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# Dar He: The Lynching of Emmett Till

## Study Guide



*Emmett Till: 14 year old Chicago boy murdered by J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant, Jr. for allegedly whistling at a white woman in Mississippi.*

### Vocabulary Words...

Acquit  
Civil Rights  
Jim Crow  
Look Magazine  
Lynching  
NAACP  
Peer Pressure  
Wolf Whistle

### Recommended Reading...

*A Wreath For Emmett Till*  
By Marilyn Nelson

*Getting Away With Murder, The True Story of the Emmett Till Case*  
By Chris Crowe

*The Lynching of Emmett Till A Documentary Narrative*  
Edited by Christopher Metress

*Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime that Changed America* by Mamie Till- Mobley and Christopher Benson

### Map It Out

Emmett Till was raised by his mother, Mamie in Argo, Illinois – just a hair outside of Chicago. He was lynched and killed in Money, Mississippi while on a vacation visiting his uncle, Moses Wright.

Find the two cities on a map. How many miles separate Chicago, IL and Money, MS?

What was the population of Chicago, IL in 1955? What was the population

of Money, MS in 1955? What are the populations in those cities now?

List the possible differences in lifestyle in the North vs. South; big city vs. small town; black vs. white Citizens; and relationships between black and white citizens in the 1950's.

How were race relations different in the 1950's? How are race relations similar in 2006? Why do

you think Emmett's mother was reluctant to send her son for a visit in the South?

What role did peer pressure play in the events that lead up to Emmett's murder? Who was pressured? Emmett Till? Carolyn Bryant? Roy Bryant? J.W. Milam? The Jury? How might each have been pressured into his/her actions?

### Playing The Dozens

Playing the dozens is an African-American custom in which two competitors take turns insulting one another, their adversary's mother or other family members until one of them has no comeback.

In the U.S., the practice can be traced back to slavery, when verbal sparring became a substitute for physical contention.

While the competition is usually light-hearted, smiles sometimes mask real tensions.

The dozens can be a harmless game, or, if tempers flare, a prelude to physical violence. But in its purest form, the dozens is intended to defuse conflict amicably, descended from an oral tradition rooted in traditional West African cultures.

The dozens is a contest of personal power -- of wit, self-control, verbal ability, mental agility and mental toughness. Defeat can be humiliating; but a skilled contender, win or lose, may gain respect.

"Yo' mama," a common, widely recognized phrase, is a cryptic reference to the dozens.

The term "the dozens" refers to the devaluing on the auction block of slaves who were past their prime, who were aged or who, after years of back-breaking toil, no longer were capable of hard labor. These enslaved human beings often were sold by the dozen.

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### Remembering BoBo

Bobo – as Emmett was known to his family and friends, was a memorable young man. He dressed well, spoke with a stutter, played the dozens with wit, and grew up with his mom in the big city of Chicago.

His life was cut short at the age of 14. His grieving mother spent the rest of her life making sure that Emmett would live on by making sure others

never forgot him. Mamie Till started her mission by insisting that Emmett's body be displayed in an open coffin so that visitors could see his bloated body and bludgeoned face and head. She said, "I wanted the world to see what they had done to my boy."

What do you think it would be important to remember about Emmett Till?

Write an obituary for Emmett Till. Include his personal likes, his surviving family members, the charity to which the family might like donations sent in his honor.

Write in a respectful tone the things you feel would be important to remember about this young man.

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*"Lord, take my soul.  
Show me what you  
want me to do and  
make me able to do it."*

*-Mamie Bradley Till  
Emmett Till's Mother*

### The Acquitted

Although they confessed to the murder of Emmett Till in a *Look Magazine* article, J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant, Jr. were acquitted of the murder charges against them. Both men have since died from cancer. J.W. died in 1980. Roy died in 1990. Carolyn Bryant is still alive. She remarried and moved to Greenville, MS. She refuses to talk about the events surrounding the Emmett Till case.

In 2004, the FBI reopened the Emmett Till murder case. In 2005 Emmett's body was exhumed from his grave in search of DNA evidence to pursue murder charges against any surviving suspects. At this time, murder charges could still be filed against Carolyn Bryant and any field hands who might have assisted J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant.

Proposed legislation, known as the "Till bill," would create an Unsolved

Civil Rights Crime Investigative Office, which would allow the FBI to investigate unsolved killings in coordination with state and local law enforcement officials. "There are unsolved cases like the Till case in many states in America," said fellow sponsor U.S. Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga. "If we allow these crimes to go unanswered, we cannot candidly declare we are a nation that believes in justice."



Roy Bryant, Jr. and J.W. Milam

### Curriculum Links

Arts Education  
Theatre Arts  
English Language Arts  
Social Sciences  
Character Education  
American History

#### Other Emmett Till inspired works...

Television - *Playhouse 90/Noon On Doomsday* by Rod Serling

Song – *The Death of Emmett Till* by Bob Dylan

Theatre - *Blues for Mr. Charlie* by James Baldwin

Poetry – *Emmett Till* by James A. Emanuel