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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. Write these on the board. What elevates a work of fiction to greatness? Then ask them to discuss, within groups, other books they know that include some of these characteristics. Do any of these books remind them of *The Shawl*? Is this a great book?

A great writer can be the voice of a generation. What kind of voice does Cynthia Ozick create in *The Shawl*? Does this story speak about more than one woman's personal trauma? What can we learn about the importance of memory and history from reading this book? Human dignity? The will to live?

Divide students into groups and have each group determine the single most important theme of the book. Have a spokesperson from each group explain the group's decision, with references from the text. Write these themes on the board. Do all the groups agree?

Writing Exercise

Ask students to write a letter to a friend, perhaps one who does not like to read, explaining why *The Shawl* is a good book. The student should make an argument that explains why this book has meaning for all people, even those who have no interest in other times or other places.

Homework

Students will finish their essays.