

A is a privilege that
many people do

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A Lesson Before Dying Growing up with disadvantages is always a struggle in life. The novel *A Lesson Before Dying* conveys the struggles of growing up and receiving an education. Because both characters face injustice and face responsibility, redemption in death is the struggle of life in this novel. Ernest Gaines, in *A Lesson Before Dying*, explores several themes suggested by the title, including education, death, and justice. The first theme suggested by the title *A Lesson Before Dying* is education, reinforced by Ernest Gaines through the clever use of plot.

Education is a privilege that many people do not have, especially the black disadvantaged like Jefferson who comes from a poor black community of Bayonne. As the book unravels not only is Jefferson receiving lessons from Grant, he is teaching Grant that redemption belongs to everyone and that his duty to his community is worth much more than he initially attributes to it. It is clear that Grant learned from Jefferson as much as Jefferson learned from Grant. “ My eyes were closed before this moment, Jefferson. My eyes have been closed all my life.” Ernest Gaines uses enforces the importance of dying with an education throughout the novel.

As Jefferson is laid to rest he teaches all the characters the true lesson of life which, is embracing life and education. *A Lesson Before Dying* suggests another theme, that of coming of age, a theme Ernest Gaines highlights in his repeated characters. The novel begins with the execution of 21- year old Jefferson, who has to grow up quickly before he faces his fate.

“ I don’t want them to kill no hog,” said Miss Emma. “ I want a man to go to that chair, on his own two feet.” Grant and deputy Paul help Jefferson

become a man so he can die proud. In the end, the characters are painfully aware that Jefferson is a brave man walking to his death, not an animal being dragged to slaughter. It is in these last days that Jefferson becomes the light of the entire community. In these last days, Jefferson exhibits grace and redefines what it means to be powerful, to be a hero, to be a man.

Ironically, A lesson before dying is one taught by Jefferson. Injustice is a third theme found in the novel and in its title; Ernest Gaines uses tone to demonstrate that theme. Injustice is being prevailed everywhere in the novel because of the racist tone of the whites and the execution of Jefferson. All blacks at this time are facing these injustices that are particularly infuriating because no one stands up to defy them. The entire town accepts Jefferson's conviction with a solemn silence. Grant is the biggest criticizer of this problem he remains silent, but as the novel pervades Grant learns to take a stand and fight against this injustice, and to fight for people to never have to be falsely prosecuted the way Jefferson was. A Lesson Before Dying, then, conveys the struggles of education while facing injustice in a coming of age era. In life education can be taken for granted without realizing its importance.

Jefferson does not only become a man with pride, he teaches Grant to use his voice. " And that's all we are, Jefferson, all of us on this earth, a piece of drifting wood, until we—each one of us, individually—decide to become something else."