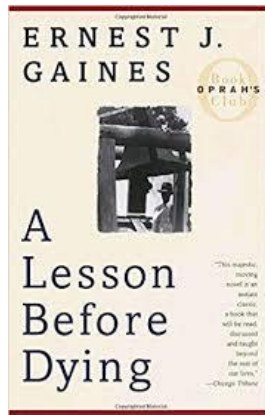


A Lesson Before Dying



ISBN-10 0-375-70270-9

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Author Gaines, Ernest

Publisher Vintage

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Lexile 750L

Genre Young adult, Realistic Fiction

Synopsis Two young black men, one condemned to death for a murder and the other a teacher, form a bond in a small Cajun Louisiana community in the late 1940s.

Themes Race, Mortality, Prejudice

Protagonist African American, Male

Note Over the years, these books have been published in multiple editions. The page numbers in your book may be different than the ones on the lesson plan.

More Information www.scu.edu/character



Character Based Literacy Program

Independent Study Lesson Plan

A Lesson Before Dying, Week 1



PREPARE

Background Gather background knowledge about a place, time, event, person, or thing.



Change Requires Effort Change is possible. Change requires three things: a vision, a plan and effort. It requires changing bad habits to good habits. It requires effort even when I don't feel like working. It requires taking one step at a time.

Research and define each of the following background questions. They will be important pieces to the story. Answer each question in complete sentences.

Research racial segregation in pre-civil rights South.

What were the Jim Crow laws?

What were plantations?

What was segregation?

How did the laws of segregation affect the way that whites and blacks felt about each other and themselves?

Research what "Separate but Equal" means and the ruling of Brown vs. Board of Education.

Does segregation perpetuate racism?

Word Wall Here are five vocabulary words to learn and add to the Word Wall.

jurors (4)	verdict (4)	solitary (4)	pleaded (5)	conspiracy (7)
chauffeur (16)	antebellum (17)	plantation (17)	gingham (18)	obviously (19)
pledged (33)	allegiance (33)	tyrant (38)	vividly (39)	averted (39)
satchel (43)	agitated (44)	humiliate (46)	aggravate (49)	annual (50)
grudgingly (61)	relented (61)	burden (63)	confederate (68)	deputy (69)

READ

Read Read the selection.

Read p. 4-69

RESPOND

Timeline List 15-20 of the most important events on your Timeline.

Think about what you read today and begin your timeline

- First, *fix the facts*: who, what, when, where, why
- Then, decide on the most important events and begin your timeline with these.

Over the course of the next week you will be required to read a number of pages. It would be best if you spread the reading out over the next week and not try to do everything at the last minute before your next appointment.

Map Add to ongoing, class activities like a KWL chart or Map: where did the characters go?

KWL Chart

Maintain a KWL chart regarding life in the South and segregation during the late 1940s.

Bookmark

Add to your bookmark.

Venn Diagram

Create an on-going Venn Diagram containing things that are important to blacks and whites in the Bayonne area. Which things do both groups value?

EXPLORE

Activity Explore the reading more deeply with a visual or oral language activity.

Sketch

There is generally no photography allowed in court. However, often the media send someone to draw the scene. Pretend you are that person and draw the scene inside the courtroom as the defense attorney makes his closing remarks. Place below the picture a quotation of a sentence or two that demonstrates the essence of the defense attorney's case to save the life of Jefferson. (HINT: Review pages 7-8)

Bookmark: Vision-Plan

Using the materials of your choice, such as pens, markers, and construction paper create a bookmark that tracks Grant's progress toward making Jefferson into a man on one side. **On one side, note the changes taking place.** On the other side, create a successful vision for yourself ten years into the future - one void of crime or wealth made through previous criminal activity.

1. Imagine what your life will look like ten years from now. Where will you live? What will you be doing for a living? How will you get around? What interests outside of work will you be pursuing? What relationships will you be in?, etc.
2. Using the top third of your bookmark, use symbols that represent the answers to these questions. Do the same on the other side for Grant. (What symbols would you use to show Jefferson becoming a man?)

3. Now, on your side of the bookmark, list the ten things that have to happen in order for you to achieve your vision (do well in school; stay out of trouble; apply for college, etc.). This is your Plan. NOTE: Leave the last third of your bookmark blank so that you have room for step 4.
4. On Grant's side of the bookmark, keep track of the actions that Grant takes to help Jefferson become a man. On your side, record what you have done in the past 24 hours to move toward your ten-year vision.

Map

Draw a map of the Quarter **using a hand-drawn map or a printed map that can be found online.** Include Miss Emma's, Tante Lou's, the schoolhouse/church, Mr. Henri Pichot's plantation, and the road out of the Quarter toward Bayonne.

Open Mind Portrait

Create an Open Mind Portrait for Grant Wiggins. Use thought bubbles and speech bubbles to delineate between what he is thinking (saying inside) and what he is saying out loud, especially as it pertains to segregation.

Poster

Create a political poster with the caption "Separate is NOT Equal." Include a visual that demonstrates the inequalities inherent in segregation. **You may use the Internet or authoritative print resources to conduct research that may prove useful in your poster.**

Discussion

Key Questions (p. 4-15)

1. Where and when does the novel take place? How does the setting influence the viewpoints expressed in the novel?
2. What does Grant do for a living?
3. Where do you think Grant's parents are? How about Jefferson's?
4. Why do you think Miss Emma and Tante Lou want Grant to be the one that visits Jefferson?
5. What about this trial is unfair?
6. Do you agree with Grant? Is Jefferson really beyond saving? Why or why not?

Key Questions (p. 16-29)

1. Who is Mr. Henri Pichot? Why do they have to go through him to visit Jefferson?
2. Why is Grant so angry when he leaves Mr. Pichot's?
3. What conclusions can you draw about life in the Quarter from today's reading? Would you like to live there? Why or why not?
4. How will Grant teach Jefferson to die like a man? Do you think that this is a noble skill to have?

