**DRY SEPTEMBER**

* + 1. **LONG ANSWERS:**
       1. **Explain the racial prejudice in “Dry September”.**

**OR**

**Explain the concept of vigilante justice through the story “Dry September”.**

Ans - “Dry September” is set in the South during the 1920s, when black men were often subjected to violence in retaliation for any perceived offense, often without proof or due process. “[Dry September](https://www.enotes.com/topics/dry-september)” is an indictment of the American South’s racism. A black man named Will Mayes is accused by a white woman, Minnie Cooper of attacking her. Even though the accusation might be false, he is killed without being given a chance to prove his innocence. This was because the racial bias that prevailed in America. Blacks were far more likely to be executed for crimes in the South than Whites. Faulkner’s story specifically exemplifies the ways in which whites used power and force, not to impose actual justice on society, but to maintain their own social dominance over blacks in the South. Furthermore, the story reveals the prejudiced nature of vigilante justice.

“Dry September” begins with a group of white men discussing the rumored sexual attack or insult of [Minnie Cooper](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/dry-september/characters/minnie-cooper), a white woman, by a black man, [Will Mayes](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/dry-september/characters/will-mayes). The mob of men ignore the protestations of local barber [Henry Hawkshaw](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/dry-september/characters/henry-hawkshaw), who is convinced that Mayes is innocent, and instead decide to abduct and assault Mayes that very evening. This form of vigilante justice, very common during this period in American history, is based on prejudice and racialized anger rather than evidence. None of the men in the barber shop know what actually happened to Minnie Cooper, nor do they care about the details. In fact, when one man suggests that the group figure out if Mayes is actually guilty, the mob’s self-appointed leader [McLendon](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/dry-september/characters/john-mclendon) responds, “What the hell difference does it make?” Their intention is not to indict and then punish Mayes for his actions, but to send a message to the black men of Jefferson and to reinforce the social structure of the South in the pre-Civil Rights era. To that end, though the assault on Mayes is not described directly in the story, men in the main square spread the news that Mayes “went on a little trip.” This vague rumor serves as a cautionary tale to the other black men of the town that the white men are not going to let “the black sons” off the hook easily until “one really does it.” Their threat is successful as when Minnie Cooper walks to the movie theater that evening, there was “not a Negro on the square. Not one.”

Beyond highlighting the prejudiced nature of vigilante “justice,” the story also reveals how such vigilantism can rob people of individual, rational thought. While McLendon is ultimately able to rally two cars of men to attack Mayes, there is initially some degree of doubt among those assembled in the barbershop regarding Mayes’s guilt. A few call for facts and evidence, with one attempting to calm the others down by noting that “We'll get the facts in plenty of time to act.” Another questions the allegations themselves, asking, “Did it really happen?” Even as McLendon is able to persuade nearly all of the men in the barber shop to join him, many of them continue to express shame or discomfort about the decision. As some men get up to leave the shop, the others “sat uncomfortable”, unable to look at each other. However, one by one they rose and joined McLendon. The fact that the men go through with things despite doubts about the justice of their actions further points to the dangers of the mob mentality inculcated by vigilantism.

Henry Hawkshaw, the barber, stands out as a man of reason and integrity. He alone explicitly defends Mayes and argues against taking action. Yet, his words have little effect on the angry mob. Hawkshaw is certain from the beginning that Mayes is innocent, and is steadfast in his defense, noting, “I know Will Mayes… I know Miss Minnie Cooper, too”. This puts him in direct conflict with the prejudiced and vengeful McLendon, highlighting the contrast between the men to the point that they’re described as looking “like men of different races.” Hawkshaw decides to find the men after they leave the barber shop, presumably to convince them not to hurt Mayes. But he, too, is quickly swept up in the action. His repeated protests of “Listen, boys” become little more than background noise, as the men continue on their mission. He even inadvertently becomes involved in the abduction itself, when Mayes lashes out at the crowd of men “and the barber struck him also”. Hawkshaw eventually realizes the futility of his actions and gives up his role as Mayes’s defender. His final action in the story is to escape, jumping from the moving vehicle and leaving the angry mob behind. The image of Hawkshaw as he “climbed back onto the road and limped on toward town” is one of a man who has tried, and failed, to impose reason. By presenting Hawkshaw’s efforts to curb the violence through appeals to thoughtful discourse futile, Faulkner ultimately argues that prejudiced vigilantism is inherently irrational.

