

CHAPTER
21

Section 1

LITERATURE SELECTION *from Inherit the Wind*
by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee

In this excerpt from Act II of the play based on the Scopes trial, "Brady" represents the prosecutor William Jennings Bryan, "Drummond" is defense attorney Clarence Darrow, "Cates" is John Scopes, and "Davenport" is Attorney General Stewart. In your opinion, which man—Brady or Drummond—makes the stronger case?

BRADY (*with dignity*): Your Honor, I am willing to sit here and endure Mr. Drummond's sneering and his disrespect. For he is pleading the case of the prosecution by his contempt for all that is holy.

DRUMMOND: I object, I object, I object.

BRADY: On what grounds? Is it possible that something is holy to the celebrated agnostic?

DRUMMOND: Yes! (*His voice drops, intensely*) The individual human mind. In a child's power to master the multiplication table there is more sanctity than in all your shouted "Amens!", "Holy, Holies!" and "Hosannahs!" An idea is a greater monument than a cathedral. And the advance of man's knowledge is more of a miracle than any sticks turned to snakes, or the parting of waters! But are we now to halt the march of progress because Mr. Brady frightens us with a fable? (*turning to the jury, reasonably*) Gentlemen, progress has never been a bargain. You've got to pay for it. Sometimes I think there's a man behind a counter who says, "All right, you can have a telephone; but you'll have to give up privacy, the charm of distance. Madam, you may vote; but at a price; you lose the right to retreat behind a powder-puff or a petticoat. Mister, you may conquer the air; but the birds will lose their wonder, and the clouds will smell of gasoline!" (*thoughtfully, seeming to look beyond the courtroom*) Darwin moved us forward to a hilltop, where we could look back and see the way from which we came. But for this view, this insight, this knowledge, we must abandon our faith in the pleasant poetry of Genesis.

BRADY: We must *not* abandon faith! Faith is the important thing!

DRUMMOND: Then why did God plague us with the power to think? Mr. Brady, why do you deny the *one* faculty which lifts man above all other

creatures on the earth: the power of his brain to reason. What other merit have we? The elephant is larger, the horse is stronger and swifter, the butterfly more beautiful, the mosquito more prolific, even the simple sponge is more durable! (*wheeling on Brady*) Or does a sponge think?

BRADY: I don't know. I'm a man, not a sponge.

(*There are a few snickers at this; the crowd seems to be slipping away from Brady and aligning itself more and more with Drummond.*)

DRUMMOND: Do you think a sponge thinks?

BRADY: If the Lord wishes a sponge to think, it thinks.

DRUMMOND: Does a man have the same privileges that a sponge does?

BRADY: Of course.

DRUMMOND: (*roaring, for the first time: stretching his arm toward Cates*): This man wishes to be accorded the same privilege as a sponge! He wishes to think! (*There is some applause. The sound of it strikes Brady exactly as if he had been slapped in the face.*)

BRADY: But your client is wrong! He is deluded! He has lost his way!

DRUMMOND: It's sad that we aren't all gifted with your positive knowledge of Right and Wrong, Mr. Brady. (*Drummond strides to one of the uncalled witnesses seated behind him, and takes from him a rock, about the size of a tennis ball. Drummond weighs the rock in his hand as he saunters back toward Brady*) How old do you think this rock is?

BRADY (*intoning*): I am more interested in the Rock of Ages, than I am in the Age of Rocks. (*A couple of die-hard "Amens."* Drummond ignores this glib gag.)

DRUMMOND: Dr. Page of Oberlin College tells me that this rock is at least ten million years old.

BRADY (*sarcastically*): Well, well, Colonel Drummond! You managed to sneak in some of that scientific testimony after all. (Drummond opens up the rock, which splits into two halves. He shows it to Brady.)

DRUMMOND: Look, Mr. Brady. These are the fossil remains of a pre-historic marine creature, which was found in this very county—and which lived here millions of years ago, when these very mountain ranges were submerged in water.

BRADY: I know. The Bible gives a fine account of the flood. But your professor is a little mixed up on his dates. That rock is not more than six thousand years old.

DRUMMOND: How do you know?

BRADY: A fine Biblical scholar, Bishop Usher, has determined for us the exact date and hour of the Creation. It occurred in the year 4,004, B.C.

DRUMMOND: That's Bishop Usher's opinion.

BRADY: It is not an opinion. It is literal fact, which the good Bishop arrived at through careful computation of the ages of the prophets as set down in the Old Testament. In fact, he determined that the Lord began the Creation on the 23rd of October in the Year 4,004 B.C. at—uh, at 9 A.M.!

DRUMMOND: That Eastern Standard Time? (*laughter*) Or Rocky Mountain Time? (*more laughter*) It wasn't daylight-saving time, was it? Because the Lord didn't make the sun until the fourth day!

BRADY (*fidgeting*): That is correct.

DRUMMOND (*sharply*): The first day. Was it a twenty-four-hour day?

BRADY: The Bible says it was a day.

DRUMMOND: There wasn't any sun. How do you know how long it was?

BRADY (*determined*): The Bible says it was a day.

DRUMMOND: A normal day, a literal day, a twenty-four-hour day? (*Pause. Brady is unsure.*)

BRADY: I do not know.

DRUMMOND: What do you think?

BRADY (*floundering*): I do not think about things that . . . I do not think about!