Key Questions (p. 29-41)

1. What might be some of the reasons Grant has for wanting to leave Bayonne?
2. Why doesn't Vivian think that leaving is such a good idea?
3. What do you think makes these two characters different from each other? What do you think it is that draws them to each other?
4. What do you imagine is eating at Grant so much that he is treating the students so harshly?
5. When Grant describes what he sees in the Quarter, how do you think he feels about the place and the people?

Key Questions (p. 42-55)

1. Why does Grant refuse coffee or even food in Henri Pichot's kitchen?
2. Why does he have to wait in the kitchen, while Mr. Henri Pichot is enjoying himself in the front room? Is this an injustice? Why or why not?
3. Why doesn't the sheriff apologize for keeping Grant waiting for two hours or more? Would you blame racism or a lack of empathy?

Key Questions (p. 56-69)

1. Do you believe the superintendent when he tells Grant, "We're all in the same shape"?
2. Do you agree with the superintendent's opinion that the black children at the school should be sent to work in the fields? Why or why not?
3. What is your impression of the superintendent? Do you find him cold-hearted? Unrealistic? Racist? Review the language he uses towards Grants students to help inform your answer.
4. What is the significance of walking past the statue of a Confederate soldier in the parking lot?
5. What does Antoine mean when he says it won't matter?
6. What effect is produced by placing this scene right after the one in which Mathew Antoine tells Grant that he can try all he wants, but in the end it won't matter?
7. Do you think Grant makes a difference? Will you? How?

EXTEND

Write Write a short product from today's prompt to connect to the unit theme.

Key Paragraph, p. 14

"Tante Lou, Miss Emma, Jefferson is dead. It is only a matter of weeks, maybe a couple of months—but he's already dead. The past twenty-one years, we've done all we could for Jefferson. He's dead now. And I can't raise the dead. All I can do is try to keep others from ending up like this—but he's gone from us. There's nothing I can do anymore, nothing any of us can do anymore" (p. 14).

Writing Prompt

In this section of the novel, Grant says that there is nothing that anyone can do for Jefferson. He claims that Jefferson is already dead. Do you agree with this statement? Does the situation seem hopeless, or is there something that can be done?

Write 1-2 argumentative paragraphs in which you argue either for or against Grant's claim. Do you believe that nothing can be done for Jefferson? Why or why not? Explain your reasoning with your own personal opinions, as well as facts and evidence from the novel. What do you think it will take for the townspeople of Bayonne to change their minds? Do you believe change is possible?

Key Paragraph, p. 22

"That's not what I come up here for, Mr. Henri,' Miss Emma said to him. 'I'm not begging for his life no more; that's over. I just want see him die like a man. This family owe me that much, Mr. Henri. And I want it. I want somebody do something for me one time 'fore I close my eyes. Somebody got do something for me one time 'fore I close my eyes, Mr. Henri. Please, sir'" (p. 22).

Writing Prompt

Jefferson's defense attorney referred to his client as as 'no more than a hog' when he pleaded with the jury to save Jefferson's life. Miss Emma is concerned that her godson will die and all that people will see when they look at Jefferson is a hog. What are the qualities that make you human?

In a 2-paragraph response, argue in favor of your own personal definition of a 'human.' In the first paragraph, explain what you think being human entails. What makes humans different from animals? In a second paragraph, argue why your definition is correct. What makes it a better definition than the one Jefferson's defense attorney uses? Use examples from the text as well as your own personal opinions. Make sure to provide a counter-argument somewhere in your response. Conclude your second paragraph with a reiteration of your stance.

Key Paragraph, p. 34

"I went out into the yard, slapping the Wescott ruler against my leg hard enough to sting it. The cool air felt good on my face, and after standing in the yard for a while, I walked to the road. But there was nothing to see out there but a couple of automobiles—my gray Ford parked down the quarter in front of my aunt's house, and a car parked alongside the ditch farther up the quarter. Other than that, all there was to see were old, gray weather-beaten houses, with smoke rising out of the chimneys and drifting across the corrugated tin roofs. Living and teaching on a plantation, you got to know the occupants of every house, and you knew who was home and who was not..." (p. 34).

Writing Prompt

Gaines, the author, provides a lot of details about the school and the Quarter in today's reading. Review today's key paragraph.

Then, write a paragraph arguing either for/against the following statement: the description of the school and the Quarter in today's reading is depressing. How do you feel when you read today's key passage? Why does it make you feel that way? What techniques does Gaines use to produce an emotion? Use examples from the text and be sure to provide a counterargument somewhere in your paragraph. Conclude your writing with a reiteration of your stance.

Key Paragraph, p. 49

"I don't like it," Guidry said. "And I'll tell you why I don't like it. Because I think the only thing you can do is just aggravate him, trying to put something in his head against his will. And I'd rather see a contented hog go to that chair than an aggravated hog. It would be better for everybody concerned. There ain't a thing you can put in that skull that ain't there already" (p. 49).

Writing Prompt

Segregation was harmful to the psyches of both blacks and whites. It made whites view blacks as subhuman. And it made blacks struggle to believe in their own humanity. We know by his comments how Guidry feels about Jefferson. And we know by his actions how he feels about Grant.

Pretend you are Grant. **Write an argumentative paragraph about how you feel about Sheriff Guidry and other powerful white people in town; specifically argue that their attitudes and treatment towards you is unjust. Use at least one example from today's text to back up your assertions. In your paragraph, provide several suggestions as to how these people can change their mindset. Remember, change requires a vision, a plan and effort. What are some visions, plans and efforts white townspeople can take towards becoming more tolerant? Conclude with a reiteration of your stance.**

Key Paragraph, p. 65

"...Well you will believe me one day. When you see that those five and a half months you spend in that church each year are just a waste of your time, you will. You will. You'll see that it will take more than five and a half months to wipe away—peel—scrape away the blanket of ignorance that has been plastered and replastered over those brains in the past three hundred years. You'll see" (p. 65).

