

# [A lesson before dying: complete summary essay](https://assignbuster.com/a-lesson-before-dying-complete-summary-essay/)

1. Title: A Lesson Before Dying 2. Author: Ernest J. Gaines 3. Date of publication: 1993 4.

Genre: Historical Fiction 5. Biographical information about author: He was born January 15, 1933 in Louisiana. He lived on the River Lake Plantation. He started working in the fields when he was nine. He was raised by his aunt, Augusteen Jefferson.

His parents moved to California during WWII and he joined them when he was 15. He served in the US Army and graduated from San Francisco State College in 1957. He now lives in San Francisco, California and is an English professor. 6. Plot Summary: Jefferson went with the “ wrong crowd” and ended up at the wrong place at the wrong time. This “ bad” choice resulted in him being convicted of murdering Mr.

Grope, the white storekeeper. After his godmother, Miss Emma heard the defense attorney say he wasn’t as smart as a hog; Miss Emma asked Grant Wiggins to teach Jefferson how to be a man before his execution. Grant hates the idea, but Aunt Tante Lou won’t take no for an answer and Vivian, his girlfriend, convinces him it’s the right thing to do. During his jail visits with Jefferson things didn’t go well. Jefferson refused to talk, eat and at times acted like a hog. As time went on Jefferson and Grant became friends and Grant brought him a radio and gave him a notebook to write down his thoughts.

During all this time Reverend Ambrose was more concerned with making sure Jefferson was saved and would go to heaven. Grant didn’t believe in heaven so he couldn’t help in that area. He was more interested in making Jefferson realize he had an opportunity to be a hero. 7.

Memorable quote: “ But let us say he was not. Let us for a moment say he was not. What justice would there be to take this life? Justice, gentlemen? Why, I would just as soon put a hog in the electric chair as this. – This quote set the tone for the rest of the book. 8. Setting: Bayonne, Louisiana in the 1940’s 9.

Symbols: The ruler symbolizes authority. Grants uses the ruler to make his students obey him or else. The diary symbolizes Jefferson’s feelings about his life, the situation he’s in, his friendship with Grant, and his hope that whites can stop being prejudice toward blacks. The back door symbolizes racism because the whites thought they were better than the blacks so the blacks could not use the front door. The radio symbolizes an inner peace and helps Jefferson take his mind off the execution. 0.

Themes or topics for discussion: Racism – Grant hates being pushed around by white people and wants desperately to move away. Also Jefferson is unfairly convicted by an all white jury. Easter – Jefferson’s execution date is an issue for the governor because he doesn’t want Jefferson executed near Easter. He is afraid the blacks will consider Jefferson a victim like Jesus was when he was killed by a racist society. “ Little white lies” – Reverend Ambrose tells Grant that it’s okay to tell lies if it’s helping somebody and to not judge people who lie when necessary.

11. Questions you have: What is a “ quarter” of a town? What does it mean when Jefferson tells Grant “ he’s vexing him”? Would a white man have received the same verdict if the tables were turned? 12. Significance of opening scene: Jefferson never had a chance of having a fair trial. He was accused of killing a white man and the judge, lawyers, and jury were all white and they lived in a racist community.

13. Significance of closing scene: Paul showed that not every white person in their community is racist and he wants to be Grant’s friend. He also conveyed that Jefferson died a brave man. 4.

Characters, their roles in the story, and a description containing 3 adjectives and 3 revealing quotes from them: Jefferson – In his role he is the victim of racism who turns out to be a brave hero. He is young, black, poor and uneducated. He’s convicted of murdering a white man and given the death penalty. •“ It wasn’t me. It wasn’t me, Mr.

Grope. It was Brother and Bear. Brother shot you. It wasn’t me. They made me come with them. You got to tell the law that, Mr.

Grope. You hear me, Mr. Grope? ” •“ I’m a old hog, “ he said. “ Youmans don’t stay in no stall like this. I’m a old hog they fattening up to kill. ” •“ What it go’n fell like, Mr.

Wiggins? ” Grant – In his role he is the narrator and the teacher. He is educated, bitter and an atheist. Against his will he’s been selected to help turn Jefferson into a man. •“ The public defender, trying to get him off, called him a dumb animal,” I told her.

“ He said it would be like tying a hog down into that chair and executing him-an animal that didn’t know what any of it was all about. The jury, twelve white men good and true, still sentenced him to death. Now his godmother wants me to visit him and make him know-prove to hese white men-that he’s not a hog, that he’s a man. I’m supposed to make him a man. Who am I? God? ” •“ What for? ” I said. “ What for, Tante Lou? He treated me the same way he treated her.

He wants me to feel guilty, Tante Lou. I didn’t put him there. I do everything I know how to do to keep people like him from going there. He’s not going to make me feel guilty.

” •“ But then I’m lost, Jefferson,” I said, looking at him closely. “ At this moment I don’t believe in anything. Like your nannan does, like Reverend Ambrose does, and like I want you to believe. I want you to believe so that one day maybe I will.

” Reverend Ambrose – In his role he’s the pastor of the plantation church. He’s short, uneducated and a devoted believer. He never went to theological school, but he heard the calling and now he must save Jefferson’s soul before he dies. At the same time he’s teaching Grant that an education doesn’t make him smart. •“ I didn’t ask for none of your uppity, mister. ” •“ You’d have the strength if you had God,” Reverend Ambrose said.

•“ When you act educated, I’ll call you Grant. I’ll even call you Mr. Grant, when you act like a man. ”