The town of Jefferson is clearly ruled by a group of white men who feel empowered to take justice into their own hands. Their version of justice, however, is rooted in longstanding racism and the desire to maintain the traditional social structure of the pre-Civil War South. Vigilantism in Faulker’s story is not a means for justice at all, but rather the preservation of a specific and deeply prejudiced societal order. There is little room for differences of opinion, reason, or heroism in this highly-structured society, and men like Henry Hawkshaw are doomed to fail in their quest for true justice.

* 1. **Justify/Elaborate/Explain the title of the story “Dry September”.**

**OR**

**Do you think that title of the story justifies it? Explain.**

Ans – “Dry September" is a reference to a month at the end of summer in which there has been little rain. It is in such a hot and dry evening in September that a group of men gather in a barbershop in Jefferson, Mississippi, discussing the rumor that a black man, [Will Mayes](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/dry-september/characters/will-mayes), has attacked [Minnie Cooper](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/dry-september/characters/minnie-cooper), an unmarried white woman. Infact, one of the characters in the story states that the weather is enough to make a man do anything. This suggests that the dry, hot summer has a role in the supposed crime and the events that happen during the story. The story is an indictment of the American South’s racism. Even though the accusation laid on Will Mayes by Minnie Cooper might be false, he is killed without being given a chance to prove his innocence. This was because he was a Black and because of the racial bias, Blacks were far more likely to be executed in the South than Whites.

The title "Dry September" shows that heat and drought are an important part of the story and symbolize the racial tension in the town. The rumor that [Will Mayes](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Dry-September/character-analysis/#Will_Mayes) has committed some unknown act against [Minnie Cooper](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Dry-September/character-analysis/#Minnie_Cooper) spreads "like a fire in dry grass." One of the men explicitly declares that the weather is "enough to make a man do anything." The narrator mentions the sweat on the characters several times. [McClendon](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Dry-September/character-analysis/#McClendon) and Butch use "hell" several times in their dialog. [Faulkner](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Dry-September/author/) ties most mentions of heat, sweat, and hell to characters who are directly involved in the murder of Will Mayes or to the murder itself. Faulkner uses the heat as a catalyst for the events of the night, just as racial discrimination is the cause.

At the beginning of the story, Faulkner mentions the “bloody September twilight”. Blood, we might imagine, is often wet, in contrast to the "dry" in the title, and the lack of rain through the hottest part of the Mississippi summer. "Bloody" supplies a tone of menace that harmonizes it with "dry." As we note from the burning grass simile, it is as if the rumor is on fire. This is a fancy way of saying that by the time the rumor reaches the hot night, it is out of control. "Aftermath of sixty-two rainless days" lets us know that the sunset, the spread of the rumor, and its out-of-control status are all products of the dry heat and the violent passions that notoriously accompany hot weather. The first line, thus, expands on the rumor of the title and gives us the bare facts of the case, which is that something ominous is about to happen. Moreover, it also implies that the heat and the dust and the violent passions will culminate in some violent and bloody event. All the events and characters in the story, thus, resemble the heat and drought that the title "Dry September” is suggestive of.

Faulkner also appears to be using symbolism in the story, particularly the weather. In the first section of the story, Faulkner uses the word ‘dead’ to describe the air. This is significant as it in some ways acts as foreshadowing to what will happen with Will Mayes later in the story. The opening line of the story also acts as foreshadowing to the eventual killing of Will Mayes, Faulkner using the word ‘bloody’ to describe the September twilight. Also in section three of the story Faulkner again describes the air, though this time uses the word ‘lifeless.’ He also describes the day as having ‘died in a pall of dust.’ This may be significant as Faulkner could be suggesting that the residents of Jefferson, particularly McLendon and the lynch mob are morally dead, by taking the law into their own hands. Thus it could be said that the dead and lifeless weather of a “Dry September” resemble the events and emotions of the characters in the story.

The narrator's reports of the long, dry summer symbolize that the prejudices held by McClendon and other townspeople have always been present. The narrator also states that the fan in the barber shop "stirred, without freshening" the air. Some people in the early 1900s attempted to make steps towards reducing racial discrimination just as the fan attempted to reduce the heat. Racial discrimination and the air in the barber shop remained and were only slightly affected by the attempts at racial equality and the fan.

On the end, the bloody human heart, the conflicts between people, that burning rumors, the hot weather are notorious for helping fan the flames. In short, the title presents us with a version of the story pared down to its most basic element – dry weather. And for Faulkner, the weather is only important in so far as its impact on the people experiencing it.