Writing Prompt

In today's reading, Grant remembers the words that his teacher Matthew Antoine tells him: "Do the best you can. But it won't matter." This quote goes against the notion that change requires effort. Antoine tells Grant that the only option for blacks in the south is to run away. How do you feel about this statement?

In an argumentative paragraph, make the claim that Matthew Antoine's statement is false. Support the claim that people can change the world around them by using your own personal experience as well as evidence from the text. Also, think about someone in your own life who did their best and ended up

making a positive impact on the world. Why is it better to believe in yourself rather than give up hope? Conclude your writing with a reiteration of your stance.

Character Based Literacy Program

Independent Study Lesson Plan

A Lesson Before Dying, Week 2



PREPARE

Background Gather background knowledge about a place, time, event, person, or thing.



Change Requires Effort Change is possible. Change requires three things: a vision, a plan and effort. It requires changing bad habits to good habits. It requires effort even when I don't feel like working. It requires taking one step at a time.

Research and define each of the following background questions. They will be important pieces to the story. Answer each question in complete sentences.

An excerpt from Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech:

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

What is the Great Migration? Who is Jackie Robinson?

Who is Ernest J. Gaines, the author of *A Lesson Before Dying*?

Where is Baton Rouge?

What were conditions like in jail at the time the novel takes place?

Word Wall Here are five vocabulary words to learn and add to the Word Wall.

narrow (84)	routine (75)	aggravation (81)	patronizing (82)	sycamore (82)
afford (84)	mock (86)	cynical (84)	defiant (84)	vertical (86)
inquisitor (99)	devoted (101)	baptized (101)	crucified (102)	ancestors (107)
pride (113)	contemplating (114)	pastoral (116)	faith (121)	patience (123)
vexing (129)	heartrending (130)	headway (131)	shackles (134)	termination (135)

READ

Read Read the selection.

Read p. 69-137

RESPOND

Timeline List 15-20 of the most important events on your Timeline.

Think about what you read today and begin your timeline

- First, *fix the facts*: who, what, when, where, why
- Then, decide on the most important events and begin your timeline with these.

Over the course of the next week you will be required to read a number of pages. It would be best if you spread the reading out over the next week and not try to do everything at the last minute before your next appointment.

Map Add to ongoing, class activities like a KWL chart or Map: where did the characters go?

KWL Chart

Maintain a KWL chart regarding life in the South and segregation during the late 1940s.

Bookmark

Add to your bookmark.

Venn Diagram

Maintain an on-going Venn Diagram containing things that are important to blacks and whites in the Bayonne area.

EXPLORE

Activity Explore the reading more deeply with a visual or oral language activity.

Cartoon

Create a five-box cartoon demonstrating the humiliation for Grant of going to see Jefferson. Include Grant, the deputy and the Sheriff. Use passages from the novel to provide inspiration for your drawings.

Postcard

Pretend you are Grant. Send your parents in California a short postcard. Choose a scene from the book for the cover. Then decide what and how much you want to tell them about what is going on in Bayonne.

Map

Review pages 106-107. Either add to your map from last week or create a new, updated map that includes all the sites Vivian and Grant pass on their way through the quarter.

Open Mind Portrait

Create an Open Mind Portrait for Miss Emma. At the bottom of the page, place the caption, "Somboddy go'n do something for me 'fore I die." Use thought bubbles to show all the things she is thinking of that she has had to do for others over the years.

Character Trait Sheet

Use a character trait sheet located in the classroom resources section of the CBL sourcebook. Fill out the top half of the sheet on Grant. You may use the information later to help you write your daily reflection.

Discussion

Key Questions (p. 69-82)

1. What happens when Miss Emma, Tante Lou and Grant go into the courthouse?
2. How does Jefferson react to having visitors? What is he most interested in finding out?
3. Why doesn't Jefferson eat the food that they brought? Do you think that Jefferson's refusal of food is a sign that he has given up hope?
4. Why doesn't Grant want to continue going to see Jefferson?
5. What advice might you give Grant to keep him going? In your own words, make sure he knows that change is possible; it requires a vision, a plan and effort.

Key Questions (p. 83-95)

1. Why can't Vivian leave Bayonne? Why doesn't Grant?
2. How do you feel about Grant carrying on an affair with a married woman? Is this ethical?
3. Why do you think Grant's parents are in California?
4. How might Jefferson be seen as a hero by his people? How might his death represent the injustice of segregation and Jim Crow laws?
5. Think about heroes such as Martin Luther King Jr., who have died while upholding their cause. How does their death impact the community? Do you think it inspires people to take up the cause and work towards justice?

Key Questions (p. 96-109)

1. What kinds of things are important to people in Bayonne?
2. What made Grant stop believing in the Bible?
3. Why do you think Vivian insists on washing the plates after she and Grant use them?
4. What might be the significance of naming his baby Paul?

Key Questions (p. 110-124)

1. Who is “the big boss in Baton Rouge”?
2. Complete the sentence from page 122, “That’s all I’m is, fattening up to...”
3. What does Miss Emma mean when she says, “Sombody go’n do something for me ‘fore I die”?
4. What does Grant feel guilty about? Why does he want to run away from all of this?
5. If Grant stays to help Jefferson transform into a man, what do you think will happen to Grant?
6. What do you think the “lesson before dying” might be?

