

Review of ernest gaines' book, a lesson before dying

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In the novel, "A Lesson Before Dying", by Ernest Gaines, the protagonist, Grant Wiggins gives a young convict a lesson during his last days alive. Suffering through the horrors of racism in their small community, black Americans seem to appear to have no chance of progression. As Mr. Wiggins struggles with a young man named Jefferson, he ends up learning a couple of lessons himself. In the process of Mr. Wiggins trying to help Jefferson, he befriends a white man, which gives his community hope towards stopping racism. Not only does Mr. Wiggins learn a lesson from this situation, but so do Jefferson, and a white deputy, Paul. These three characters have changed greatly throughout this novel, all changing very similarly to open hearted, caring men.

This novel insists on the fact that a man's death can be a meaningful event in which could change a community. Jefferson has always led a quiet life, but when he becomes a convict for a crime he did not commit, he begins to react with anger. "But let us say he was not. Let us for a moment say he was not. What justice would there be to take his life? Justice, gentlemen? Why, I would just as soon put a hog in the electric chair as this." (Page 8, paragraph 4)

When Jefferson gets convicted he begins to act upon what the whites think of him, a hog. In this novel Jefferson learns that by dying like a man, he will fight back to the community that wrongly accused him of a robbery and murder. Being a coloured man in a white society, Jefferson believes he will make his community proud. For these reasons Jefferson walked into his execution with his head held high, showing pride for his people. People were fascinated as an onlooker said "He was the strongest man in that room, Grant Wiggins," (Page 253, paragraph 5)

Since Mr. Wiggins lives within a prejudice society, he has a bitter attitude towards whites, and cannot stand to think about how unjust Jefferson's conviction was. For most of the novel Mr. Wiggins is living as a difficult, angry school teacher that longs for the day he gets to escape his community, which he believes will never change. As Jefferson's trial approaches it emphasizes Mr. Wiggins' pessimistic attitude. However, during the course of the novel, Mr. Wiggins' personality begins to change. He begins to love something other than himself; Mr. Wiggins begins to love his community. He realizes that even small victories can produce a change, so he takes the first step towards improving his society. Rather than looking at Jefferson as a hopeless young man, Mr. Wiggins accepts Jefferson and begins to not only fight for Jefferson's rights, but his own as well. Mr. Wiggins cries at the end of the novel which shows that he truly has turned into an open-hearted caring man. "I turned from him and went into the church. Irene Cole told the class to rise, with their shoulders back. I went up to the desk and turned to face them. I was crying." (Page 256, paragraph 2) Since this novel is written in first person, the protagonist, Mr. Wiggins, ends the novel with the changes he has seen in himself, and in his community.

A character that changed the novel is Paul, the deputy of the prison. Paul began to mend the broken line between coloured people and white people, when he went to visit Mr. Wiggins. Even though Paul was already an open-hearted man, he continued to improve his position as a white deputy by showing that he cares. "She's beautiful; you're a lucky fellow there, Grant Wiggins." (Page 255, paragraph 1) Paul seems to be the only caring man at

the prison, which proves itself in this quote. In this community, a white man would never call a coloured woman beautiful, which shows that Paul is not prejudiced. In this novel, Mr. Wiggins does not want to go back to the jail because he gets searched and is viewed as a lower status man by the guards. However Paul is one of the guards at the prison, and he befriends Mr. Wiggins, through his relationship with Jefferson. Jefferson trusts Paul enough to give him his belongings before he dies. This displays that Paul is a trustworthy man, especially for a coloured man to trust him. In the end of the novel Paul proves himself as a sympathetic deputy, he sees the problems that blacks experience and does not like it.

Mr. Wiggins, Jefferson, and Paul all learn that there is simple heroism in world. Jefferson defies those who consider him a 'hog' by walking with pride to the electric chair. Grant recognizes that he doesn't have to run away from the south, but that he can stay and make the most of it with Vivian. As for Paul, Paul recognizes the power that he has always had. All these men changed by the end of the novel, they all learned a 'lesson before dying'.