

Are Papa and Mama good parents?

Both Papa and Mama are parents, unlike those we are all used to seeing in today's society. Their role in the family, their discipline and order and most importantly their esteem is greater than great. To say they are successful parents, is quite an understatement, for they are bringing up four lack children in the white-dominated Mississippi of the nineteen thirties and succeeding quite extraordinarily.

The first time we meet Mama is when Ms Crocker is informing her of Cassie and Little Mans "inappropriate" behaviour in class, earlier that day. The "crime" of the kids was that they had rebelled against the labelling of them as Negroes in the class readers. Our first impression of Mama is that she is understanding yet diplomatic. She knows that what her children done was no crime and that Ms Crocker should not force them to accept the prejudiced ways of the current system. Mama, like any good parent, teaches her children what is right and what is wrong and has taught them not to accept the prejudice that they face on account of their skin colour. Mama here is definitely acting as a good parent would, but she goes even further - what she says and does in this situation shows that she is willing to upset the authorities if it means that she is standing up to what she thinks is right. Mama is willing to get herself into trouble in respect for her, her pupils and her children's feelings. Is that not a good parent?

We are introduced to Papa as a man who is willing to work long hours away from his family for long stretches of time, in order to provide for the family and protect the land and thus their independence and dignity. Papa's arrival stirs up a lot of excitement in the family, this is a positive sign that he is well loved and respected by them. He is very proud of his children and shows them off to whoever is nearby "...what do you think 'bout these children of mine?" It is a well-acknowledged fact that a truly loving parent would make the safety and well being of his child, one of his greatest priorities. Thus, when Papa threatens to "wear out" the children if they go down to the Wallace store his intentions may be somewhat misunderstood. He is not an aggressive man nor does he enjoy punishing his children but he does it for their own welfare. He knows the dangers of mixing with whites and he wants them to veer well away from that potential hazard. This is yet another prestigious example of fine parenting.

Mama has taken full responsibility of the house and the raising of the family, as Papa is busy at work on the railroads. When the nightriders arrive later on in the story mama turns out to be a bit of a heroine too. Mama takes her shotgun and stays awake the whole night patrolling the house, making sure no harm is inflicted upon its occupants. So good a parent is Mama that she plays the role of the mother in the story excellently and has also excelled in playing the part of the dad too when he is away.

One of Mama's main aims in life, as I have aforementioned, is to teach her children to differentiate between wrong and right. She is bringing them up with

a pride about being what they are. When the children break rules as they sometimes do, Mama gets disappointed as she feels she has lacked in that aspect in their upbringing. When the children went to the Wallace store mama felt it was high time they were exposed to the reality of what the Wallace's have done to the black people. Mama took the kids to see Mr Berry - victim of the Berries burning conducted by none other but the Wallace's. Some may feel that the sight of the deformed man may be too disturbing to show children as young as six, but their mum knows best. Mama as a good parent wanted to make her children understand the reason behind the limitations that were imposed upon them. By doing that Mama ensured that the children were confident in what they were doing, when a child has not got that confidence in their hearts they can be tempted to break the rules and taste the forbidden fruit. The Logan children know that forbidden fruit does *not* taste best.

When a child is disturbed by something that happens to them it is the duty of every good parent to listen to what they've got to say, to understand them and to act upon their understanding. When Cassie is obviously upset by what happens to her at Strawberry, mama and papa intervene, offering their very best help and support. Mama thinks level headedly and always put justice, logic and reason into consideration before basing her actions upon emotions. Mama offers a lot of emotional support to Cassie. She makes her understand that "she had to grow up a little", and that it was going to be hard but she would have to put up with it. On a more optimistic note she reminds her that the "Sun'll come out one day" and it will all be better. Papa also helps, reminding Cassie what their religion says about all this. He is firm, not as emotional as mama but he conveys his message and inspires the listener, adding in his own examples as well. Mama and Papa both cooperate together to provide the best nurturing, upbringing and maternal care they can to their offspring.

Further on in the book Mama teaches Cassie the history of her ancestors and the reason why they ended up in America i.e. black history. This again is an act by mama with an aim to plant seeds of pride in Cassie's heart so she may grow up to become happy and proud to be black. Mama is proud of her origins and she knows it is only fair that her children and her pupils are taught about their history so they too may share in this sense of pride. That is one of the reasons why mama taught "alternative history" in school, a lesson that ended up in her getting sacked. Again this shows how far mama is determined to go for the truth and to bring her children up in the right way.

Other, less significant events prove Mama and Papa's parental skills to be up to scratch. When Jeremy hints to Stacey that they could become friends Papa reminds Stacey that he should not dive into unknown waters. He notes that a friendship with Jeremy might well be better than a friendship with T.J, but he should not try it out due to the uncertainty that lies around it and the danger of being involved in such a relationship.

Papa only appears a few times in the book but every time he appears he makes an influential movement, or says/does something vital for the betterment of the black population and the plot of the story. Papa's most

influential move comes at the end of the book, when he sets the cotton on fire to save T.J. If Papa sacrificed so much for a boy that was considered unfit to be dealt with on the basis that he is black, one must ponder to which extent Papa would go to save his own children.

Mama and Papa, through a chain of events in the book truly prove that they are first class parents, fit of bringing up four successful children and equipping them for the bleak future that lies ahead. They may be compared to a farmer that sacrifices every penny he has got and every spare second of his time ensuring that his crops turn out to be the best. Papa and Mama have reared disease-resistant crops, children that can resist the diseases of infectious, contaminated white prejudice. Papa and Mama are always "watching the weather forecast" and making sure no ill or harm is inflicted upon their "crops"(children). What can I say but Mama and Papa are the best farmers around!