Key Questions (p. 125-137)

1. How does the group end up meeting with Jefferson in the dayroom?
2. Will Jefferson ever come around? What do you think will do the trick?
3. Remember that change requires a vision, a plan and effort. How is Grant displaying a vision a plan or effort to help change Jefferson? Do you think he will be successful?
4. How many times would you show up for Jefferson before you gave up on him?
5. What advice would you give Grant at this point?

EXTEND

Write Write a short product from today’s prompt to connect to the unit theme.

Key Paragraph, p. 79

“Everything you sent me to school for, you’re stripping me of it,’ I told my aunt. They were looking at the fire, and I stood behind them with the bag of food. ‘The humiliation I had to go through, going into that man’s kitchen. The hours I had to wait while they ate and drank and socialized before they would even see me. Now going up to that jail. To watch them put their dirty hands on that food. To search my body each time as if I’m some kind of common criminal. Maybe today, they’ll want to look into my mouth or my nostrils, or make me strip. Anything to humiliate me. All the things you wanted me to escape by going to school. Years ago, Professor Antoine told me that if I stayed here, they were going to break me down to the n***** I was born to be. But he didn’t tell me that my aunt would help them to do it” (p. 79).

Writing Prompt

Like Martin Luther King Jr., Grant had a dream. He dreamed that schooling would allow him a seat at King’s “table of brotherhood.”

Pretend you are Grant. **Write an argumentative speech in the style of Martin Luther King Jr., claiming that Jefferson has the right to sit at the ‘table of brotherhood’ with blacks and whites alike. Explain why you are passionate about this case and what it means to you to see equality between races. Identify the plan you have made to make this dream a reality. Support your evidence with information from the novel; you may also find that research into Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech is helpful in crafting your own argumentative**

speech. Conclude your speech with a reiteration of your stance.

Key Paragraph, p. 84

“That man out there doesn’t want me up here either,’ I said to him. ‘He said I will never be able to make you understand anything. He said I’m just wasting my time coming up here now. But your nannan doesn’t think so. She wants me to come up here. She wants us to talk. What do you want? You want me to stay away and let him win? The white man? You want him to win?’” (p. 84).

Writing Prompt

In today’s reading, Grant states that he is going to lie to Miss Emma about Jefferson enjoying the food because he doesn’t want the white man to win. How do you feel about lying for a just cause? Is it ethical or unethical?

In an argumentative paragraph, claim that, if Jefferson were to die like a man – despite his being accused of being a hog – it would be a victory. In your paragraph, explain who the victory would belong to. Do you believe that Jefferson’s dying with dignity would make him a hero? Would he become a historical figure like Jackie Robinson or Joe Louis? Why or why not? Be sure to provide a counterargument in your paragraph. Conclude your paragraph with a reiteration of your stance.

Key Paragraph, p. 107

“...Just before we came up the cemetery, we turned left on a road that would take us farther into the field. This was Vivian’s first time back here, and I told her that my people had worked these fields ever since slavery, and many of them were buried in the cemetery behind us...” (p. 107).

Please also read...

About the Author: The world into which Ernest James Gaines was born--on January 15, 1933--is essentially the world which he has distilled into the dense and complex world of his six novels and his stories. The land around River Lake Plantation--near New Roads, Pointe Coupee Parish, Louisiana--is the land around the Pichot plantation, near Bayonne, St. Raphael Parish, presented in *A Lesson Before Dying*. The black community in which Gaines grew up became "the quarter" of this 1993 novel, as well as providing the setting and social matrix of his previous works. The author's vision of Henri Pichot's cane fields stems directly from the fields in which Gaines himself worked as a child. As Gaines has said: "Though the places in my stories and novels are imaginary ones, they are based pretty much on the place where I grew up and the surrounding areas where I worked, went to school, and traveled as a child. My characters speak the way people speak in that area."

Gaines also has drawn considerably on the mores of black culture and the storytelling traditions of rural Louisiana. The result is prose that is at once exact, idiomatic, stately, and true to the spoken language of actual people.

Writing Prompt

Strong stories are often written by authors who write about what they know. Re-read the section above titled, "About the Author."

Write an argumentative paragraph in which you claim that Gaines based his novel on several instances in his own life. You may find that conducting further research on the author's life to be helpful in constructing your claim. Which specific details of the novel are similar to Gaines' own experience? Be sure to conclude your paragraph with a reiteration of your stance.

Key Paragraph, p. 123

"'What for?' I said. 'What for, Tante Lou? He treated me the same way he treated her. He wants me to feel guilty just the same as he wants her to feel guilty. Well I'm not feeling guilty, Tante Lou. I didn't put him there. I do everything I know how to keep people like him from going there. He's not going to make me feel guilty.'

'You going back,' she said. 'You ain't going to run away from this, Grant'" (p. 123).

Writing Prompt

Imagine you are Vivian. Pretend that Grant has come to you for advice after the argument with Tante Lou. **Write an argumentative letter to him, claiming that it is important that he stay and live up to his responsibilities. Include language and phrases that the Vivian might use when addressing Grant. What does he need to do to help Jefferson find his humanity and his dignity? How can you change his mind with your words? Remember that change is possible: it requires a vision, a plan and effort. Conclude your letter with a reiteration of your stance.**

Key Paragraph, p. 129

"'I don't know when I'm going to die, Jefferson. Maybe tomorrow, maybe next week, maybe today. That's why I try to live as well as I can every day and not hurt people. Especially people who have sacrificed for me. I don't want to hurt those people. I want to help those people as much as I can'" (p. 129).

