

Midnight Without a Moon

By Linda Williams Jackson

2018 Jane Addams Children's Book Award Honor, Books for Older Children

This Learn and Do Reading Guide is intended to help teachers, librarians, and family members facilitate important, genuine reflection, dialogue, and inspiration for action among young people as they read this commended title together or on their own.

If the adult is reading aloud, the commentary can be shared and the questions posed as seems fit in the process. If young people are reading independently, Building Background and Reflection can be discussed with an adult before and after reading. Dialogue Questions could be assigned for written consideration while reading, with discussion afterward. All or just a few prompts and questions can be utilized. In all cases, conversation about the book is key.

In a group setting, children can be asked to turn to someone nearby to consider a question before several young people share with the whole group. It is so important that young people share their own perspective and learn about others' as well. Here are some useful sentence starters for students extending each other's thinking: When you said...I thought/I wondered...Before I read this I thought...now I think.... This makes me feel....because....



The Jane Addams Children's Book Award annually recognizes children's books of literary and aesthetic excellence that effectively engage children in thinking about peace, social justice, global community, and equity for all people.

Jane Addams wrote, "Peace would no longer be an absence of war, but the unfolding of worldwide processes making for the nurture of human life." She saw the fostering of "sympathetic knowledge" as the building block of peace. (Newer Ideals of Peace - 1907). In modern terms, the award criteria asks, "How can people work with compassion, empathy, and activism to advance Jane Addams's belief that achieving true peace means more than ending war; it means ensuring justice for all people?" "Sympathetic knowledge," compassion, empathy, and activism are the distinguishing features of peace-building that we seek to emphasize in our reading guides.

BEFORE READING

Adults:

- *Midnight Without a Moon* is indeed “an unflinching bird’s-eye view of 1955 Mississippi.” (Sharon G. Flake)
In light of the violence within the story, plan for how you will provide a safe place for processing feelings that may arise for children, especially those who have experienced domestic and racialized violence within their families and communities and for those who are sensitive to news of such violence in the media. All children will need attentive support. Encourage empathy and questioning.

Young Readers:

- What do you know about Emmett Till? Emmett was an African American teen who visited the Mississippi Delta during the summer in which *Midnight Without a Moon* is set. While *Midnight* is a fictional story, sadly, Emmett’s story is not. Emmett was murdered, and his death helped to bring about the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s. To learn more read [Emmett Till - Students Britannica](#).
- We need to understand the term “lynching” going into this story. “A lynching is the public killing of an individual who has not received any due process.” ([NAACP.org](#))

July Chapters 1-3

BUILDING BACKGROUND

What do we know about? What can be learned going in?

- Before reading consider: “Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror.” Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop [Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass Doors](#). Based on *Midnight Without a Moon*’s summary and the book cover, what are you wondering? Before you begin reading, how do you think this book might become a window, mirror, or sliding glass door for you? Why?
- From the first page, Rose vividly, honestly and dramatically shares her life on a sharecropper farm in the Mississippi Delta of 1955. As you bond with this spunky girl, take special note of the emotional challenges she faces.

DIALOGUE

Spaces for conversation throughout the book

- Imagine you could speak for Rose and answer Ma Pearl's question at the end of Chapter 1, "*Gal, what the heck jest happened to you?*" What would you say?
- Among the many loud and commanding characters in Rose's family, one is very quiet. What do you learn and sense about her brother, Fred Lee?
- What do you find yourself inferring or even predicting as Chapter 3 builds and Rose says on page 30, "*Something was wrong?*"

REFLECT

Deeper dive, or looking as a whole. How does this change how you feel and what you think?

- What images of Rose's world are most vivid for you? Why? What parts of the setting for these chapters did you have difficulty imagining in your 'minds eye'?
- Rose's emotional hurt and her sense of injustice are strong. In what ways do you find yourself empathizing with her? Why?

July Chapters 4-8

BUILDING BACKGROUND

What do we know about? What can be learned going in?

- Colorism affects Rose within her family and within her concept of herself. "Colorism—the preference for or presumed superiority of people based on the color of their skin—is related to racism but can be more subtle and, for many of us, feels less familiar. Colorism, at once an interracial and intra-racial phenomenon, can be particularly devastating when perpetrated within racial groups, often within families." EmbraceRace.org Colorism is a by-product of racism and white supremacy that reinforces the notion that people with lighter skin tones are more capable, competent, etc.