* 1. **Describe the themes in the short story.**

## Ans – “[Dry September](https://www.enotes.com/topics/dry-september)” is an indictment of the American South’s racism. A black man named Will Mayes is accused by a white woman, Minnie Cooper and even though the accusation might be false, he is killed without being given a chance to prove his innocence. This was because he was a Black and because of the racial bias, Blacks are far more likely to be executed in the South than Whites. The title "Dry September" shows that heat and drought are an important part of the story and symbolize the racial tension in the town.

One of the most important themes in the story is the theme of racial discrimination."Dry September" centers on the lynching of an African American man in revenge for a rumor that no one even knows the details of. This story would have been very different if [Will Mayes](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Dry-September/character-analysis/#Will_Mayes) were white or if [Minnie Cooper](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Dry-September/character-analysis/#Minnie_Cooper) had also been African American. The white men of the town discriminate against Will Mayes because of his skin color and feel that their discrimination is justified. The other townspeople know that Will Mayes is gone and most likely dead. They notice that "There's not a Negro on the square" after [McClendon](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Dry-September/character-analysis/#McClendon) and his men go to see Will Mayes that evening. They know what happened and choose to ignore it. The casual way they refer to Will Mayes' death shows that the majority of the townspeople do not believe the discrimination and murder were wrong.

Related to the theme of racial discrimination is the theme of violence. [Faulkner](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Dry-September/author/)'s story brings awareness to the issue of violence. The main event in "Dry September" is the murder of [Will Mayes](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Dry-September/character-analysis/#Will_Mayes). [McClendon](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Dry-September/character-analysis/#McClendon) and his men drag Mayes from his workplace and take him to an abandoned field. Faulkner does not describe the murder itself. The reader learns that the men return without Mayes when [Hawkshaw](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Dry-September/character-analysis/#Hawkshaw) sees the car returning toward town and notes that there were only “four people in it”, thus implying they killed and disposed off Mayes. McClendon still has his pistol when he returns home at midnight and "laid it on the table beside the bed."

The violence is not only in the murder of Will Mayes. No one knows the specifics of [Minnie Cooper](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Dry-September/character-analysis/#Minnie_Cooper)'s accusation. Minnie could have said that Will Mayes mildly insulted her, or she could have said that Mayes attacked her. The men at the barber shop assume the most violent possibility. Their baseless assumption that Will Mayes attacked Minnie Cooper shows their tendency to assume the worst and most violent story. Faulkner includes violence at the end of the story as well. McClendon is not a calm, peaceful man even in his own home. He verbally and physically abuses his wife when he arrives home after murdering Will Mayes. McClendon's wife does not seem to be surprised, and the reader can assume that he has abused her before.

Rumor and reputation are powerful elements of life in “Dry September,” as characters are defined by their social status and the stories that others tell about them. As an unmarried middle-aged woman and a black man, respectively, [Minnie Cooper](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/dry-september/characters/minnie-cooper) and [Will Mayes](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/dry-september/characters/will-mayes) have little control over their public images in the 1920s American South. Accordingly, both are passive bystanders to the action of the story and have little to say for themselves. The white [McLendon](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/dry-september/characters/john-mclendon), meanwhile, is seemingly automatically afforded a sense of respect and dignity that belies his cruel, abusive nature. This distinction highlights the hypocritical nature of the Jefferson community and condemns respect based on shallow societal judgments. At the center of the story’s controversy is Minnie Cooper’s honor, though Faulkner makes clear that she, herself, has little say in the matter. Minnie has no lines in “Dry September,” and her reputation is entirely defined by those around her even before the rumors of her alleged insult or assault by Mayes.

"Dry September" shows the extreme effects that rumors can have. The men in the barber shop really have no idea what [Minnie Cooper](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Dry-September/character-analysis/#Minnie_Cooper) said about [Will Mayes](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Dry-September/character-analysis/#Will_Mayes). The narrator none of the men that were gathered in the barber shop “knew exactly what had happened”. However, the rumors made it seem as if Will Mayes had raped Minnie Cooper. Perhaps, it could also might have been that someone overheard Minnie say something innocent and made assumptions or even changed the story altogether. [Faulkner](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Dry-September/author/) never writes what actually happened between Minnie Cooper and Will Mayes. Perhaps he does this to prove a point - when someone starts a rumour, it is impossible to predict what consequences it might have and who will be sucked into it.