Writing Prompt

Do you believe that Grant is telling the truth in the paragraph above? Take a stand one way or the other and **write an argumentative paragraph claiming that he is either telling the truth or lying. Use information you have learned about Grant by reading the book thus far to build your argument. Try to use at least one direct quotation. (HINT: You may also want to review the character trait sheet you created today.) What are some clues to help you support your claim? Do you personally agree with his statement? Provide a counterargument in your paragraph. Conclude your paragraph with a reiteration of your stance.**

Character Based Literacy Program

Independent Study Lesson Plan

A Lesson Before Dying, Week 3



PREPARE

Background Gather background knowledge about a place, time, event, person, or thing.



Change Requires Effort Change is possible. Change requires three things: a vision, a plan and effort. It requires changing bad habits to good habits. It requires effort even when I don't feel like working. It requires taking one step at a time.

Research and define each of the following background questions. They will be important pieces to the story. Answer each question in complete sentences.

Who was Rosa Parks and what did she do to spark change?

Who was Emmett Till and what is his story?

What is 'subtext'?

What is the turning point of this story?

What is the Emancipation Proclamation? How does it relate to Gaines' novel?

Word Wall Here are five vocabulary words to learn and add to the Word Wall.

shrugged (138)	moral (139)	obligation (139)	mill (142)	lingered (143)
precede (155)	smoldering (155)	hesitantly (156)	justice (157)	convenient (158)
duty (168)	corridor (168)	favor (171)	semidarkness (173)	smothered (173)
faintly (178)	accusing (182)	stammered (186)	deliberately (188)	hero (191)
envy (195)	emancipation (198)	genes (200)	maneuvering (201)	condemned (201)

READ

Read Read the selection.

Read p. 138-208

RESPOND

Timeline List 15-20 of the most important events on your Timeline.

Think about what you read today and begin your timeline

- First, *fix the facts*: who, what, when, where, why
- Then, decide on the most important events and begin your timeline with these.

Over the course of the next week you will be required to read a number of pages. It would be best if you spread the reading out over the next week and not try to do everything at the last minute before your next appointment.

Map Add to ongoing, class activities like a KWL chart or Map: where did the characters go?

KWL Chart

Maintain a KWL chart regarding life in the South and segregation during the late 1940s.

Bookmark

Add to your bookmark.

Venn Diagram

Maintain an on-going Venn Diagram containing things that are important to blacks and whites in the Bayonne area.

EXPLORE

Activity Explore the reading more deeply with a visual or oral language activity.

Postcard

Create a postcard picture of the school's Christmas program. Pretend you are Grant. Use the back to send a short message to your parents in California. Tell them about the pageant and anything else you feel is appropriate.

Open Mind Portrait

In today's reading, Reverend Ambrose accepts a cup of coffee at the kitchen table in Pichot's house; Grant declines. Create an Open Mind Portrait of the two of them in the kitchen. Use speech bubbles and thought bubbles to show what each is saying and thinking. Consider what each is thinking about his current situation - in the kitchen, with or without coffee - and also what each is thinking about the other.

Open Mind Portrait

Create an Open Mind Portrait of the department store clerk and of Grant. Use thought bubbles and speech bubbles to show what each is saying and also what each might be thinking about the other.

Poster

Create a "Heroes Wanted" poster. List five qualities one must possess in order to be a hero.

Newspaper Article

Sometimes, newspapers include two or more editorials (opinion-based articles) side by side to talk about a particular event or issue. Each usually has a different opinion. Create the editorial page of the Bayonne newspaper. Include the title and opening sentences for three accounts of the fight that occurred last night at the Rainbow Club. One should be from a dark-skinned African-American perspective. Another should be from a light-skinned African-American perspective. The third should be from a white perspective who believes in segregation. All three of the editorials should be argumentative and take a stance on the cause of the fight and who is to blame. When appropriate, use authoritative print or digital sources to supplement your claims. You may wish to incorporate the Emancipation Proclamation into one or more of your editorials. Make sure your language, diction, titles and introductory sentences correctly reflect the opinion of the writer.

Discussion

Key Questions (p. 138-151)

1. Why do you think Jefferson needs to act differently towards his godmother?
2. What advice would you give Grant if he wants things to change?
3. If you were Grant, what would you do to change the situation? Remember, change requires a vision, a plan and effort.
4. Grant may have a vision, but does he have a plan?
5. Pretend you are Grant. Come up with a plan to change things in Bayonne.

Key Questions (p. 152-166)

1. What is significant about Grant's refusal of a cup of coffee and Reverend Ambrose's acceptance?
2. Why do Ambrose and Grant seem to be fighting each other, rather than working together?
3. Do you think that Irene Cole is actually in love with Grant? What evidence makes you believe so?

Key Questions (p. 166-177)

1. What does a gallon of ice cream have to do with being human? How about a radio? Does this signal a change in the direction of the novel?
2. Do you believe that Irene loves Grant in the same way that Tante Lou does?
3. Why doesn't Grant correct the sheriff by saying "batteries"?
4. How does Grant act similarly to Rosa Parks when he insists that the salesclerk give him a new radio instead of the floor model? What would you have done in that situation?

Key Questions (p. 178-194)

1. What makes a hero?
2. Are you a hero? Do you have the capacity to be?
3. What sets humans apart from other animals?
4. Do you believe that it is the radio that has caused Jefferson to change his behavior? Why or why not?

5. In today's reading, Reverend Ambrose claims that the radio is a sinful influence on Jefferson. Do you agree with him? Who or why not?
6. Grant claims that he and the Reverend are not heroes because they cannot stand up to the whites. Who does Grant believe the real hero is?
7. How does Jefferson react to Grant's speech about heroes?

Key Questions (p. 195-208)

1. Why is Grant in a good mood when he gets to the Rainbow Club?
2. What makes his mood change?
3. Why do you think Vivian feels disgusted? How would you feel if you were in her shoes?
4. Why might this get Vivian fired? How could this make it harder for Vivian to maintain custody of her children?

EXTEND

Write Write a short product from today's prompt to connect to the unit theme.

