

Racism as a
message in a "lesson
before dying"



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As Jefferson finds himself, in the wrong place watching a robbery of a liquor store. He himself is convicted and sentenced to death by an electric chair. A lesson before dying by Ernest J.

Gaines writes with the message about how people are treated based on their race. Jefferson's defense attorney pleads with the court as he's being convicted to death by comparing him to a hog who isn't even worth executing. Grant Wiggins is a character who is an educated black teacher in the same town, who is also treated differently compared to others based on his race. Nearing the end closing onto the time before Jefferson is about to die, he begins to regain his humanity and starts recording his thoughts in a diary. As Jefferson dies in the end, he turns into more of a human than a hog and, In the end, he dies with the dignity of changing himself into the person he wants to be.

Gaines book set in the time before the Civil rights movements has the main idea about the brutal system that is tinted in racism, judgment, and treatment of African Americans. Gaines supports his theme of racism throughout the book with certain sentences such as I had come through that back door against my will, and it seemed that he and the sheriff were doing everything they could to humiliate me even more by making me wait on them (44) as the author is explaining that white people are allowed to humiliate black people without facing them or even speaking to them. As the idea of entering in the back door brings the idea of the segregation of blacks and white being separated in entering through separate doors. The idea of the people who enter through the back door (African American) has to wait till the white people have eaten or been served which shows the idea of

control over others lives. Ernest J. Gaines book's setting takes place in the pre-civil rights movements in Louisiana with signs of segregation between blacks and whites. In Gaines book A lesson before dying, there are 3 main characters that reveal the main points in the book. Grant Wiggins plays the role as the protagonist in the book, the narrator who experiences the most changes throughout the book as he starts looking for what he can change and help his community after he had given up the change in education. The mentor in the book is the character, Jefferson. He starts out as a quite character, but gets thrown into a tough situation nearing the end, he doesn't let people define who he is as a person, he defines himself as a man, and he helps to teach Grant to do that as well.

With the major idea of racism being the message Gaines is portraying to the reader, a sentence to the reader that helps support the theme of racism would be "" We black men have failed to protect our women since the time of slavery. We stay here in the South and are broken, or we run away and leave them alone to look after the children and themselves (166) this message said by Grant shows an inside to the historical effects of slavery on society and how societal structures and relationships are affected. Carl Senna, the writer of the article Dying like a man, says in his writing ...a white sheriff tells a condemned black man to write in his diary that he has been fairly treated. Although the prisoner assents, nothing could be farther from the truth (Senna, Carl. Dying Like a Man. The New York Times, The New York Times, 8 Aug. 1993, archive. nytimes. com/www. nytimes. com/books/97/12/28/bsp/16002. html.) which goes along of stating that the white sheriff wants the black man to lie and write he has been treated well

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which is the opposite of what has happened. Throughout the Book, the author Gaines has one strong message that stands out more than others, which is about racism. How the treatment of people is based on the color of their skin, and the journey of one character being falsely accused of a crime he did not commit, but at the end of it all, learning to not let others define who he is and even though he ends up dying in the end, he dies with dignity and whom he wants to be as a person.