Gender and class are also two important themes in the story. The characters in “Dry September” act within strictly proscribed gender and class boundaries, which Faulkner refers to vaguely as “snobbery male and retaliation female.” These categories dictate the actions of both men and women in Jefferson, robbing individuals of broader opportunity and in, some senses, free will. Such rigid boundaries, the story suggests, ignore the possibility of female agency and force men to perform an authoritative masculinity that, in this story, quickly escalates into violence.  Minnie’s status in society is marred by a number of factors, starting with the fact that she is not part of the upper class. Her social routine is similar to that of richer women - she dresses in the afternoon, meets up with friends, and spends time socializing in the shops. Yet, Minnie only has “three or four new voile dresses” to choose from each day, and she and her friends “haggle over the prices” without actually making any purchases. This class distinction is of the utmost importance in Jefferson, and is the reason that Minnie finds herself unmarried and alone in her late thirties. She was unable to compete with her upper-class friends for the available men to marry and has since found herself living with her ageing mother and aunt.

These are the important themes in the short story “Dry September” by William Faulkner. Each of the themes are connected with each other and contribute to the success of the story. Apart from these, the theme of hypocrisy and sexism also contribute to the dominating theme in the story, which is the racial discrimination in the South.

* 1. **Attempt an analysis of the character of Minnie Cooper.**

Ans -Miss Minnie Cooper, the supposed victim of William Faulkner's short story, "Dry September" is one of the major characters of this racially-charged tale of deceit and murder. Minnie is nearing forty years of age and lives in a small house with her mother and aunt. She was most likely born and raised in Jefferson, as she comes from a middle-class background of “comfortable people not the best in Jefferson, but good people enough”. In her youth, Minnie is described as being “a little brighter and louder flame than any other”. She seems to be a gregarious person and full of energy, having “a sort of hard **vivacity**” that allows her to be accepted by the upper-class in spite of her poorer social standing. She also used to be popular  and considered attractive by the men in her community. However, as she gets older and the others become more class conscious, she becomes a **victim of rumours**. While she was young, she had a “slender, nervous body”. However, as she grew up into adulthood, Minnie Cooper seemed less vibrant and as described in the story, became a woman “on the slender side of ordinary looking”.

Minnie is an unmarried white woman in her late thirties who may or may not have been sexually assaulted by a black man, Will Mayes. "Dry September” narrates the story of the lonely and unhappy Minnie Cooper who accused a black man, Will Mayes, for attacking her. The story happens in rural South, where racism against black people is wide spread in the society. A group of hard-core bigots, led by ruthless John McLendon, decides to punish Will Mayes, without even bothering to check whether Minnie's claim is true. The only opposition to their plan comes from a barber Henry Hawkshaw, who believes that they should try to "find out the truth first" There is no proof that anything happened between the two, and some people in Jefferson doubt her story, as this is not the first time she has had a “man-scare.” She is a creature of habit and Faulkner introduces her by describing the way she spends nearly every day. In fact, Faulkner uses a decent amount of the story's text to provide the reader with background information on Minnie Cooper, something he does not do with any of the other characters, some of whom are not even named. Minnie is the catalyst for the events of the story and occupies a central role in it. She has been virtually abandoned by this society, due to her low class and lack of a husband. Though she was attractive as a young girl, she was passed over by the boys in town in favor of women with a higher social status. She briefly dated the clerk at the local bank. Unfortunately, that did not end well, as he moved to Memphis without Minnie. After that, she settled in with her aging mother and aunt, and had little to do to occupy her time.

According to others in Jefferson, Minnie drank whiskey on a regular basis and had accused a man of watching her undress, both of which are seen as desperate attempts to attract attention. The rumor involving Will Mayes makes Minnie the center of attention, whether or not that was her intent in the first place. On Saturday night, Minnie gets dressed to go to town with her friends. She seems nervous and shaky. As they walk to town she calms down. When they reach the town square she gets nervous again. She hears rumors of Will's situation, and feels men watch her with her eyes. At the movies Minnie begins laughing hysterically. Her friends take her home and try to quiet her down, especially when her laughter becomes intermingled with screams.

Minnie doesn't get a single line of dialogue in "Dry September." Minnie's character is dynamic because throughout the story we realize that she is very unhappy and that she tries hard to get that old feeling of being wanted back. However, by the end of story, she understands that she will never be young and pretty again regardless of her attempts. When her friends ask her questions, she doesn't answer. Together with the treatment of the only other woman whom we hear speak, McLendon‟s wife, we may recognize the role women are expected to play in Jefferson town and American society, that of silent spectators, to be used by the White men to further their own interests and prejudices.

