

# 7

## Lesson Seven

### FOCUS: Character Development

Novels trace the development of characters that encounter a series of challenges. Most characters contain a complex balance of virtues and vices. Internal and external forces require characters to question themselves, overcome fears, or reconsider dreams. The protagonist often undergoes profound change. A close study of character development maps the evolution of motivation, personality, and belief in each character. The tension between a character's strengths and weaknesses keeps the reader guessing about what might happen next, affecting the drama and the plot.

In *A Lesson Before Dying*, Grant must teach Jefferson how to die like a man. In doing so, Grant examines his place and purpose in the community and Jefferson learns to act with dignity and pride while facing his own death.

### Discussion Activities

Discuss Handout Three, "Jackie Robinson and Joe Louis." What qualities did these men possess that made them cultural heroes? In Chapter 12, the old men in the bar reenact highlights of the baseball games of their hero Jackie Robinson. Grant later tells Jefferson, "A hero is someone who does something for other people. He does something other men don't and can't do. He is different from other men. He is above other men" (p. 191). Ask your students to consider the rest of Grant's comments on pp. 191-194. Do they agree with his definition of a hero? Can Jefferson be the role model Grant wants him to be?

Consider the ways Grant is a hero to his students and his aunt. Does he ever disappoint them? If so, what do we learn about Grant's character in these moments?

Can small actions be considered heroic? Are there opportunities for personal heroism in the world of *A Lesson Before Dying*? If so, who are the heroes of the novel so far? Do they possess any of the same qualities as Jackie Robinson or Joe Louis?

### Writing Exercise

Grant's speech to Jefferson seems to imply that only men can be heroes. Ask your students to write a brief essay on one of the women in the novel whose actions could be considered heroic. What is most admirable about her? How do her actions affect others? Do those who benefit from her actions realize it?

### Homework

Read Chapters 25-27 (pp. 195-218). Ask your students to pay close attention to the scene in Chapter 25 where Grant fights with the mulatto sharecroppers. How does Grant describe the mulattoes' racism? Are his remarks about them equally racist? Ask your students to consider the ways this scene advances the plot of the novel.