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Lesson Eight

FOCUS: The Plot Unfolds

The author artfully builds a plot structure to create expectations, increase suspense, and inform character development. The timing of events, from beginning, to middle, to end, can make a novel predictable or riveting. A plot, propelled by a crisis, will reach a climax, and close with a resolution (sometimes called *dénouement*).

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter does not conform to a traditional plot structure. McCullers wrote the novel just as she would have composed a piece of music, arranging each voice so that the effect was a unified theme, examining the way disparate lives converge in order to attempt to understand the commonality of humankind.

Discussion Activities

Use the homework assignment from the last lesson to have students present the most important turning points in the novel. Some of the turning points are Alice's death at the beginning of Part Two; Portia telling Dr. Copeland about the amputation of Willie's legs; Singer's purchase of the radio; and Mick's decision to take the job at Woolworth's in order to help her family. Ask students to refer to key passages from the story, explaining why the turning points they identified are the most significant. How do these turning points provide a general arc or trajectory to the story? Can you identify the rising action, climax, and resolution to the story?

Writing Exercise

The novel, told from multiple viewpoints, closely examines the lives of five main characters. How does McCullers integrate the lives of these characters into the plot? Does the use of multiple narrators fail to create a coherent plot? If so, how? If not, why not?

Homework

Have students read Part Two, Chapters 14-15 (pp. 305-326). In tonight's reading, your students will come to the novel's climax—the death of Antonapoulos and Singer's subsequent suicide. Without giving these developments away, ask them to consider why Singer reacts as he does. Are they shocked by his actions? Why or why not?