

ROLL OF THUNDER, HEAR MY CRY

Pre-Assessment & Interpretation Guide

CENTRAL IDEA

What does it take to hold onto something when the entire system around you is built to take it — and what does holding on cost the people who manage it?

Novel: Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred D. Taylor

Setting: Rural Mississippi, 1933, during the Great Depression and under Jim Crow

Designed for: Advanced readers in grades 6–8, with adaptable supports

TEXT USE

Use a teacher-approved copy of the complete 12-chapter novel. This resource supplies original prompts and no reproduced passages.

Purpose & Directions

This pre-assessment reveals current reasoning about economic power, the difference between a rule and an enforcement, the cost of resistance, and what a person owes someone who is drifting toward harm. It does not require any knowledge of the novel and should not be used as a gatekeeping score.

ADMINISTRATION

Allow 25–40 minutes, or split across two sittings. Students may write, dictate, or record oral responses. Keep the reasoning demand constant.

Student Directions

- Explain how you know; more words do not automatically mean stronger thinking.
- Name uncertainty when evidence is limited.
- You may revise any response.
- Do not search the internet during this task.

1. Owning the Ground

SCENARIO

One family owns the ground they live on. Everyone around them rents or works someone else's land.

Task

What can that family do that their neighbors cannot? What new dangers does owning it create?

2. The Used Book

SCENARIO

A student is handed a badly damaged book and told it is what students like her receive. The record inside the cover explains why.

Task

What has she just been taught? Is refusing it worth what refusing might cost?

3. Refusing to Buy

SCENARIO

A community decides to stop shopping at one store in order to punish its owners. Many of the people asked to join owe that store money.

Task

Is this a fair weapon? Who is actually taking the risk, and who is making the decision?

4. Made to Apologize

SCENARIO

An adult makes a child apologize to someone who wronged the child, in public, to prevent something worse.

Task

Was the adult right? What did the child lose? Can both answers be true at once?

5. Drifting

SCENARIO

Someone you have known your whole life starts spending time with people who are clearly using him. He will not listen.

Task

What do you owe him? At what point does he become responsible for what happens?

6. Burning Your Own Field

SCENARIO

A person deliberately destroys something valuable that belongs to them, in order to stop something worse from happening.

Task

How would you judge that choice? What would you need to know before judging it?

7. What the Record Says

SCENARIO

Something happened to a family, but no newspaper covered it and no court recorded it. All that survives is what the family tells its children.

Task

Is that account evidence? What can it establish, and what can it not?

Student Self-Reflection

Which response best shows your thinking? Why?

Where did you need more evidence?

Did any answer change while you were writing it?

Facilitator Interpretation Guide

Dimension	Emerging	Developing	Advanced
Claim	Opinion or summary	Defensible but broad	Nuanced, conditional, revisable
Evidence	Unanchored assertion	Relevant example	Selects evidence by purpose and names its limits
Perspective-Taking	One party's view only	Names two views	Explains why views differ and what each one misses
Reasoning	Evidence listed	Explains a link	Explains mechanism, motive, and uncertainty
Complexity	Dismisses alternatives	Mentions another view	Tests counterevidence and revises

Look Especially For

- Item 3: does the student notice that the people bearing the risk and the people making the decision may be different? That distinction runs the entire unit.
- Item 4: does the student hold two true things at once — that the adult was right and that something was still lost? Students who can do this will read Big Ma correctly.
- Item 7: does the student treat family testimony as a real source with real limits, rather than dismissing it or accepting it whole?
- Item 1: does the student already see ownership as a source of both freedom and exposure?

Do Not

- Convert the matrix into an IQ label or a single permanent score.
- Penalize handwriting, spelling, speech, or length when they are not the construct.
- Assume a confident answer equals a well-reasoned one.
- Delay access supports until a student struggles.

Instructional Decision Sheet

Dimension	Current Evidence	Next Challenge / Support
Claim		
Evidence		
Perspective-Taking		
Reasoning		
Complexity		

Compacting Decision

☐ Maintain core sequence ☐ Compact routine practice ☐ Accelerate to independent inquiry

Access Plan

Reassessment after Mission 3
