

Dear Parents,

I want to discuss a book on the seventh-grade summer reading list, *Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry*, by Mildred D. Taylor. This novel has been in the CCS seventh-grade literature curriculum for several years, but considering events of the past days, its study is even more relevant. For those of you not familiar with her novel, it received the Newbury Medal in 1977 which is awarded annually to the author of "the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children". It is a story of the Logan family and their struggle against racism in 1930's Mississippi as they maintain their pride and independence while they pursue the American dream of making their life better for their family.

As the book attempts to depict the culture and history of this time, the "n" word is used. When we discuss the novel in class, we intend to show the children that words, which can seem small and insignificant, can have an abundance of power and influence. Of course, they can be used for good, but they can also be used for evil purposes and can spread hatred and division. Words can reveal much about a person's inner heart and thoughts. There are many Biblical connections as God has much to say about the power of words. Two examples from Proverbs 10:11 and 15:4 state, "The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence" and "Gentle words bring life and health; a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit."

We encourage you to discuss the book with your child as he/she completes the summer reading. Open a family dialog and share your own thoughts and experiences on the topics of racism, equality, the importance of family, and other topics included in Ms. Taylor's story.

Additionally, this year we will incorporate a short study of the author into the class discussion. For those of you who are not familiar with her story, Ms. Taylor was the great-granddaughter of a slave and a plantation owner, and some of the scenes in the novel were taken from stories she heard from her family. Ms. Taylor wrote several children's novels and received numerous literary awards for her work, including the Coretta Scott King award in 1982, 1988, and 1990.

Middle schoolers are struggling to find their own identity, and I believe one of the most valuable lessons we can model for them is to show how *all* of us have been fashioned in the likeness of God (Genesis 1:27, James 3:9). We are made in His image, and in God's eyes, we stand before Him as equals – equally created, equally loved, equally valued, and equally in need of Jesus (John 1:12, 3:16). Please know that we intend to treat this novel and all its topics with the utmost respect in our classroom discussions.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.