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Lesson Ten

FOCUS: What Makes a Book Great?

Great stories articulate and explore the mysteries of our daily lives in the larger context of the human struggle. The writer's voice, style, and use of language inform the plot, characters, and themes. By creating opportunities to learn, imagine, and reflect, a great novel is a work of art that affects many generations of readers, changes lives, challenges assumptions, and breaks new ground.

Discussion Activities

Ask students to make a list of the characteristics of a great book. What elevates a novel to greatness? Ask them to discuss, within groups, other books they know that include some of the same characteristics. Do any of these books remind them of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*? Is this a great novel?

A great writer can be the voice of a generation. What kind of voice does McCullers provide through the stories of the five main characters? What does this voice tell us about the concerns and dreams of McCullers's generation? How does this voice represent the Depression-era South?

Have each group choose the single most important theme of the novel. Ask a spokesperson from each group to explain his or her decision. Write these themes on the board. Are all the groups in agreement?

Writing Exercise

Ask students to answer the following questions: 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?

Have students work on their essays in class. Be available to assist with outlines, drafts, and arguments. Have each student partner with another to edit outlines and/or rough drafts. Provide students with characteristics of a well-written essay.

Homework

Students should work on their essays. See the essay topics at the end of this guide. For additional prompts, see the Reader's Guide "Discussion Questions" section (p. 14). Rough drafts are due during the next class.