



Mississippi History on Loan BARN BURNING

The Mississippi Department of Archives and History established the Mississippi History on Loan film program to enhance classroom instruction on Mississippi history, literature, art, personalities, and places. The program has over 200 titles available year-round for grades 4-12. The films are offered in VHS and DVD format.

Mississippi History on Loan presents *Barn Burning*. William Faulkner's short story centers on Sarty, an adolescent boy in post-Civil War Mississippi. Sarty's father, Snopes, is a sharecropper consumed by resentment. When Snopes plans revenge on his employer, Sarty must reconcile loyalty to his father with his sense of justice.

Produced by Calvin Skaggs, 2004. 40 minutes, color.

The activity packet includes the following:

- Curricular Connections for Common Core and Mississippi Department of Education Frameworks
- William Faulkner Biography
- Timeline of Events
- Discussion Questions
- Identifying Elements of a Story
- Character Analysis
- Text Analysis
- Essay
- Who To Talk To
- Teacher Evaluation

For more information please contact:

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Curricular Connections

MDAH works to ensure our lessons and activities complement Common Core Curriculum and Mississippi Department of Education frameworks, competencies, and objectives. Each lesson and activity has been matched to the grade levels, subjects, competencies, and objectives.

Curricular Connections		
Common Core Language Arts	Grade 8	RL1; RL2; RL3; RL4; RL7; W2; W4; W5; SL1; SL2; SL3; SL4; SL5; SL6; L1; L2; L3; L4; L5
	Grades 9-10	RL1; RL2; RL3; RL4; RL5; RL7; W2; W4; W5; SL1; SL2; SL3; SL4; SL5; SL6; L1; L2; 3; L4; L5
	Grades 11-12	RL1; RL2; RL3; RL4; RL5; RL7; W2; W4; W5; SL1; SL2; SL3; SL4; SL5; SL6; L1; L2; 3; L4; L5

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William Faulkner Biography

Who is William Faulkner?

William Cuthbert Faulkner (September 25, 1897 – July 6, 1962) was an American writer and Nobel Prize recipient from Oxford, Mississippi. Faulkner wrote novels, short stories, poetry, essays, screenplays, and a play. He is primarily known for his novels and short stories set in the fictional Yoknapatawpha County, based on Lafayette County, Mississippi, where he spent most of his life.

Faulkner is one of the most celebrated writers in American literature. Although his work was published as early as 1919 and extensively during the 1920s and 1930s, Faulkner was relatively unknown until receiving the 1954 Nobel Prize in Literature for “his powerful and artistically unique contribution to the modern American novel.” He became the only Mississippi-born Nobel laureate. Two of his works, *A Fable* (1954) and his last novel *The Reivers* (1962) won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. In 1998, the Modern Library ranked his 1929 novel *The Sound and the Fury* sixth on its list of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century. Also on the list were *As I Lay Dying* (1930) and *Light in August* (1932). *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) is often included on similar lists.



Top: *William Faulkner speaks to the Delta Council at Delta State Teachers College, May 15, 1952.* Bottom: *Faulkner's Oxford home, Rowan Oak. MDAH, Archives and Records Services.*

Plan a trip to Rowan Oak!

Go to <http://www.rowanoak.com/> to plan a trip to Faulkner's Oxford home.



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Timeline of Events

Name _____ Date _____

Directions: Place the events of the film in the proper chronological order.

_____ Abner brings de Spain to court.

_____ Sarty goes to Major de Spain's house to warn him.

_____ Major de Spain charges Abner twenty extra bushels of corn in addition to their contract.

_____ Sarty's family leaves without him.

_____ Abner steps on de Spain's rug.

_____ Sarty overhears men talking about Abner's past as a horse thief.

_____ Abner and his sons go to town.

_____ Sarty gets into a fight with a boy who insults his father.

_____ Abner tells his wife to hold Sarty.

_____ Abner uses a rock to "scrub" the rug clean.



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Timeline of Events **Answer Key**

Name _____ Date _____

Directions: Place the events of the film in the proper chronological order.