* 1. **Character analysis of John McLendon.**

Ans – John McLendon is a major character in the short story “Dry September”. He is described as having commanded troops in France and is considered a war hero and man of action around Jefferson. From the barber shop the first scene of this story to McLendon’s home the last scene we see, McLendon is existed as the character who controls the direction. McLendon has a “thick head” and a “heavy-set body”, but when he keeps his feet apart, he has an easy poise. He has a “furious, rigid face” and a “hot, bold glance”. McLendon is described as wearing a felt hat and a white shirt “open at the throat”. He carries a heavy automatic pistol in his hip pocket. There is no mention of his current occupation, and it appears that it does not matter much, as he is entirely defined by his wartime heroism. He lives in Jefferson with his wife, and while he is publicly viewed as a man of valor, within the walls of his home, McLendon is verbally and physically abusive with his wife, embodying the hypocrisy at the center of “Dry September.”

The movements of characters in the story are actually determined by several powers such as sheer will, obstructions, and ideal and so on. McLendon’s movements from the barber shop to an abandoned brick kiln are also a result of certain powers - McLendon’s pursuit of authority. McLendon is a vigilante, and the story's most obvious villain. His gun, hat, handcuffs, and experience as a military commander give him a general air of authority. McLendon bursts into the barber shop at the beginning of the story in order to recruit men to help him retaliate against Will Mayes for what he may or may not have done to Minnie Cooper. While some of the other men, including Henry Hawkshaw, suggest that they should gather facts and go to the authorities, McLendon questions their reputations as white men tasked with upholding the status quo. He gathers a mob of angry men and, with the gun he has tucked in his waistband, abducts Mayes and brings him to a secluded area to kill him.

McLendon was a man who had once had commanded troops in France and had been “decorated for valor”. However. he has retired and has now become an ordinary man at middle age. It seems that what he does to Will Mayes is out of his racial prejudice or what he believes as rightful action for protecting white woman. However, in reality, he actually just wants to make sure that he is still in authority, and he enjoys being a controller of events. The evidence may be found in several places where he interacts with others. In the barber shop, it is him that initiates the movement for lynching Will. He asks other white men, “are you going to sit there and let a black son rape a white woman on the streets of Jefferson?” He wants that they should take actions. Thus, he ends the quarrels abruptly and takes immediate action to seek supports for his movement, “Who’s with me?” he demands with an authority that implies a refusal was unacceptable. Even when some rational clients ask him to find out the facts first, he still sticks to his own stubborn decision.

McLendon’s commanding attitude is also accompanied by his body language. He always roves his gaze to try to command other men just like he is still the commander in the army. After McLendon successfully convinces the men to agree with him, he leads his followers to capture Mayes and bring him to the car. He repeats “Get in” to Will in such a commanding voice that it makes him like the victor who gives orders to the captive in the battlefield. Here, McLendon’s fascination with power for controlling black people could be witnessed. Finally, McLendon drives his car to an abandoned place for lynching Will. He ignores Hawkshaw’s request for pulling over and leaving, but suggests him to jump out without turning his head. Thus, the whole action concerning all the scenes is determined by McLendon and his pursuit for power and control.

McLendon is, most likely, a murderer, and Will was probably not his first victim. McLendon seems practiced and systematic in carrying out his plan. He is chilling to the extreme, unwilling to listen to reason, and bent on keeping the black citizens of Jefferson in a state of fear. If that's not enough, he abuses his wife, as we see in the final scene. There is absolutely nothing likeable about him, nothing to distract us from his dangerousness. Yet, the final imagery of him "panting" and his body “pressed against the dusty screen" somehow humanizes him. He is a bully, a lonely broken man in a broken world. He is a man who hurts the people with whom he comes into contact. The readers would perhaps feel no sympathy for his crimes, or his perspective. However, it would seem that he too is a victim of his circumstances. McLendon, too, is trapped in roles he cannot or will not be able to escape from. His character is a good example of what a person should not be.