Key Paragraph, p. 151

"She was right; I was not happy. I had heard the same carols all my life, seen the same little play, with the same mistakes in grammar. The minister had offered the same prayer as always, Christmas or Sunday. The same people wore the same old clothes and sat in the same places. Next year it would be the same, and the year after that, the same again. Vivian said things were changing. But were they changing?" (p. 151).

Compare the previous paragraph with this one

"People always say that I didn't give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn't true. I was not tired physically, or no more tired than I usually was at the end of a working day. I was not old, although some people have an image of me as being old then. I was forty-two. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in" – Rosa Parks

Writing Prompt

Change in society is often forced. It takes a vision and a plan. **Write an argumentative paragraph in which you list the things that need to change in Bayonne. Use today's reading as well as that of previous days to support your claims. Then, in a second paragraph, argue that Grant and Rosa Parks are not as different as they may seem at first. Use the key paragraphs from today as evidence to support your claims. How can Grant learn from Rosa in order to implement change? Make sure to provide a counterargument in your paragraphs.**

Key Paragraph, p. 157

"Twelve white men say a black man must die, and another white man sets the date and time without consulting one black person. Justice?" (p. 157).

Compare quote above with description of the Emmett Till case below.

On August 28, 1955, Emmett Till, a 14-year-old African-American youth who was on a summer vacation from his home on Chicago's south side, was kidnapped from his

uncle's home in LeFlore County, Miss. by two white men. Four days later, Till's badly beaten body was recovered from the Tallahatchie River. A 75-pound cotton gin fan was attached with barbed wire to his neck.

Till had allegedly entered a grocery store, bought some bubble gum, and whistled at a white woman who worked there. The woman's husband and his half-brother kidnapped and killed Till. As one put it, "I just decided it was time a few people got put on notice." An all-white jury acquitted the two men in an hour and seven minutes. One juror commented, "If we hadn't stopped to drink a pop, it wouldn't have taken that long."

Writing Prompt

Use today's reading and the history of Emmett Till to explain how the Justice system of Segregated America was in need of change. **Write an argumentative paragraph in which you claim that justice was not present in either of the cases. Provide evidence and facts/quotes to support this claim (you may find it helpful to conduct research using authoritative print or digital sources). Then, consider how Jefferson might stand to be an agent of justice and change by going to the electric chair with dignity.**

Key Paragraph, p. 174

"'Here.'

It was the kind of 'here' your mother or your big sister or your great-aunt or your grandmother would have said. It was the kind of 'here' that let you know this was hard-earned money but also, that you needed it more than she did, and the other kind of 'here' that said she wished you had it and didn't have to borrow it from her, but since you did not have it, and she did, then 'here' it was, with a kind of love. It was the kind of 'here' that asked the question, when will all this end? When will a man not have to struggle to have money to get what he needs 'here'? When will a man be able to live without having to kill another man 'here'?" (p. 174).

Writing Prompt

In the quotation above, Gaines explains the many levels of meaning in the word, "here," when said by Thelma Claiborne. This 'here' is related to subtext; remember that subtext is the meaning beneath dialogue – it is what the speaker really means.

First, write an informative paragraph which you first describe a time in which someone said a word or phrase to you that displayed their true, unsaid feelings. Next, write an argumentative paragraph in which you claim that there was a hidden meaning behind their words. What was the subtext? What were the speaker's true feelings behind what they said? Use personal experience to support your claims. Give background details to make your paragraphs as concise and clear as possible. Be sure to conclude your second paragraph with a reiteration of your claim.

Key Paragraph, p. 191

"That is not a hero. A hero does for others. He would do anything for people he loves, because he knows it would make their lives better. I am not that kind of person, but I want you to be. You could give something to her, to me, to those children in the

quarter. You could give them something that I never could. They expect it from me, but not from you. The white people out there are saying that you don't have it—that you're a hog, not a man. But I know they are wrong. You have the potential. We all have, no matter who we are.

'Those out there are no better than we are, Jefferson. They are worse. That's why they are always looking for a scapegoat, someone else to blame. I want you to show them the difference between what they think you are and what you can be. To them you are nothing but another n*****--no dignity, no heart, no love for your people. You can prove them wrong. You can do more than I can ever do'" (p. 191).

Writing Prompt

Write an argumentative paragraph in which you claim that someone you know is a hero. Do they possess the traits that Grant outlines in today's key paragraph? You might wish to choose a historical figure we have studied to compare your hero with, such as Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., Emmett Till, Jackie Robinson, or Joe Louis. Be sure to explain how he or she fits the definition of a hero as laid out by Grant. Also, conclude with a reiteration of your stance.

Key Paragraph, p. 199

"...Since emancipation, almost a hundred years ago, they would do any kind of work they could find to keep from working side by side in the field with the n*****. They controlled most of the bricklaying business in this part of the state. Even took that kind of work from the white boys, because they would do it so much cheaper than the white boys would. Anything not to work alongside the n*****...Dumb as hell, but prejudiced as hell. They had no other place to go to do their drinking—they would not dare go to any of the white clubs—so they would come here and bring their prejudiced attitudes with them. They would keep it down when there were several blacks in the place, but with only me and the three old men standing at the bar today, they felt pretty safe" (p. 199).

Writing Prompt

These young bricklayers have bought into the myth of white supremacy. **Write an argumentative paragraph in which you claim that the laws of segregation have led these young bricklayers to believe that they are superior to darker-skinned people. Use examples from the text to support your claims. You may find that conducting research into segregation during the 1950's and 60's is helpful in providing information that backs up your stance. Make sure to provide a counterargument. Conclude your assignment with a reiteration of your stance.**

Character Based Literacy Program

Independent Study Lesson Plan

A Lesson Before Dying, Week 4



PREPARE

Background Gather background knowledge about a place, time, event, person, or thing.