- 6 Abner brings de Spain to court.
- 9 Sarty goes to Major de Spain's house to warn him.
- 4 Major de Spain charges Abner twenty extra bushels of corn in addition to their contract.
- 10 Sarty's family leaves without him.
- 2 Abner steps on de Spain's rug.
- 7 Sarty overhears men talking about Abner's past as a horse thief.
- 5 Abner and his sons go to town.
- 1 Sarty gets into a fight with a boy who insults his father.
- 8 Abner tells his wife to hold Sarty.
- 3 Abner uses a rock to "scrub" the rug clean.



Mississippi History on Loan BARN BURNING

Discussion Questions

Name _____ Date _____

Directions: Answer the questions below during or after watching *Barn Burning*.

1. Who is the protagonist in the story?
2. What are the basic features of his situation or predicament?
3. What are the important conflicts at work in the story?
4. What is important about Abner and Sarty's walk in the woods on the way to the new tenement job?
5. At the new sharecropper's quarters, what is Sarty's impression of the big house?



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Discussion Questions Continued

6. What is significant about the father's marring the rug?
7. How is the rug cleaned?
8. After Major de Spain asks for compensation, what are Sarty's hopes?
9. What are Sarty's hopes after the fine has been imposed?
10. What is revealed about Abner when he buys tobacco and cheese for his sons and gives Sarty his pocketknife?
11. Why is Abner Snopes setting fires?



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Discussion Questions **Answer Key**

1. Sarty Snopes
2. Sarty does not respect or believe in his father's vengeful barn burning, but he wants to protect his father and keep his family intact.
3. Sarty's father burns barns out of spite for his employers, therefore forcing the Snopes family to continually move from place to place. They do not have a true home since Abner cannot help but burn his employers' barns. Sarty is too young to understand why his father is so destructive, but he knows in his heart that his father is wrong. Sarty wants to prevent his father from burning barns but he also wants to keep his family together.
4. Abner accuses Sarty of nearly confessing his father's barn building to the people in the town they just left. But Abner impresses upon his son the importance of sticking with family and with people of your own blood, contending that family is all you have in life.
5. Sarty is astounded by the grandeur of the pristine white house. The obvious affluence of its residents convinces Sarty that his father will be forced to give up his barn burning and that the family will be able to remain in this new location.
6. Instead of burning Major de Spain's barn right away, Abner decides to destroy de Spain's rug to indicate his distaste for members of society who have financial and political power.
7. The rug was first washed with lye soap by the daughters who removed the stain. However, Abner felt that his daughters did not remove the stain completely so he uses a rough stone to scrub the rug until the place where the stain was becomes a hole.
8. Sarty hopes that his father will allow him to hide the additional twenty bushels of corn demanded by Major de Spain so he cannot have them.
9. After the judge's ruling of \$5 worth of corn being given as payment to Major de Spain in addition to the amount in the contract, Sarty is still pessimistic. He does not think that his father should have to pay for the damages to the rug since Major de Spain did not specify how he wanted it to be cleaned.
10. Abner is very generous to his sons and buys the oldest son a plug of tobacco as well as buying himself and both his sons cheese to share. Abner gives Sarty his pocket knife, a major indicator of his generosity and love for his son.
11. Abner sets fires because he feels like he has been wronged by people of higher power.



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Identifying Elements of a Story

Name _____ Date _____

Directions: Answer the questions below before or after watching *Barn Burning*.

1. Who is the narrator of the story?
2. Describe the setting of the film *Barn Burning*.
Time:

Place:
3. What is the climax of the story?
4. What are two themes of the story?
5. Identify 2-3 of the symbols in the story and explain what each represents.



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Identifying Elements of a Story **Answer Key**

1. Sarty Snopes
2. Time: Post-Civil War
Place: Mississippi or another rural area of the South
3. The climax of the story occurs when Sarty finally realizes how wrong his father is to burn barns. He breaks free from his mother's hold on him and tries to warn Major de Spain that his father is going to burn down his barn.
4. Loyalty to family rather than loyalty to the law; courage; youth and growing up; and class and society.
5. Fire (representing revenge); the rug (representing Abner's hatred for the upper class); the wagon (as a symbol of the inconstancy in the family's life); Abner's black jacket (a symbol of better times for the family).

