell the story from the point of view of one of the trees. Write about how the tree felt about the events. Tell how the tree felt about Mr. Andersen, Cassie, and Papa.
4. Read other books and poems about trees. *The Lorax*, by Dr. Seuss, is a story about a creature who cuts down all of the trees, and another creature who tries to save them. Reading the book and/or watching the video may provide material for further discussion about conserving the environment.
5. Write a poem about a tree.

SONG OF THE TREES TEST

Part I True or False: Mark each sentence with a **T** if it is true and an **F** if it is false. (2 points)

- _____ 1. Cassie is the oldest child.
- _____ 2. Cassie and her brother had to do chores.
- _____ 3. Cassie's brother, Stacey, thinks the trees sing, too.
- _____ 4. Cassie won the tag game.
- _____ 5. Mr. Andersen's men put the X's on the trees.
- _____ 6. Mr. Andersen only wanted to cut a few trees.
- _____ 7. Big Ma wanted to sell the trees.
- _____ 8. Mama loved the trees like Cassie did.
- _____ 9. Mama told the children to stay out of the forest.
- _____ 10. Papa was going to blow up the forest if Mr. Andersen didn't leave.

Part II Matching: Read each description in Column 1. Find the name in Column 2 which matches the description. Write the letter of the name in front of the correct description.

Column I

Column 2

- | | |
|---|---------------------|
| _____ 1. thought the trees whispered to her. | A. Little Man |
| _____ 2. took care of the farm while Papa was away. | B. Cassie |
| _____ 3. was David's mother. | C. Claude |
| _____ 4. rode to Louisiana to get Papa. | D. Mama |
| _____ 5. was very neat and clean. | E. Mr. Andersen |
| _____ 6. ate all the cornbread. | F. Big Ma |
| _____ 7. saved the trees. | G. Christopher-John |
| _____ 8. wanted to cut down the trees. | H. Tom |
| _____ 9. told his boss the lumbermen should leave. | I. Stacey |
| _____ 10. carried Cassie away from the woods. | J. David Logan |

Part III Multiple Choice: Choose the best ending for each sentence. Write the letter of the correct answer in the blank. (2 points each)

- _____ 1. Mama was upset that Christopher-John ate all of the cornbread because
(a) she didn't want him to get fat.
(b) they didn't have much food.
(c) the cornbread was for company.
- _____ 2. Cassie and her family lived in
(a) Mississippi.
(b) Louisiana.
(c) Georgia.
- _____ 3. The children, from the oldest to youngest, were
(a) Cassie, Little Man, Stacey, Christopher-John.
(b) Stacey, Cassie, Christopher-John, Little Man.
(c) Little Man, Christopher-John, Stacey, Cassie.
- _____ 4. Which sentence describes Cassie's feelings about the trees?
(a) Cassie was not interested in the trees.
(b) Cassie liked the trees, but she liked flowers better.
(c) Cassie loved the trees and thought they sang to her.
- _____ 5. Mr. Andersen started to cut the trees
(a) after Big Ma agreed to sell them.
(b) before he put X's on them.
(c) before he talked to Big Ma.
- _____ 6. Big Ma agreed to sell the trees because
(a) she wanted to get rid of them.
(b) she liked Mr. Andersen and wanted to help him.
(c) she was afraid that David would get hurt if she didn't.
- _____ 7. Mama sent Stacey to get Papa because
(a) he was the only one who knew the way.
(b) Mr. Andersen would not notice if one of the children were gone, but he would notice if one of the adults were gone.
(c) Cassie couldn't ride a horse.
- _____ 8. Little Man began fighting with Mr. Andersen because
(a) he didn't like the way Mr. Andersen was treating him.
(b) he wanted to show off to his brother and sister.
(c) he wanted to practice being a fighter.
- _____ 9. When Little Man started fighting with Mr. Andersen, Cassie and Christopher-John
(a) ran back to get their mother
(b) made him stop.
(c) tried to rescue him themselves.
- _____ 10. Papa set the dynamite because
(a) he had to do something serious to scare the lumbermen.
(b) it would be easier to blow the trees up than cut them down.
(c) he liked to play tricks on people.

Part IV Vocabulary: Find the correct definition below for each underlined word. Write the letter of the correct definition in each blank.

- _____ 1. The cotton stalks would *glisten* toward the sun.
- _____ 2. Little Man was a most *finicky* dresser.
- _____ 3. My brothers and I *ambled* down the narrow path.
- _____ 4. Christopher-John and Little Man resumed their *leisurely* pace.
- _____ 5. Mr. Andersen said he would not *haggle* over the price.
- _____ 6. Cassie listened to the crash of the *ancient* trees as they fell.
- _____ 7. The sound of the steel against the trees was *foreign* to Cassie.
- _____ 8. Little Man managed to *elude* the clutches of the lumbermen.
- _____ 9. Little Man *reluctantly* said he would stay out of the forest.
- _____ 10. "You can't sell these logs, David," Mr. Andersen exclaimed *incredulously*.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| A. to dispute or argue | F. to avoid or escape by quickness |
| B. showing a lack of belief | G. very old |
| C. to glitter or sparkle | H. walked at an easy, slow pace |
| D. unwillingly | I. without hurry |
| E. fussy | J. not belonging, not related |

Part V Essays: Choose two of the questions to answer. Write one or two paragraphs for each answer. Use quotes and information from the book to support your answer.

- 1. Pretend you are Cassie. Write a letter to Mr. Andersen convincing him to save the trees.
- 2. Was Papa brave or foolish? Why do you think so?
- 3. Was there anything else Papa could have done to save the trees?
- 4. What kind of a person was Mr. Andersen?

Song of the Trees

ANSWER KEY

Part I True or False

1. F
2. T
3. F
4. T
5. T
6. F
7. F
8. T
9. T
10. T

Part II Matching

1. B. Cassie
2. D. Mama
3. F. Big Ma
4. I. Stacey
5. A. Little Man
6. G. Christopher-John
7. J. David Logan
8. E. Mr. Andersen
9. H. Tom
10. C. Claude

Part III Multiple Choice

1. b
2. a
3. b
4. c
5. c
6. c
7. b
8. a
9. c
10. a

Part IV Vocabulary

1. c
2. e
3. h
4. i
5. a
6. g
7. j
8. f
9. d
10. b

Part V Essay Questions

Answers will vary.



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