

A lesson before dyingtopics essay



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Symbolism is the voice of the unspoken feeling. There is an abundant amount of powerful symbols exhibited within the novel *A Lesson before Dying* by Ernest Gaines. The author successfully adds a touch of importance to his symbols; the three most important symbols delineated in this novel are Jefferson's notebook, the recurring food, and lastly the kitchen door of Mr. Henri's house. *A Lesson before Dying* emphasizes the implications behind symbols and how they are borne throughout the story.

Gaines does not hold back at all when it comes to showing that Jefferson's notebook is an extremely important symbol in the book *A Lesson before Dying* due to its connective nature. Jefferson's notebook acts as a window, giving the reader a glance into the inner workings of his mind which was not possible before. For example, the reader is able to actually read Jefferson's notebook entry in chapter.

Jefferson had detached himself from the community as he felt that they had not paid attention to him before his arrest and that injustice had been served to him; the notebook that was gifted to him ultimately served to be a reconnection to society – a type of forgiveness. Lastly, the notebook represents hope for a beaming future collaboration not just between the black community, but also between black and white people. “ Allow me to be your friend, Grant Wiggins. I don't ever want to forget this day. I don't ever want to forget him. (Gaines 259)

With Paul's request to shake hands with Grant, a new level of equality is established between the “ white” and “ black” man, emancipating Grant from any feelings of being inferior, thus enforcing the concept of connectivity

between the two different communities. Hence, the notebook essentially was successful at symbolizing the concept of connectivity, as along with the characters in A Lesson before Dying, the reader is also able to connect with Jefferson through the thoughts written in his notebook, secondly, the notebook is a method of emancipation for Jefferson as his initiative to write down his thoughts after much persuasion was a form of forgiveness for the ignorance that he had faced prior to his sentence and lastly, thanks to the notebook, a new level of equality had been established amongst Paul and Grant, therefore creating a connection between them also.

A very important symbol that is slipped repetitively into A Lesson before Dying is the recurring food, which indicates a mean of expression for the characters. It would mean so much to her if you would eat some of the gumbo. ” (Gaines 194) When Miss. Emma had brought Jefferson food, he had refused to eat it; Grant took the refusal seriously and thought of it as a portrayal of Jefferson’s anger towards his family. Hence, Grant begged Jefferson to eat in order to show Miss. Emma that he truly loved her; this was a tactic employed by Grant to somehow make Jefferson express his feelings through the food as a mean – a form of indirect emancipation.

Jefferson had not co-operated much until ice cream had been mentioned; “ I want me a whole gallona ice cream,” (Gaines 175) Grant stated that a smile had appeared on Jefferson’s face; “ I can bring you some ice cream anytime, Jefferson. ” (Gaines 175) Grant very successfully put forward a hand of friendship by offering to fulfill Jefferson’s wishes through food as a mean of expression. Lastly, Jefferson shows an indication of wanting to return the favour of affection to Grant; “ Care for a ‘ tato, Mr. Wiggins? ’ (Gaines 228)

This is a pivotal moment as Jefferson willingly uses the food as a method of showcasing his affection rather than being forced to.

Therefore, the food successfully represents a mean of expression for the characters in *A Lesson before Dying*, because Jefferson is forced to eat the food brought by Miss. Emma by Grant in order to show his love and forgiveness, Grant voluntarily offers to bring Jefferson ice cream, which showcases Grant putting forward a hand of friendship, and lastly, with Jefferson's offer to share food with Grant, he expresses his gratitude.

In the book *A Lesson before Dying*, the kitchen door found within Mr. Henri's house is an important symbol as it indirectly represents the role of black people in Southern society. When Grant went to Mr. Henri's house, he could not simply knock at the front door as he was black and had to enter through the kitchen at the rear of the house, similar to the way of a servant, simply because he was black. Thus, the door signified the subservient and inferior role that Southern blacks employed; the stigma of being unequal.

Tante Lou had told Grant that there was a possibility of him never having to enter through the kitchen door another time; " It was you who said you never wanted me to go through that back door ever again. " (Gaines 17) When Grant had to enter through the Pichot's kitchen door again, he was degraded yet again, despite having an education. Hence, Grant had to deal with the feelings which were a result of the degrading kitchen door; educated or not, it was implied that a black man will still be treated the same.

Lastly, once Jefferson's designated execution date was established, Sheriff Guidry asked to speak with Grant in his front room; this showcased the change of roles in regards to the kitchen door, as although Grant had entered with the status of a black man, he had been seen in the front as an equal. This incident symbolized that the roles of the Southern black people were not permanent; it symbolized emancipation.

Therefore, the kitchen door symbolized the role of black people because it signified the inequality of Grant as a black man, it showed that despite the education that Grant received, his role as a mere black teacher in the "quarter" did not help raise his stature or value, and lastly, after the announcement of Jefferson's execution, the kitchen door showcased the actual elimination of roles, as Grant's journey consisted of not simply entering the house with the value of a servant, but actually venturing all the way to the front with respect.

The concept of emancipation successfully ties with the prominent symbols present within this novel; with the forgiveness given by characters, acts of sharing with another human being despite not having any blood relations and treating everyone equally regardless of their race – emancipating not only the black community present in this story, but also any other characters.

In conclusion, the three most important symbols within the novel *A Lesson before Dying* are Jefferson's notebook, the recurring food, and lastly, the kitchen door situated at the rear of Mr. Henri's house. Do you have any present matters that can be resolved by being more open-minded? " Your

assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won't come in. " – Isaac Asimov