Mississippi History on Loan BARN BURNING

Character Analysis

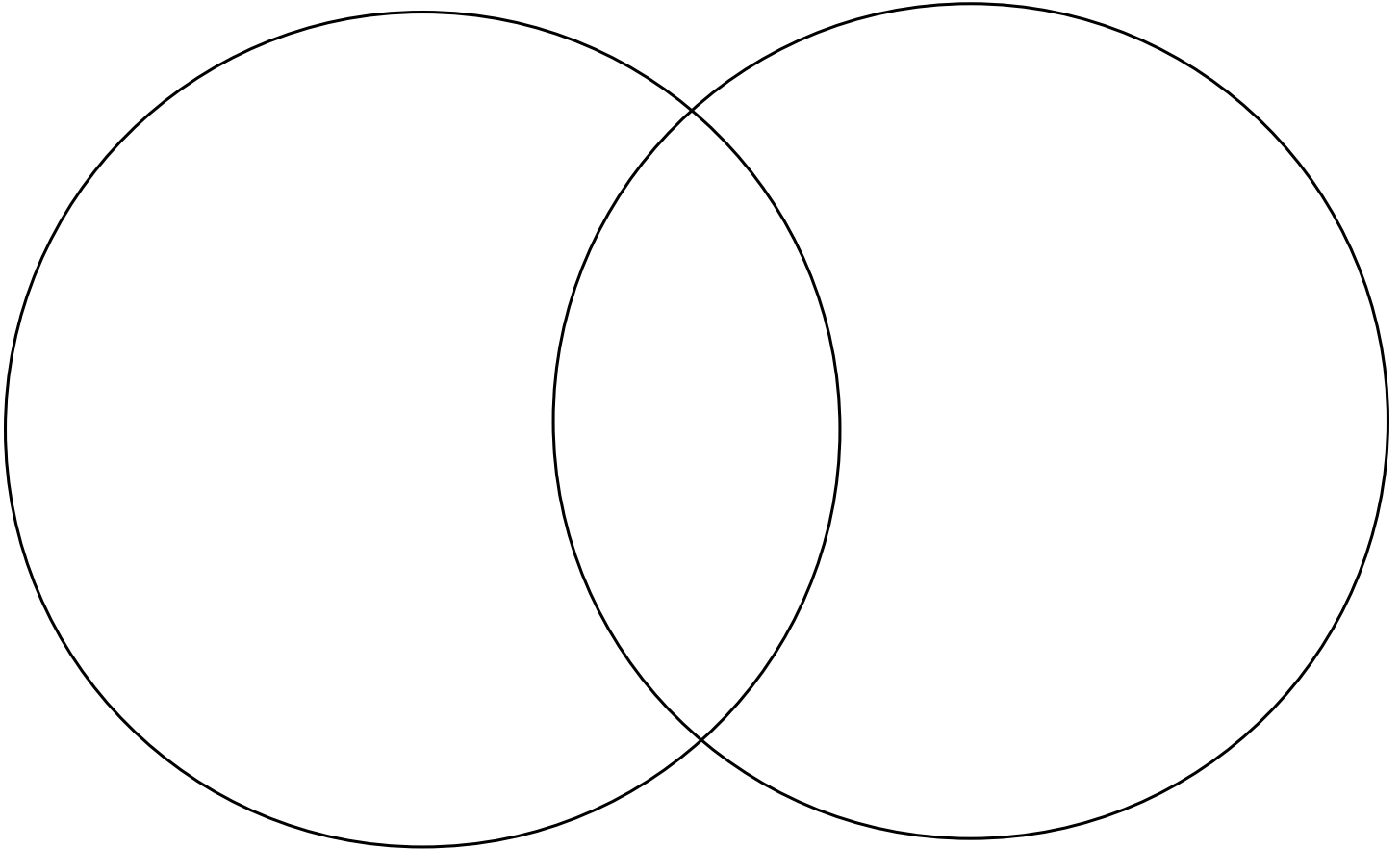
Name _____ Date _____

Directions: Occasionally films portray characters differently than the author wrote them. Using Abner, complete the venn diagram below to note the similarities and differences in Abner's character in the film and the short story.

Abner

Short Story

Film



Mississippi History on Loan

BARN BURNING

Character Analysis Answer Key

Name _____ Date _____

Directions: Occasionally films portray characters differently than the author wrote them. Using Abner, complete the venn diagram below to note the similarities and differences in Abner's character in the film and the short story.