Heading to chop cotton in the 1950s

[Library of Congress](https://www.loc.gov/rr/hist/hist1.htm)

DIALOGUE

Spaces for conversation throughout the book

- Throughout this section, how does Rose respond and react to violence— both the news of violence and direct violence coming her way? Further, how are you feeling about each instance of violence she encounters?
- Medgar Evers was the first field officer in Mississippi for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). As you read, keep track of questions you have about the NAACP as well as the very different opinions about the organization held by different characters.
- Why are people saying Levi ‘got himself shot’ or ‘was called home by God’? Do you agree?

REFLECT

Deeper dive, or looking as a whole: How does this change your feeling and thinking?

- Does Rose’s dreaming of the future or use of humor and even sarcasm surprise you? How? Why do you think she takes the tack she does in these incidents?
- Do you or have you ever had a friend like Hallelujah? What about him reminds you of your friend? What do you most like about Hallelujah and his connection with Rose?
- Was there a part or parts of these intense chapters that felt like a sliding glass door for you — where you could “walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author?” Which part(s) and why do you think that was so?

August Chapters 9-13



BUILDING BACKGROUND

What do we know about, what can be learned going in?

- Emmett Till visited his uncle Mose Wright in Money, Mississippi. In these chapters our story connects with Emmett’s as we learn that Money is a nearby town and Papa is a (fictional) friend of Mose.
- *The Chicago Defender* talked about in these upcoming chapters was, “more than a local paper, the Defender was also an engine of ideas and opinions that galvanized black people nationwide.” [Remembering the Chicago Defender - National Museum of African American History and Culture](#). *The Chicago Defender*, and other Black newspapers, had a huge impact. When most periodicals did not cover Black news, Black newspapers carried messaging about the Black community and politics outside of local jurisdictions and images and stories across the country (and/or world) similar to the way things ‘go viral’; today.

DIALOGUE

Spaces for conversation throughout the book

- Aunt Belle and Montgomery Ward Harris arrive at last in Chapter 11. What do you most like about each of them? What do you wonder about them?
- What are you thinking, feeling and wondering about Queen?
- On page 121, Rose says, “And I certainly wouldn’t have the opportunity to get myself educated like Aunt Belle. Because I didn’t have the grit to defy Ma Pearl the way she had.” What do you infer from this statement and what is your reaction to it? Why?

REFLECT

Deeper dive, or looking as a whole: How does this change your feeling or thinking?

- What questions do you have for our main characters at this juncture? Choose several and create an important question for each: Rose, Fred Lee, Queen, Ma Pearl, Papa, Hallelujah, Aunt Belle, Monty. Be as honest as you can and ask them to be honest too.

August Chapters 14-18

BUILDING BACKGROUND

What do we know about? What can be learned going in?

- White Citizen Councils were organized to oppose integration of Mississippi schools following the *Brown vs Board of Education* Supreme Court Decision.



Equal Justice Initiative

DIALOGUE

Spaces for conversation throughout the book

- Rose's and Hallelujah's visit to Miss Addie and her daughter Jinx was both fun and upsetting in several ways. What do you imagine Rose and Hallelujah thinking to themselves as they headed back to Rose's house?
- Why does Aunt Belle say Ma Pearl has a 'slave mentality'? Why does Ma say Aunt Belle has a 'fool mentality'? What are Rose's thoughts and feelings regarding these two opposing views?
- At the end of this section, we only know Emmett—as yet the unnamed boy—is missing. What are your biggest questions about what happened to him?

REFLECT

Deeper dive, or looking as a whole: How does this change your feeling or thinking?

- Rose's fears are building and her aspirations for why she wants to move North are changing. Have your hopes and aspirations for Rose changed since beginning this book? What were they then and what are they now? Why?

September Chapters 19-24

BUILDING BACKGROUND

What do we know about? What can be learned going in?

- Listen to and watch: [Nat King Cole - Unforgettable](#)
- Be ready to stop and take some deep breaths as you read these chapters. Notice and take care of your own feelings as you witness Rose's experiences and what she learns.

DIALOGUE

Spaces for conversation throughout the book

- Rose's anger is rising throughout these chapters. Why is that and where might it take her?
- As you read Chapter 21 and experience the depths of lament Rose and others in her church are experiencing at Emmett Till's death, what is most impactful for you and why?
- Though Rose resists coming forward to be saved, she smiles when her brother does. Why do you think he came forward and why do you think she smiles?

REFLECT

Deeper dive, or looking as a whole: How does this change your feeling or thinking?