Change Requires Effort Change is possible. Change requires three things: a vision, a plan and effort. It requires changing bad habits to good habits. It requires effort even when I don't feel like working. It requires taking one step at a time.

Research and define each of the following background questions. They will be important pieces to the story. Answer each question in complete sentences.

What is the difference between selfishness, self-centeredness, and selflessness?

What is a hero? What is a heroine?

What are some main points of Afrocentric History?

What does the character Paul represent in the story?

Afrocentric History

“Some black historians point out that white male historians have too long defined history as a series of *significant events* (occurrences that are meaningful or symbolic for a person, group, or culture).

This point of view implies that the events selected for inclusion by members of the dominant culture are significant to *all* people. Consequently, black history has been virtually excluded from U.S. history texts because white male writers and historians did not consider the accomplishments of blacks significant.

In *Lesson*, Jefferson's execution is a significant event in the black community. His impending death has a profound impact on the people in the quarter — from the students at Grant's school, to the members of Rev. Ambrose's church, to the patrons of the Rainbow Club. By focusing on the Afrocentric view of history, Gaines emphasizes the worth and dignity of everyday heroes like Jefferson, an uneducated black field worker, and Grant Wiggins, an educated black man whose education makes no difference to the white community, which treats him the same way that it treats uneducated blacks. Grant's education, however, makes him more aware of the disrespect toward blacks by the white community; thus, it is difficult for him to see how the education that he offers his students can have a positive impact on their lives.

It is this realization that causes Grant to question his own life and fantasize a better future away from his home community rather than seek to counteract the influences that have worn it down.”

--Excerpted from Cliff's Notes:

Paul represents the hope for change and an end to segregation. He represents hope for the success of the civil rights movement. He represents the possibility of Martin Luther King's dream to be at the “table of brotherhood.”

Word Wall Here are five vocabulary words to learn and add to the Word Wall.

rage (215)	trembling (215)	weary (217)	brief (231)	cynical (231)
possessions (222)	bud (223)	jolt (225)	unconscious (225)	diary (226)
tarpaulin (236)	gruesome (240)	executioner (243)	dumbbell (242)	trance (245)
feat (248)	brute (248)	dominated (250)	tranquil (252)	transformation (254)

READ

Read Read the selection.

Read p. 208-256

RESPOND

Timeline List 15-20 of the most important events on your Timeline.

Think about what you read today and begin your timeline

- First, *fix the facts*: who, what, when, where, why
- Then, decide on the most important events and begin your timeline with these

Over the course of the next week you will be required to read a number of pages. It would be best if you spread the reading out over the week and not try to do everything at the last minute before your next appointment.

Map Add to ongoing, class activities like a KWL chart or Map: where did the characters go?

KWL Chart

Maintain a KWL chart regarding life in the South and segregation during the late 1940s.

Bookmark

Add to your bookmark.

Venn Diagram

Maintain an on-going Venn Diagram containing things that are important to blacks and whites in the Bayonne area.

EXPLORE

Activity Explore the reading more deeply with a visual or oral language activity.

Acrostic Poem

Create an acrostic poem, using one of the following words “self-centered,” “selfish,” or “selfless.” Each line of your poem should begin with the next letter in the word, “self-centered.” Together the seven or eight lines of the poem should convey your feelings about what it means to be self-centered, selfish, or selfless.

Postcard

Imagine you are Jefferson. Create a postcard to send with Grant for your Nannan. On the front draw yourself as a “man” in a beautiful scene, rather than in your cell. On the other side, tell her the things you really want her to know before you pass on. You may wish to use phonetic spelling, like Jefferson.

Newspaper Article

Create a front page article for the local Bayonne newspaper about preparation for the execution tomorrow. Include the title of the article and a visual. You don’t have to write the article, but include a bulleted list of some of the local residents you might interview for the story. For the visual, sketch what you imagine the scene at the jail before the execution would be like.

Newspaper Article

Create another editorial page for the newspaper. Include three titles for editorials regarding Jefferson’s execution - one from Grant, one from Miss Emma, and one from Paul. Remember that editorials are opinion pieces. Take a stance with each editorial you write and make sure that your title conveys the point you are trying to make. Write an argumentative, introductory sentence for each editorial.

Discussion

Key Questions (p. 208-221)

1. Why is Grant in good spirits?
2. Do you think Grant is selfish? Or is he self-centered? Does being selfless make you more of a man/woman/hero?
3. What type of education (real world or institutional) teaches selflessness?
4. Explain what Reverend Ambrose means when he says he is the one that is educated. Do you agree?

Key Questions (p. 221-234)

1. What does Jefferson write about in his journal?
2. What part did you think was most poignant?
3. What will the town of Bayonne get from Jefferson walking like a man to his execution? Do you think it will be the catalyst for change?
4. Do you feel that Grant has failed or succeeded in making Jefferson a man? Why or why not?

Key Questions (p. 235-245)

1. What is Gruesome Gerty?
2. Today's reading includes several recollections and points of view about the same moments in time. What effect does Gaines seek to achieve by doing so?
3. Will Jefferson walk to his execution a man? What effect will this execution have on the community? On segregation?
4. If you were in Jefferson's shoes, how would you want to spend your last day on earth? Who would you want with you?

Key Questions (p. 246-256)

1. What lessons were learned in this book?
2. What would Grant say if you interviewed him on his feelings about the execution? What would Jefferson say? What would Miss Emma say? Paul?
3. Why do you think Paul, the sympathetic white man from "good stalk," is such an important character?

EXTEND

Write Write a short product from today's prompt to connect to the unit theme.