Abner

Short Story

Film

- Primitive thoughts and actions
- Actions driven by war experience (makes small campfires so as not to alert the enemy, speaks little and softly, etc.)
- Gets his oldest son to help burn de Spain's barn

- Stiff movements
- Limp from the war
- Disgruntled appearance
- Pride in his old Sunday frock coat

- Gives Sarty his pocketknife
- Leaves town and Sarty after the fire
- More human-like



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Text Analysis

It was after sundown when they reached home. They ate supper by lamplight, then, sitting on the doorstep, the boy watched the night fully accomplished, listening to the whippoorwhills and the frogs, when he heard his mother's voice: "Abner! No! No! Oh, God. Oh, God. Abner!" and he rose, whirled, and saw the altered light through the door where a candle stub now burned in a bottle neck on the table and his father, still in the hat and coat, at once formal and burlesque as though dressed carefully for some shabby and ceremonial violence, emptying the reservoir of the lamp back into the five-gallon kerosene can from which it had been filled, while the mother tugged at his arm until he shifted the lamp to the other hand and flung her back, not savagely or viciously, just hard, into the wall, her hands flung out against the wall for balance, her mouth open and in her face the same quality of hopeless despair as had been in her voice. Then his father saw him standing in the door.

"Go to the barn and get that can of oil we were oiling the wagon with," he said. The boy did not move. Then he could speak.

"What. . ." he cried "What are you . . ."

"Go get that oil," his father said. "Go."

Then he was moving, running outside the house, toward the stable: this the old habit, the old blood which he had not been permitted to choose for himself, which had been bequeathed him willy nilly and which had run for so long (and who know where, battenning on what of outrage and savagery and lust) before it came to him. I could keep on, he thought. I could run on and on and never look back, never need to see his face again. Only I can't. I can't, the rusted can in his hand now, the liquid splashing in it as he ran back to the house and into it, into the sound of his mother's weeping in the next room, and handing the can to his father.

"Ain't you going to even send a n*****?" he cried. "At least you send a n***** before!"

This time his father didn't strike him. The hand came even faster than the blow had, the same hand which had set the can on the table with almost excruciating care flashing from the can toward him too quick for him to follow it, gripping him by the back of the shirt and on to tiptoe before he had seen it quit the can, the face stooping at him in breathless and frozen ferocity, the cold, dead voice speaking over him to the older brother who leaned against the table, chewing with that steady, curious, sidewise motion of cows:

"Empty the can into the big one and go on. I'll ketch up with you."

"Better tie him to the bedpost," the brother said.

"Do like I told you," the father said. Then the boy was moving, his bunched shirt and the hard, bony hand between his shoulder-blades, his toes just touching the floor, across the room and into the other one, past the sisters sitting with spread heavy thighs in the two chairs over the cold hearth, and to where his mother and aunt sat side by side on the bed, the aunt's arms about his mother's shoulders.



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Text Analysis Continued

“Hold him,” the father said. The aunt made a startled movement. “Not you,” the father said. “Lennie. Take hold of him. I want to see you do it.” His mother took him by the wrist. “You’ll hold him better than that. If he gets loose don’t you know what he is going to do? He will go up yonder.” He jerked his head toward the road. “Maybe I’d better tie him.”

“I’ll hold him,” his mother whispered.

“See you do then.” Then his father was gone, the stiff foot heavy and measured upon the boards, ceasing at last.

Then he began to struggle. His mother caught him in both arms, he jerking and wrenching at them. He would be stronger in the end, he knew that. But he had no time to wait for it. “Lemme go!” he cried. “I don’t want to have to hit you!”

“Let him go!” the aunt said. “If he don’t go, before God, I am going up there myself!”

“Don’t you see I can’t? his mother cried. “Sarty! Sarty! No! No! Help me, Lizzie!”

Then he was free. His aunt grasped at him but was too late . . . Then he was out of the room, out of the house, in the mild dust of the starlit road and the heavy ripeness of honeysuckle, the pale ribbon unspooling with terrific slowness under his running feet, reaching the gate at last and turning in, running, his heart and lungs drumming, on up the drive toward the lighted house, the lighted door. He did not know, he burst in, sobbing for breath, incapable for the moment of speech; he saw the astonished face of the Negro in the linen jacket without knowing when the Negro had appeared.