* 1. **Character analysis of Henry “Hawk” Hawkshaw.**

Ans – Henry “Hawk” Hawkshaw is one of the primary characters in the short story “Dry September” by William Faulkner. He is described as a middle-aged man. He is “a thin, sand-colored man with a mild face” and has a “mild, stubborn tone” when speaking. He works as a barber in a barber shop in Jefferson. We first meet Hawkshaw in the sweaty, noisy barber shop in full Saturday night swing. The barber shop is one of the central gathering places for men in the town. “Dry September” opens with Hawkshaw discussing the rumors about Minnie Cooper and [Will Mayes](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/dry-september/characters/will-mayes) with his fellow barbers and their customers. He presents a cool and reasonable contrast to the men around him. Hawkshaw vehemently defends Mayes, showing himself to be principled and rational in contrast to the blind racial hatred of the other men in the shop.

Hawkshaw is a stubborn person who does not easily give up on his beliefs. This is proved when he argues with the other men in the barber shop over the topic of Minne Cooper. Hawkshaw states his point of view about the rumours circulating around town. He honestly believes Will Mayes is innocent. Although this statement creates controversy and earns him many insults, he strengthens his point through arguments. He argues that he knows Mayes and believes that he would not attack a white woman, and that Minnie is a middle-aged unmarried woman who might be prone to exaggeration. This discussion leads to a confrontation between Hawk and [John McLendon](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/dry-september/characters/john-mclendon), in which McLendon questions Hawk’s virtue as a white man. Eventually, the other men leave with McLendon in an angry mob, intent on finding Mayes and killing him. By publicly defending a black man, and vouching for his character, Hawkshaw takes a stand for truth and justice, and not without risk. But, he doesn't leave it at that – he joins the men in their hunt for Will. In the car on the way to the ice plant, Hawkshaw continues to use reason and rationality to stop McLendon and the other men from carrying out their plan against Will. Unfortunately, reason isn't always effective. When Hawkshaw participates in the initial beating and handcuffing of Will, his powers of rhetoric and reason are useless. Hawkshaw doesn't seem to have an alternative plan to save Will. Without such a plan, he might believe that if he stays in the car, he will become more and more implicated in the crimes against Will. Although Hawkshaw had reluctantly joined the men in an attempt to keep them from hurting Mayes, he ends up jumping from a moving vehicle and walking back to town in defeat. Hawkshaw’s trajectory illustrates the near-impossibility of combating racial hate with reason, as well as the loneliness of dissent in small-town America.

Henry Hawkshaw, the barber, stands out as a man of reason and integrity. He alone explicitly defends Mayes and argues against taking action. Yet, his words have little effect on the angry mob. Hawkshaw is certain from the beginning that Mayes is innocent, and is steadfast in his defense, noting, “I know Will Mayes… I know Miss Minnie Cooper, too”. This puts him in direct conflict with the prejudiced and vengeful McLendon, highlighting the contrast between the men to the point that they’re described as looking “like men of different races.” Hawkshaw decides to find the men after they leave the barber shop, presumably to convince them not to hurt Mayes. But he, too, is quickly swept up in the action. His repeated protests of “Listen, boys” become little more than background noise, as the men continue on their mission. He even inadvertently becomes involved in the abduction itself, when Mayes lashes out at the crowd of men “and the barber struck him also”. Hawkshaw eventually realizes the futility of his actions and gives up his role as Mayes’s defender. His final action in the story is to escape, jumping from the moving vehicle and leaving the angry mob behind. The image of Hawkshaw as he “climbed back onto the road and limped on toward town” is one of a man who has tried, and failed, to impose reason. By presenting Hawkshaw’s efforts to curb the violence through appeals to thoughtful discourse futile, Faulkner ultimately argues that prejudiced vigilantism is inherently irrational.

It is difficult to describe Hawkshaw as a hero or a coward. He is a person who, although does not shrink from expressing his views, eventually ends up giving up and losing hope for Will’s survival. He had joined McLendon and his crew of men hoping to convince them that Will might be innocent. However, eventually, even when Will pleads him to stay, Hawkshaw jumps off the car unable to handle the injustice and violence that he witnesses. Instead of bravely taking a stand against Mclendon, he removes himself from the car, thus choosing the path of ignorance and cowardice. Although he started with a noble cause, his attempts to bring justice to Will prove to be completely futile and pitiful.

* 1. **Describe the violence in “Dry September”.**

**Ans -** “Dry September” is set in the South during the 1920s, when black men were often subjected to violence in retaliation for any perceived offense, often without proof or due process. “[Dry September](https://www.enotes.com/topics/dry-september)” is an indictment of the American South’s racism. A black man named Will Mayes is accused by a white woman, Minnie Cooper and even though the accusation might be false, he is killed without being given a chance to prove his innocence. This was because he was a Black and because of the racial bias, Blacks are far more likely to be executed in the South than Whites. Faulkner’s story specifically exemplifies the ways in which whites used violence not to impose actual justice on society, but to maintain their own social dominance over blacks in the South. Furthermore, the story reveals the prejudiced nature of vigilante justice.

