

# 10

## Lesson Ten

### FOCUS: What Makes a Great Book?

Novels illustrate the connections between individuals and questions of humanity. Great stories articulate and explore the mysteries of our daily lives, while painting those conflicts in the larger picture of human struggle. Readers forge bonds with the story as the writer's voice, style, and sense of poetry inform the plot, characters, and themes. By creating opportunities for learning, imagining, and reflecting, a great novel is a work of art that affects many generations of readers, changing lives, challenging assumptions, and breaking new ground.

#### Discussion Activities

Ask students to make a list of the characteristics of a great book. Write these on the board. What elevates a novel to greatness? What are some of the books they consider “great?” Do any of these books remind them of *A Lesson Before Dying*?

A great novel stands the test of time and is read long after it is written. Gaines published *A Lesson Before Dying* in 1994. The novel is set in the late 1940s. Do you believe this novel will endure the test of time? Is the novel as relevant today as when it was first published? Do you think that its subject and themes will continue to be relevant? Why or why not?

Writers can become the voice of a generation or of a particular group of people. What kind of voice does Gaines provide through Grant? What can this teach us about the concerns and dreams of people of color who grew up in the pre-civil rights South?

#### Writing Exercise

If you were the voice of your generation, what would be your most important message? Why might you choose to convey this in a novel rather than a speech or an essay? What story would you tell to get your point across?

Be available to assist students as they work on their essays in class. Have students partner with each other to edit outlines or rough drafts. Provide them with the characteristics of a well-written essay.

#### Homework

Students should work on their essays. Rough drafts are due next class. Celebrate by participating in a Big Read community event.