

Student _____ Grade _____

*****Bradbury - English II*****

A Lesson Before Dying

by Ernest J. Gaines

Each day you will be assigned certain chapters to read. You will have a question or two to answer each day. Respond in paragraph form. Responses should be a COMPLETE paragraph with explanation. These are not one or two sentence answers. Please label your paper, so I know which questions you are answering for each section. **Read** the chapters and answer the questions based on **YOUR** understanding of the text. Trust me. It will be much quicker for you to actually read the chapters versus trying to look up all the answers on the internet. Using any answers other than your own is considered cheating and no credit will be given. If we return to school after April 17, you will not be able to do the culminating project at the end of the novel if you have not read it. You can turn in assignments weekly to the drop box at the school, or you may email or text me a picture of completed work. Students working online, please submit in Google Classroom. I will post “assignments” in Google Classroom that you can submit to. I will give feedback there if I see an issue. Also, check your school email. Remember, turn in assignments a week at a time. I do NOT want assignments turned in daily--just weekly. Please submit the week’s assignments by Sunday evening. You are welcome to work ahead if you finish early. You can contact me anytime with a question. I am always available via email at stacey.bradbury@norfork.k12.ar.us. I will check emails several times a day. Because I love you and miss you, and I know you do me as well, you can even have my cell number (870)404-5007. :)

ASSIGNMENTS:

March 30-April 3

- Monday - No assignment
- Tuesday - Read Chapters 1-2. Choose a question from each chapter.
- Wednesday - Read Chapters 3-5. Choose one question from this section..
- Thurs. - Read Chapters 6-7. Choose one question from this section.
- Friday - Read Chapters 8-10. Choose one question from this section.

April 6-10

- Monday - Read Chapters 11-12. Choose one question from this section.
- Tuesday - Read Chapters 13-15. Choose one question from this section,
- Wed. - Read Chapters 16-18. Choose one question from this section.
- Thur. - Read Chapters 19-20. Choose one question from this section.
- Friday - Good Friday. No assignments.

April 13-17

- Monday - Read Chapters 21-22. Choose one question from this section.
- Tuesday - Read Chapters 23-24. Choose one question from this section.
- Wed. - Read Chapters 25-26. Choose one question from this section.
- Thurs. - Read Chapters 27-28. Choose one question from this section.
- Friday - Read Chapters 29-31. Choose one question from this section.

March 30–April 3 (Chapters 1–10)

A Lesson Before Dying: Chapter 1 (choose 1)

1. Existentialism: How responsible are we for our actions, for our predicament, for our lives? Is Jefferson guilty? Is he somewhat responsible for the murder in the store? Is he responsible for his own trial, since he took the liquor and the money?
2. What do you think of the defense attorney’s strategy—that Jefferson is essentially an animal, a boy not a man, and can’t think or plan things with his small brain? Will this defense work for him? What does it tell us about the novel’s setting?
3. What else can we infer about the setting, and the narrator in the opening chapter?
4. We don’t get anything about the narrator in this chapter. Why? What literary purpose might this omission serve?
5. The defense attorney ends with this statement: “We must live with our own conscience” (8). What does Gaines evoke here?
6. Nine pages into the novel, we know that Jefferson is condemned. What can this novel be about?
7. What are some connotations for the word, condemned? Are we all condemned? If so, what are our lives about?
8. “Brother” and “Bear” –not really human names, what effect do these names have?

A Lesson Before Dying: Chapter 2 (choose 1)

1. Note how Miss Emma stares out into the yard, Yet, “was not seeing any of that” (12). This echoes the narrator’s first words in the novel: “I was not there, yet I was there” (3). What does Gaines achieve or imply with these contradictions?
2. "Tante Lou, Miss Emma, Jefferson is dead. It is only a matter of weeks, maybe a couple of months—but he’s already dead....There’s nothing I can do anymore, nothing any of us can do anymore"(14).
Is he right; is it too late for Jefferson? What about the rest of us mortals?
3. What do we make of the Narrator now—now that we know he doesn’t want his job, his life, now that we know he does as he is told by his aunt? What lessons does he need to learn in this novel?