“Dry September” begins with a group of white men discussing the rumored sexual attack or insult of [Minnie Cooper](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/dry-september/characters/minnie-cooper), a white woman, by a black man, [Will Mayes](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/dry-september/characters/will-mayes). The mob of men ignore the protestations of local barber [Henry Hawkshaw](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/dry-september/characters/henry-hawkshaw), who is convinced that Mayes is innocent, and instead decide to abduct and assault Mayes that very evening. None of the men in the barber shop know what happened to Minnie Cooper, nor do they care about the details. In fact, when one man suggests that the group figure out if Mayes is actually guilty, the mob’s self-appointed leader [McLendon](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/dry-september/characters/john-mclendon) responds, “What the hell difference does it make?” Their intention is not to indict and then punish Mayes for his actions, but to send a message to the black men of Jefferson and to reinforce the social structure of the South in the pre-Civil Rights era. To that end, though the assault on Mayes is not described directly in the story, men in the main square spread the news that Mayes “went on a little trip.” This vague rumor serves as a cautionary tale to the other black men of the town that the white men are not going to let “the black sons” off the hook easily until “one really does it.” This portrays the violence and injustice on Blacks that is caused by the Whites.

One notable symbolism of violence in the story is McLendon’s gun. It not only can be seen as a symbol of violence, but it can be seen to represent violence in the past, present and future. It is first introduced when McLendon walks into the barber shop, the reader learning that McLendon had commanded troops in France and is praised as a war hero. Thus, the reader realizes that McLendon has a violent past since war is equivalent to violence. It is assumed the McLendon uses the gun to kill Will Mayes in section three of the story, which would suggest violence in the present. Towards the end of the story, McLendon puts the gun down on the table in his bedroom. This would suggest that it is to be used again, sometime in the future. Perhaps he would use it on other Blacks to prove his authority and power.

The violence is not only in the murder of Will Mayes. Faulkner includes violence at the end of the story as well. McClendon is not a calm, peaceful man even in his own home. He verbally and physically abuses his wife when he arrives home after murdering Will Mayes. McClendon's wife does not seem to be surprised, and the reader can assume that he has abused her before. The ending of the story is also significant as it is through McLendon’s interaction with his wife that Faulkner appears to be introducing irony into the story. Will Mayes has been killed by McLendon in order to preserve Minnie Cooper’s integrity and honour. However McLendon strikes out at his own wife when he returns home from the killing. It would appear that there is one rule for McLendon and one for Will Mayes (and other black people). At no stage does the reader suspect that McLendon respects his wife in any way, if anything there is a sense that McLendon’s violence against his wife may be a daily occurrence. Unlike Minnie Cooper who McLendon has held up on a pedestal, even though she has lied about what has happened her, McLendon’s wife is not afforded the same luxury. In many ways McLendon, who has acted as the authority figure throughout the story, is a hypocrite.

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1. **Character analysis of Will Mayes:** Will Mayes is a black man who lives in Jefferson, works at the [ice](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/dry-september/symbols/ice) factory, and has been accused of sexually assaulting a white woman, [Minnie Cooper](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/dry-september/characters/minnie-cooper). It is unclear whether the rumor is true, and Mayes seems genuinely confused when confronted with an angry mob of white men who are out to kill him. [Henry Hawkshaw](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/dry-september/characters/henry-hawkshaw) knows Will, vouches for his character, and believes he is innocent; there will be no way to find out the truth, however, because the men in the barber shop have already decided on his guilt. As a black man in Jefferson, Mayes’s word is worth next to nothing, and not a single person bothers to ask him about the incident. This character evokes a good deal of sympathy: he is diligently working at the ice factory on a Saturday night, and when the mob of men drags him out to the car, he maintains a deferential manner right up until he is handcuffed and beaten. Even the one man who believes him to be innocent is unable to help him; as Mayes calls to Hawkshaw for help, the barber jumps from the car to escape the imminent violence. Mayes’s implied death is emblematic of the powerlessness of black men in this society, and in fact the rumor of his murder sends such a strong message to the black men of Jefferson that they are completely absent from public areas of town that evening.
2. **Setting :** Most of William Faulkner's stories are set in Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, and often the small town of Jefferson. This is certainly the case with "Dry September." While Mississippi is a real place, Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County and Jefferson are only based on real placesThe setting is amazingly rich and many-layered in "Dry September." It is notable how each of the story's five parts features a distinct movement as the characters travel through the various micro-settings of the story. The barbershop featured in the first section is a good example illustrating this. The relative privacy of the place, mingled with the heat, the shaving-product smells, the sweat, and the stale air combine with a week's worth of frustrations to create a perfect rumor incubator, a warm place for the rumor to grow and feed. For McLendon, the barbershop is a recruiting station. His pistol-packing presence clears the room. When the scene began the shop was packed with voices, violent energy, and men preparing for Saturday night escapades of a terrible nature. At the end of the scene the shop has transformed into a quiet place, emptied of everyone but two whispering barbers.