DRUMMOND: Do you ever think about things that you do think about? (*There is some laughter. But it is dampened by the knowledge and awareness throughout the courtroom, that the trap is about to be sprung.*) Isn't it possible that first day was twenty-five hours long? There was no way to measure it, no way to tell! Could it

have been twenty-five hours? (*Pause. The entire courtroom seems to lean forward.*)

BRADY (*hesitates—then*): It is . . . possible . . . (Drummond's got him. And he knows it! This is the turning point. From here on, the tempo mounts. Drummond is now fully in the driver's seat. He pounds his questions faster and faster.)

DRUMMOND: Oh. You interpret that the first day recorded in the Book of Genesis could be of indeterminate length.

BRADY (*wriggling*): I mean to state that the day referred to is not necessarily a twenty-four-hour day.

DRUMMOND: It could have been thirty hours! Or a month! Or a year! Or a hundred years! (*He brandishes the rock underneath Brady's nose*) Or ten million years! (*Davenport is able to restrain himself no longer. He realizes that Drummond has Brady in his pocket. Redfaced, he leaps up to protest.*)

DAVENPORT: I protest! This is not only irrelevant, immaterial—it is illegal! (*There is excited reaction in the courtroom. The Judge pounds for order, but the emotional tension will not subside.*) I demand to know the purpose of Mr. Drummond's examination! What is he trying to do? (*Both Brady and Drummond crane forward, hurling their answers not at the court, but at each other.*)

BRADY: I'll tell you what he's trying to do! He wants to destroy everybody's belief in the Bible, and in God!

DRUMMOND: You know that's not true. I'm trying to stop you bigots and ignoramuses from controlling the education of the United States! And you know it! (*Arms out, Davenport pleads to the court, but is unheard. The Judge hammers for order.*)

JUDGE (*shouting*): I shall ask the bailiff to clear the court, unless there is order here.

BRADY: How dare you attack the Bible?

DRUMMOND: The Bible is a book. A good book. But it's not the only book.

BRADY: It is the revealed word of the Almighty. God spake to the men who wrote the Bible.

DRUMMOND: And how do you know that God didn't "spake" to Charles Darwin?

BRADY: I know, because God tells me to oppose the evil teachings of that man.

DRUMMOND: Oh. God speaks to you.

BRADY: Yes.

DRUMMOND: He tells you exactly what's right and what's wrong?

BRADY (*doggedly*): Yes.

DRUMMOND: And you act accordingly?

BRADY: Yes.

DRUMMOND: So you, Matthew Harrison Brady, through oratory, legislation, or whatever, pass along God's orders to the rest of the world! (*Laughter begins.*) Gentlemen, meet the "Prophet from Nebraska!" (Brady's oratory is unassailable, but his vanity—exposed by Drummond's prodding—is only funny. The laughter is painful to Brady. He starts to answer Drummond, then turns toward the spectators and tries, almost physically, to suppress the amused reaction. This only makes it worse.)

BRADY (*almost inarticulate*): I—Please—!

DRUMMOND: (*with increasing tempo, closing in*) Is that the way of things? God tells Brady what is good! To be against Brady is to be against God! (*more laughter*)

BRADY (*confused*): No, no! Each man is a free agent—

DRUMMOND: Then what is Bertram Cates doing in the Hillsboro jail? (*some applause*) Suppose Mr. Cates had enough influence and lung power to railroad through the State Legislature a law that only Darwin should be taught in the schools!

BRADY: Ridiculous, ridiculous! There is only one great Truth in the world—

DRUMMOND: The Gospel according to Brady! God speaks to Brady, and Brady tells the world! Brady, Brady, Brady, Almighty! (Drummond bows grandly. The crowd laughs.)

BRADY: The Lord is my strength—

DRUMMOND: What if a lesser human being—a Cates, or a Darwin—has the audacity to think that God might whisper to him? That an un-Brady thought might still be holy? Must men go to prison because they are at odds with the self-appointed prophet? (Brady is now trembling so that it is impossible for him to speak. He rises, towering above his tormentor—rather like a clumsy, lumbering bear that is baited by an

agile dog.) Extend the Testaments! Let us have a Book of Brady! We shall hex the Pentateuch, and slip you in neatly between Numbers and Deuteronomy! (*At this, there is another burst of laughter. Brady is almost in a frenzy.*)

BRADY (*reaching for a sympathetic ear, trying to find the loyal audience which has slipped away from him*) My friends—Your Honor—My Followers—Ladies and Gentlemen—

DRUMMOND: The witness is excused.

BRADY (*unheeding*): All of you know what I stand for! What I believe! I believe, I believe in the truth of the Book of Genesis! (*beginning to chant*) Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, First Samuel, Second Samuel, First Kings, Second Kings—

DRUMMOND: Your Honor, this completes the testimony. The witness is excused!

BRADY (*pounding the air with his fists*): Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah— (*There is confusion in the court. The Judge raps.*)

JUDGE: You are excused, Colonel Brady—

BRADY: Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah— (*Brady beats his clenched fists in the air with every name. There is a rising counterpoint of reaction from the spectators. Gavel.*)

JUDGE (*over the confusion*): Court is adjourned until ten o'clock tomorrow morning! (*Gavel. The spectators begin to mill about. A number of them, reporters and curiosity seekers, cluster around Drummond. Davenport follows the Judge out.*)

Activity Options

1. Perform this excerpt from *Inherit the Wind* with a group of your classmates. Be sure to pay attention to stage directions for tips on gestures, tone of voice, and so forth.
2. Compare the dialogue in this excerpt with what Darrow and Bryan said during the court trial (on page 33). Then discuss the similarities and differences with a small group of classmates.