A Lesson Before Dying: Chapter 3, 4, & 5 (choose 1)

1. What characterization or exposition do we get from chapter 3?
2. We find out that Grant has left the South before, but returned. Why might he have returned? What does this tell us about him?
3. How, so far, does Southern racism seem to affect Grant and his character?
4. What does Gaines want us to know about Grant from the following interaction between him and Vivian?
“After the divorce I’ll do whatever you want me to do—as long as you’re responsible for what you do.”
“In other words, if I fail, I would have to blame myself the rest of my life for trying, is that it?”
(30)
5. Considering Grant’s personality and his feelings about his life, who is in greater need of a lesson—Jefferson or Grant?
6. What do we think of his reaction to the student who incorrectly multiplies, or of the girl who writes a slanted sentence? What is Gaines trying to achieve here?
7. What does Gaines establish by having Mr. Farrell say he doesn’t know what Henri Pichot wants, when both Wiggins and Farrell do, in fact, know? And further, what is established by noting that Mr. Farrell is a talented tradesman, and an aged man, but must ask merely as a messenger to run errands?

A Lesson Before Dying: Chapters 6 & 7 (choose 1)

1. What common assumptions does Gaines rely on early in the novel about people, the world, and life? Some of these assumptions will have to be overturned in the novel.
2. Why does Pichot send for Grant at five if he won't see him until after dinner, which doesn't begin until 5:45? He ends up waiting nearly two and a half hours.
3. What are we to make of Edna Guidry (the woman who comes back to the kitchen and greets Grant)?
4. The Sheriff and others feel that it's a waste of time for Grant to visit Jefferson; is it? Why?
5. What predictions or inferences can we make about the outcome of the novel?
6. What are we to make of the superintendent's visit? What purpose does this passage serve in the novel?
7. What is notable about his description? (He's fat—like one of the men at Pichot's)

A Lesson Before Dying: Chapters 8, 9 & 10 (choose 1)

1. Why does it bother Grant to see the kids enjoying physical labor?
2. What does Gaines want us to think about Grant's teacher, Antoine?
3. Does it matter that his predictions seem to come true (that the kids will die, that they will be broken by racism)?
4. Why does he hate Grant?
5. Does Grant hate his promising students as well?
6. Note structure of the conversation between Grant and the dying teacher on pages 64-66. The dialogue is not broken down into paragraphs, as it should be. Why does Gaines break this grammatical rule here? What does he achieve?
7. How do we feel about Grant's bitterness in chapter 10?

April 6-10 (Chapters 11-20)

A Lesson Before Dying: Chapters 11 & 12 (choose 1)

1. What does Jefferson's emotional state and his concern about being called a hog tell us about him?
2. Does Grant seem to be trying to work with Jefferson?
3. What point does Gaines make with the discussion of the athletes (Jackie Robinson, and Joe Louis)? Why does the convict that Grant remembers reading about from Florida call out to Joe Louis as he is dragged to his death?
4. Grant seems bothered that there are only two high profile black heroes for the black community. Is he, himself, *really* stepping up to fill the role?
5. In life, should we look to heroes, or should we define our own route? What does Gaines seem to be saying?

A Lesson Before Dying: Chapters 13, 14 and 15 (choose 1)

1. Grant seems to be bothered by everything in his community. He seems frustrated by all that surrounds him, yet he stays. Can we see this as a broader metaphor for life? What might Gaines be saying, beyond his discussion of the African American experience in the Jim Crow South?
2. Vivian says, "I think something happened." Then they discuss children's names. Should they have children?
3. What does it tell us about Grant that he names his own unborn children, but never mentions Vivian's existing children by name?
4. After Grant's Aunt gives Vivian the 3rd degree about class and skin-color, Vivian comments that she goes through the same thing with her family. Grant says that it is far from being the same thing, and she goes quiet. What does this tell us about Grant?
5. What do the ladies from the quarter mean by "Quality?" (Vivian is fair skinned). What does Gaines achieve by emphasizing the fact that Vivian has fair skin and that her family rejects those who are darker than themselves?
6. Is Vivian good for Grant—can she give him what he needs to develop as a person? Offer some examples to support your answer.