“De Spain!” he cried, panted. “Where’s . . .” then he saw the white man too emerging form a white door down the hall. “Barn!” he cried. “Barn!”

“What?” the white man said. “Barn?”

“Yes!” the boy cried. “Barn!”

William Faulkner, “Barn Burning” in *Mississippi Writers: An Anthology* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1991), 74-76.



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Text Analysis Continued

Name _____ Date _____

Directions: Use the excerpt from *Barn Burning* to answer the questions below.

1. What type of imagery does Faulkner use to emphasize the stressful situation?

2. Why do you think Abner does not send a messenger to de Spain's house?

3. Why does Sarty's mother say she cannot release Sarty?



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Text Analysis Continued

4. Analyze in detail the conflict within Sarty. Conclude your analysis by explaining why you believe Sarty resolves it the way he does.



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Text Analysis **Answer Key**

1. In his coat and hat Abner is both “formal and burlesque,” helping the reader think of his as both dangerous and comical. Faulkner uses words like “savagely” and “hard” to emphasize how Abner shoved his wife against the wall. The word “splashing” is an onomatopoeia that helps the reader understand what the oil sounded like as it hit the sides of the can. The sisters are yet again compared to cows, as is the older brother. When Sarty is free and he is running towards de Spain’s house, he runs upon a road that is a “pale ribbon unspooling with terrific slowness.”
2. One possibility is that Abner wanted de Spain not to know that his barn was engulfed in flames, therefore giving Abner and his family time to pack up and leave before de Spain had time to confront him.
3. Sarty’s mother is afraid of her husband potentially hurting her and her children. She is also afraid of breaking-up her family. If Sarty is able to warn de Spain, Abner could be caught or killed. If Sarty warns de Spain and Abner escapes, he will be angry at his son.
4. Sarty has an internal conflict when his father tells him to go fetch the oil can from the barn because Sarty knows that what his father is doing is wrong. Sarty argues with his father to send a warning by a messenger, but when his father refuses, he knows that he must warn de Spain himself. Sarty is aware of the consequences but he realizes that he can no longer participate in his father’s vengeance, a trademark of growing up.

Mississippi History on Loan BARN BURNING

Essay Question

Name _____ Date _____

Directions: How do Americans typically establish individual independence as teenagers? Do you remember any crucial moment in your own life when you realized that you had to make a choice between what your parent(s) and/or family believed and your own values? Describe the moment below and explain why it was a crucial moment in your life.



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Who To Talk To

Throughout the short story “Barn Burning” and its film adaptations, the teen-aged Sarty is continually torn between doing what is right and supporting his family. Talk with students about the difficulties of choosing to do what is right versus what is popular and the fact that there is always someone to turn to for help, such as a guidance counselor, teacher, etc.



Mississippi History on Loan BARN BURNING

Teacher Evaluation

COMPLETE BOTH SIDES AND PLEASE MAIL OR FAX TO THE ADDRESS ON THE NEXT PAGE. THANK YOU!

TEACHER NAME _____

SCHOOL NAME & ADDRESS _____

EMAIL (OPTIONAL) _____

TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS _____ GRADE LEVEL _____

1. In your opinion, did this unit elicit better than average student response; if so, how?

2. Which segments of the unit exceeded your students' attention span?

3. Will this unit be of assistance to you in developing future classroom activities; if so, how?

4. How did this unit add to your earlier teaching on the same subject?

5. Would this teaching unit be handier to use as a:

___single-day unit

___multi-day unit

___multi-week unit

___other

6. Were the activities and lessons appropriate for your students? How?

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Teacher Evaluation Continued

Please rate the following lesson materials and activities by circling the appropriate number.

4=excellent, 3=good, 2=average, 1=inadequate

Directions and Notes	4	3	2	1
Curricular Connections	4	3	2	1
Student Worksheets	4	3	2	1
William Faulkner Biography	4	3	2	1
Timeline of Events	4	3	2	1
Discussion Questions	4	3	2	1
Identifying Elements of a Story	4	3	2	1
Character Analysis	4	3	2	1
Text Analysis	4	3	2	1
Essay Question	4	3	2	1
Overall Lesson	4	3	2	1

We would appreciate any additional comments on this teaching unit and any suggestions for improvement. Comments may be entered in the space below.

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