

# "a lesson before dying" by ernest gaines

Literature



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The representation of childhood and adolescence helps to shape the story in "A Lesson Before Dying" by Ernest Gaines. In the beginning of the story Grant shows many traces of him still being stuck in the adolescence phase. But as the story progresses and he gets over his challenges he begins to show signs of growing as a person and he starts moving into and accepting adulthood. The characterization, tone, figurative language and dialogue also contributes to shaping the story. Dialogue is such an important part of this story because this the only way we can get to know the characters and it helps in getting their points across. Tone aids to the story because it sets the mood and foreshadows the upcoming events. Figurative Language helps to shape the story because it presents different ways to perceive the characters.

Characterization is a big contribution to how the story progresses because each character helps in advancing the plot. All of these things help to shape the story in total. At the start of the story our narrator and main character, Grant, is mentally still the adolescent. One way I know this is because he wants to run away from everything and give up like many adolescents do. He no longer wants to be committed to Bayonne, "Commitment to what-to live and die in this hellhole..." Grant is tired of being stuck in this town. Towards the ending of the story he is more accepting of the town and knows what both he and his community needs, "You could give something to her, to me to those children ..... You have the chance of being bigger than anyone who lived on that plantation..." This shows that he's growing into an adult.

Another example of him still being an adolescent is that he is hiding his relationship with Vivian from other people. "We had friends in Baton Rouge

who knew about her pending divorce and knew about my aunt...." This shows that Grant isn't ready to be open with people and accepted by society. "... this is the woman I'm going to marry one day. So you might as well start getting along right now." This quote shows as the story moves toward the ending he starts to not care what others think of him which shows his growth as a man. In the beginning of the story Grant doesn't stand up for what he does and doesn't let people force him into things that he doesn't want to do. Like going to visit Mr. Henri Pichot, " You going up there with us, Grant, or you don't sleep in this house tonight." At this point he gets frustrated but doesn't stop anything or expresses how he feels. Towards the end Grant knows how he feels and tells people straight forward with holding anything in. " You shut up or get up.... I mean that."

In chapter 25 Grant stands up for Jefferson because they were talking down Jefferson, who represents the black people community in Bayonne. They are talking about black people like they are inferior by saying " nigger" and how Jefferson " should have been gone long ago" even though they are biracial because they feel superior since they are a lighter skin shade or their white parent. This shows that Grant is now a stronger individual because he no longer sits there doing nothing. At the start of the story Grant doesn't even care about Jefferson becoming a man or how the white people treat them. At one point he has to decide to be either smart or dumb in front of white people. " Whether I should act like the that I was, or like the nigger that I was supposed to be." In chapter 6 Grant doesn't want to be involved with Jefferson at all, " I would rather have nothing to do with it, sir." But in chapter 24 Grant wants to prove all the white people wrong by having

Jefferson walk up to that chair as a man. " When I showed him the notebook and pencil I brought you he grinned. Do you know why? He believes it would just a waste of time and money. What can I hog do with a pencil and paper?" Now he telling Jefferson what the white man expects out of him and that he needs to show that both himself and black people are more than what they expect. Things like characterization, tone, figurative language and dialogue helps with shaping the story.

Characterization is significant because the characters help with moving the story ahead in a steady pace. Without Tante Lou being created the way she is she wouldn't have forced Grant to visit Jefferson and if in beginning Grant wasn't such a pushover he would have never started visiting Jefferson. Tone helps with setting the mood it shows that Grant is irritated with the fact that he can't just run away from his fears. Figurative language also helps the shaping of the story because it gives another way for the reader to perceive people and situation. Like in chapter 4 when Grant explains that the public defender ".... said it would be like tying a hog down into that chair and executing him...." This gives the jury another way to look at this case and change their minds on how they feel about this.

Dialogue is very important to " A Lesson Before Dying" since the story is in first person we only get to truly see how one person feels throughout the book. Many ideas helped with developing this story. Things like characterization, tone, dialogue and figurative language also helped. The main idea that contributed to the story was the fact that Grant was acting like he was still a child or adolescence and wasn't ready to move forward in his life. Then after meeting Jefferson, late night talks with Vivian, his

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disappointed aunt and now wanting a change in his community he has now entered the path of adulthood. After the execution of Jefferson, Grant starts crying which shows that he has accepted this ending and that he has now learned a lesson before dying.