A Lesson Before Dying: Chapters 16, 17 and 18 (choose 1)

1. Paul and Grant, and then Grant and Jefferson discuss man's confrontation with death. The idea here is that Jefferson is wrestling with his awareness of his own death—but by extension, we are all aware of our own death and we all have limited time to live. What responsibilities do we all have, knowing that we might die in any moment, and that eventually we will die?
2. What do we think of Grant's argument that he has a responsibility to his Godmother, a responsibility to not make her sad?
3. What do we think of Jefferson's response that he is going to die anyway, and that all people cry?
4. Grant seems to make the case that he, too, might die at any time. Jefferson notes that this is not the same as knowing you will die very soon. Who's correct?
5. Note that Grant's primary argument, to Jefferson, about responsibility is that he --Jefferson-- owes something to his Godmother. Does Grant follow his own advice?
6. Why is Jefferson living up to the Defense attorney's characterization? Why is he carrying this hog characterization so far? What, given everything else in the novel, is Gaines getting at here?

A Lesson Before Dying: Chapters 19 and 20 (choose 1)

1. Why might Gaines have included the dialogue from the whole Christmas program?
2. Is there any significance to the execution date of April 8th [2nd Friday after Easter], or around Easter? Also, it's on Friday. (Note: Grant, discusses this earlier.)
3. "Twelve white men say a black man must die, and another white man sets the date and time ..." (157). Might there be any significance to the number of jurors here?
4. Are there any other ways in which Jefferson is Christ-like?

April 13-17 (Chapters 21-31)

A Lesson Before Dying: Chapters 21 and 22 (choose 1)

1. What themes, ideas, or metaphors are evoked through Grant's description of the fate of black men in chapter 21, especially the line, "So each time a male child is born, they hope he will be the one to change this vicious circle..." (167)? [Chapter ends with a pretty heavy description of how men in the black community tend to break, how they are expected to make up for 300 years of failure: presented in dialogue between Vivian and Grant.]
2. If Grant understands the situation, and Miss Emma's hope for a son who breaks the cycle, who dies like a martyr so well, why is he not more willing to work with Jefferson?
3. What seems to be Gaines's message about responsibility to self and responsibility to community? Which side of the argument does the book, broadly, support?
4. What is notable about the logical or literary placement of the scene in which the saleswoman at Edwin's department store makes Grant wait and otherwise attempts to humiliate him? What point does Gaines reinforce with this passage?

A Lesson Before Dying: Chapters 23 and 24 (choose 1)

1. In chapter 23, the sheriff questions, even scolds, the reverend for not taking an active part in counseling Jefferson. The reverend states that his duty is to stand by sister Emma. The sheriff asks him, "What about Jefferson, what about his soul?" (180). Since the Reverend and Grant appear to be at odds, who would we say is doing more authentic good, in the story?
2. Is there a deeper, symbolic, level to the argument between Grant and the Reverend about the radio, about personal freedom vs. living up to the expectations of others? Note that earlier, Grant was the one arguing for meeting expectations.
3. Why is it so amazing to Grant when Jefferson says "tell-tell the chirren thank you for the pe-pecans" (186)? What insight does this give us into Jefferson's progress?
4. On page 186, Jefferson mentions the statute of the Confederate soldier again. Why is this image so often evoked and repeated?

A Lesson Before Dying: Chapters 25 and 26 (choose 1)

1. What seems to be the point of Chapter 25?
2. What is Vivian's role in the text? What does her character achieve?
3. At the end of chapter 26, is there any symbolism or significance to Grant's looking out into the darkness of the night, through the screen door and then returning to Vivian?

A Lesson Before Dying: Chapters 27 and 28 (choose 1)

1. Reverend asks Grant if he ever thinks of anybody but himself. Is this a valid criticism of Grant?
2. What does it mean that Grant believes in God but not in Heaven?
3. What seems to be happening to Jefferson as he approaches death?
4. What is different about Jefferson in this chapter?
5. Why does Grant seem to be losing his composure in these two chapters? What is he doing wrong, or what is he confronting that is difficult? What flaws are being exposed?

A Lesson Before Dying: Chapters 29, 30, 31 (choose 1)

1. Shift in perspective of the narrator; we go from person to person on the morning of the execution. Why?
2. Does the chair, and the truck (it's black) serve as some form of symbolism?
3. Someone in the courthouse notes that "The lord died between 12 and 3." Why mention this?
4. What role has Paul come to play in this novel? Why does Gaines include him?
5. In the end, Jefferson walks straight and tall to his death. What messages can we take from this beyond the significance to this particular story?
6. Why does Gaines end the story with conversation between Paul and Grant? Why Paul, and not the Reverend or Pichot?
7. Who is this story really about?
8. Is it important that Grant cries at the conclusion? What does it signify?