Key Paragraph, p. 215

"I went to college."
 'But what did you learn?'
 'To teach reading, writing, and arithmetic, Reverend.'
 'What did you learn about your own people? What did you learn about her—her 'round there?' he said, gesturing toward the other room and trying to keep his voice down.
 'No, you not educated, boy,' he said, shaking his head. 'You far from being educated. You learned your reading, writing, and 'rithmetic, but you don't know nothing. You don't even know yourself. Well?'
 'You're doing the talking, Reverend.'
 'An educated, boy,' he said, thumping his chest. 'I'm the one that's educated. I know people like you look down on people like me, but'—he touched his chest again—'I'm the one that's educated'" (p. 215).

Writing Prompt

The Reverend has never been to college. He claims to know people and therefore be educated. Grant has been to college, where he learned to teach reading, writing and arithmetic. Which type of education do you feel is more valuable for instituting change? **Write an argumentative paragraph in which you claim that either Grant or the Reverend is more educated. Back up your claim with evidence from the text as well as your own personal opinion. Which type of education is more important to helping Jefferson? (Are either related to selfishness, self-**

centeredness, or selflessness?) Provide a counterargument, and be sure to conclude with a reiteration of your stance.

Key Paragraph, p. 222

“You’ve never had any possessions to give up, Jefferson. But there is something greater than possessions—and that is love. I know you love her and would do anything for her. Didn’t you eat the gumbo when you weren’t hungry, just to please her? That’s all we’re asking now, Jefferson—do something to please her” (p. 222).

A description of Rosa Parks and the beginning of the civil rights movement.

It was the symbolic beginning of the modern civil rights movement. Rosa Parks, an Alabama seamstress, refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus to a white man. A volunteer secretary for the Montgomery branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and a veteran of the civil rights movement since the early 1930s, she was returning from work at a department store on Dec. 1, 1955. The bus filled up, whites in the front and blacks in the back. The driver ordered four blacks in the front of the black section to get up and make room for whites. Three did, but Mrs. Parks did not. She was arrested under a city ordinance requiring segregated buses and fined \$10 plus \$4 court costs.

At the time that she refused to give up her seat, only 31 African Americans in Montgomery were registered to vote. But her act of defiance shook the foundations of segregation.

...In later life, her views ranged between the non-violence of Martin Luther King and the militance of Malcolm X. "I don't believe in gradualism," she told an interviewer, "or that whatever is to be done for the better should take forever to do." By holding on to her seat, Rosa Parks illustrates how one person's spontaneous act of courage and defiance can alter the course of history.

Writing Prompt

It has been said that Miss Emma represents the Rosa Parks of fictional Bayonne. As Rosa Parks becomes the catalyst for the modern civil rights movement, Miss Emma is the catalyst for change in Bayonne.

Do you personally believe that Miss Emma represents Rosa Parks? Why or why not?

Write an argumentative paragraph that claims either for or against this comparison. Be sure to use what you know from *A Lesson Before Dying* and the excerpt about Rosa Parks above. Be sure to reference both texts. Provide a counterargument somewhere in your paragraph, and make sure you conclude your paragraph with a reiteration of your stance.

Key Paragraph, p. 245

“...Sidney drove the six blocks in Lucy’s car, and as he was approaching the store he saw a crowd of people standing on the sidewalk, facing the courthouse. Parked beside the courthouse was the same truck that Sidney had seen at eight o’clock that morning. The tarpaulin had been rolled back, and two men sat at the tail end of the truck, talking and smoking cigarettes” (p. 245).

Writing Prompt

In today's reading, Gaines, the author, gives an Afrocentric account of the preparations for the execution. We learn about the daily lives of local people as the truck with the chair arrives. We learn of people's last interactions with Jefferson, either knowingly or unknowingly.

Was Gaines' approach to tell the story from different perspectives effective?

Write an argumentative paragraph either for or against this style of writing. Did it help you gain a sense of the mood on Bayonne leading up to the execution? Or would you have preferred Gaines to stick to telling the story focusing on Grant's actions and feelings? Why or why not? Be sure to provide evidence from the text to support your argument.

Key Paragraph, p. 253

"Paul and I started walking down the quarter. We were both quiet. I waited for him to begin.

'It went as well as it could have gone.' He spoke slowly as we walked abreast, he kept looking ahead, I down at the ground. 'There was no trouble. He was a little shaky—but but no trouble.'

Paul was quiet a moment, then suddenly he stopped walking. After going another step, I stopped too, and looked back at him.

'He was the strongest man in that crowded room, Grant Wiggins...and straight he walked. I'm a witness. Straight he walked'" (p. 253).

Writing Prompt

Complete the editorial you began for Paul. **Write at least 2 argumentative paragraphs from Paul's point of view. Be sure to use words or phrases you think this characters would use. Tell how you got to know Jefferson. Tell how it made you feel to see him walk tall. Tell how important it was for you to bear witness. Tell how Jefferson's death will affect you. Make sure that your editorial is argumentative: take a stand on the execution and be sure to use evidence from the novel to support your claims.**

Optional Final Essay:

Write a five or more paragraph essay taking a stance on life in the South after emancipation and prior to the civil rights movement. Use what you learned in *A Lesson Before Dying* to develop an argumentative thesis (essay's topic sentence). Support your thesis with information you collected while reading or from research derived from authoritative print sources. Information also might come from the book. You could also obtain information from the KWL and Venn Diagram charts you developed. Further information may be drawn from historical information provided by your teacher on such topics as segregation, Jim Crow, Earnest Gaines, Rosa Parks, Emmett Till, Jackie Robinson, and Joe Louis.

Your essay must have an introductory paragraph, a body, and a conclusion that restates your position on the topic you chose. It should include references to the text, events and characters. You should include quotations, when necessary, to support your

claims. Make sure your tone is formal. Also, a counterargument is not required, but would be helpful in developing your stance on the topic you wish to address.