- Donna Bivens gives this definition of internalized racism: “As people of color are victimized by racism, we internalize it. That is, we develop ideas, beliefs, actions and behaviors that support or collude with racism. This internalized racism has its own systemic reality and its own negative consequences in the lives and communities of people of color.” [RacialEquityTools.org](https://www.RacialEquityTools.org) What evidence do you recognize of internalized racism in Rose and her family’s experience? What are the negative consequences?
- What are your greatest fears for Rose and her family members at this juncture in this story? Why?

September Chapters 25-28

BUILDING BACKGROUND

What do we know about? What can be learned going in?



A photo of Emmett Till like the one that Hallelujah shows Rose [ACLU.org](https://www.ACLU.org)

DIALOGUE

Spaces for conversation throughout the book

- In chapter 25 Rose and Hallelujah have a conversation about bravery, standing up, and fighting. If you could contribute to their conversation, what would you say to each of them?
- What does the domestic violence affecting Aunt Ruthie help you understand about Rose’s family that you did not understand before?
- Do you think Ma Pearl is justified in Chapter 27 in her opposition to the NAACP and all that is brewing around the trial? In what ways is she justified and in what ways is she not?

REFLECT

Deeper dive, or looking as a whole: How does this change your feeling or thinking?

- How do you interpret Rose's statement, "Stars shine brighter in the darkness?" How does this connect with the whole of the story so far?
- What are you inferring or predicting will happen as this novel draws to a close? Why do you think and feel what you do?

September into October Chapters 29-33

BUILDING BACKGROUND

What do we know about? What can be learned going in?



Headlines following Emmett Till murder trial. [PBS.org](https://www.pbs.org)



A young woman emerging from baptism.

[MississippiEncyclopedia.org](https://www.MississippiEncyclopedia.org)

DIALOGUE

Spaces for conversation throughout the book

- What are the most important things you learn about Papa in Chapter 29 regarding his role in the family, the kind of person he is, and his influence on Rose? Why do these things seem important to you?
- What do you think caused Rose to ask to be baptized after she had resisted for so long?
- Were you surprised by any part of what happened to and with Queen during this last part of the story? What surprised you and why?

REFLECT

Deeper dive, or looking as a whole: How does this change your feeling or thinking?

- Ma Pearl is an antagonist throughout this novel. What have you come to understand about her? If you could talk to Rose about her, what would you say?
- Were you surprised by Rose's decision to stay in Mississippi? What do you see as the strongest influences in her change of heart?
- What does it mean to you when Rose (now Rosa) says, "Imagine how bright a star would shine at midnight without a moon?"

CALL TO ACTION

Who do you want to talk to about this issue or topic? Why is this book important for kids to read or have read to them? Who do you want to share it with?

- Who will you tell about this story? What do you want them to know? Why? What will you say to convince them to read it?

Read *A Sky Full of Stars*, the sequel to *Midnight Without a Moon* and find out what happens next!

- Hallelujah said, "Dreams have more meaning when you fight for them." Linda Williams Jackson challenges us to identify what we dream of for ourselves, our families, and our community and to act on our dreams. What can you/will you fight for? Is it for those you see who are sad, hurt or needing something? What can and will you do?
- Learn more about Emmett Till and the Civil Rights Movement that his death helped sparked. How is the Civil Rights movement still underway in your community? What can you do to take part?
- Do you recognize racism and colorism among your friends, school mates and/or family? What can you and will you do and say to counter this harm?

ADDITIONAL INQUIRY AND RESOURCES

These sites can be used to build further background and to deepen understanding.

- [Midnight Without A Moon: Fictionalizes Civil Rights Moment Through Eyes Of A Teen NPR](#)
Interview with Linda Williams Jackson
- Middle Grade Discussion Resource for *Midnight Without a Moon* [Q and A with Linda Williams Jackson](#)
- Emmett Till - [Students Britannica](#)

OTHER RELATED JANE ADDAMS CHILDREN'S BOOK AWARD HONORED TITLES

- *Choosing Brave: How Mamie Till-Mobley and Emmett Till Sparked the Civil Rights Movement* by Angela Joy
- *Ghost Boys* by Jewell Parker Rhodes
- *Heart and Soul: The Story of America & African Americans* by Kadir Nelson
- *Getting Away with Murder: The True Story of the Emmett Till Case* by Chris Crowe

Susan Freiss spent the heart of her career co-creating and teaching in a vibrant 4/5 multiage community within a public school setting and currently teaches middle school reading, writing, and higher order thinking on a part-time basis. She is a previous Jane Addams Children's Book Award selection committee and Peace Association Board member. She lives in Madison, Wisconsin, holds a Masters in Curriculum and Instruction along with Reading Specialist certification, and became a Wisconsin Master Teacher in 2009.