Section four, featuring Minnie Cooper, is also particularly fascinating. Minnie's journey is circular. It begins and ends in her bedroom. In between the bedroom scenes, the setting is in constant motion. Notice how Minnie is affected by each of the different settings that make up her journey from and back to her bedroom. In the act of preparing to go out, Minnie is shaking, nervous, and vulnerable. When she is in that transitional space between her bedroom and the town square, she calms down to an extent. But, as she nears the town square, full of people since it's Saturday night, she starts freaking out again. Thus, Faulkner uses the setting in accordance with the situation. The setting matches the emotions of the characters and adds to the overall plot of the story, successfully retaining the interests of the readers.

1. **Society :** Dry September" shows us a late 1920s or early 1930s Mississippi town breaking under the weight of its outmoded social and class structures. The story also explores the divisions within society along racial and gender lines. The lack of roles available to women, and the violent roles required of men are harshly critiqued. Because society is constantly changing, the roles of men and women are never stable, but constantly shifting and adapting to survive. "Dry September" shows how difficult those changes can sometimes be.

The characters in “Dry September” act within strictly proscribed gender and class boundaries, which Faulkner refers to vaguely as “snobbery male and retaliation female.” These categories dictate the actions of both men and women in Jefferson, robbing individuals of broader opportunity and in, some senses, free will. Minnie’s status in society is marred by a number of factors, starting with the fact that she is not part of the upper class. This class distinction is of the utmost importance in Jefferson, and is the reason that Minnie finds herself unmarried and alone in her late thirties. She was unable to compete with her upper-class friends for the available men to marry and has since found herself living with her ageing mother and aunt. The position of the Blacks is lower than the women. Will Mayes, for instance, is accused and killed without being given a chance to prove himself innocent. The reason McLendon and the men believe Minnie is telling the truth is because she is a White woman, whereas Will Mayes is a Black.

The society is deeply prejudiced against the Blacks. Racial violence and discrimination is evident from the events that occur in the story. It also reveals how true justice fails in front of the racial violence. By presenting Hawkshaw’s efforts to curb the violence through appeals to thoughtful discourse futile, Faulkner ultimately argues that prejudiced vigilantism is inherently irrational.

1. **Rumours:** Rumor and reputation are powerful elements of life in “Dry September”. At the center of the story’s controversy is Minnie Cooper’s honor. "Dry September" shows the extreme effects that rumors can have. The men in the barber shop really have no idea what [Minnie Cooper](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Dry-September/character-analysis/#Minnie_Cooper) said about [Will Mayes](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Dry-September/character-analysis/#Will_Mayes). Faulkner makes clear that Minnie, herself, has little say in the matter. Minnie has no lines in “Dry September,” and her reputation is entirely defined by those around her even before the rumors of her alleged insult or assault by Mayes. The narrator states that none of the men that were gathered in the barber shop “knew exactly what had happened”. However, the rumors made it seem as if Will Mayes had raped Minnie Cooper. Perhaps, it could also might have been that someone overheard Minnie say something innocent and made assumptions or even changed the story altogether. [Faulkner](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Dry-September/author/) never writes what actually happened between Minnie Cooper and Will Mayes. Perhaps he does this to prove a point - when someone starts a rumour, it is impossible to predict what consequences it might have and who will be sucked into it. It is because of the rumour that Will Mayes is captured and eventually murdered. The rumour is used as a tool or a ruse by cruel White men like John McLendon who just want to punish the Blacks. The rumour is an opportunity for him to kill a Black and thus, send a message to all the people of the Black community that Whites are superior.