

I. **Title:** How southern children are taught to spell Mississippi

II. **Genre:** novel – literary thriller, crime/ literary fiction

III. **Setting:** small-town Chabot in rural Mississippi in the 1970s and 1980s

IV. Protagonists

- Larry Ott, son of lower middle-class white parents
- Silas '32' Jones, son of a single black mother

V. Topics

1. CULTURE

- race relations
- inter(racial) friendship
- racial prejudice

2. SOCIETY

- | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|
| • social class | • friendship | • identity |
| • social exclusion | • teenage issues | • belonging |
| • marginalisation | • family ties | • loneliness |
| • ostracism | • father-son relationship | • isolation |
| • bullying | • coming-of-age | • disconnection |
| | • gender | • neglect |
| | | • atonement |

3. ECONOMY

- economic situations
- economic decay

VI. Connection to the SPT:



1. The Ambiguity of Belonging

- What is identity?
- Which elements define a person/ character?
- What makes a person/ character belong?
- What difficulties and challenges does a person/ character (have to) face?
- How does a person/ character cope with these challenges?
- What consequences could arise?

2. The Protagonists' Ambiguity of Belonging

Larry Ott	Silas '32' Jones
Difficulties and Challenges	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rejection by peers • father-son relationship • display of manliness • social outcast • burdens of the past • financial problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unknown father • uprooted from all-black community of South Side Chicago and displaced to rural Mississippi • racial issues • poverty • unable to have an emotional relationship
Coping	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • secret boyhood friendship with Silas • relation to mother; competing for fatherly love • seclusion in book reading • daily routines • ambiguous relation to Wallace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • secret boyhood friendship with Larry • competing for fatherly love; rifle • baseball • filled up in accepted job • policeman: rights the wrongs • integration into society; girlfriend
Consequences – Trying to belong	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • critical reflection of the self/ the past • regaining a sense of belonging: Wallace • active bonding with Silas • attempts at reconciliation and a new start 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • realisations of guilt • acceptance of responsibilities • realisation of the values of bonding; opens up to girlfriend • attempts at reconciliation and a new start

