

10

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.

Ursula K. Le Guin's novels and stories depict the human condition, the magic and the obstacles in all our lives. She has used fantasy and science fiction to stretch our imaginations, to create works of great beauty, and to raise what philosophy students sometimes call The Big Questions. *A Wizard of Earthsea* asks us to consider the proper use of power and the nature of the self. *The Left Hand of Darkness*, set on a planet where people are both male and female, examines the intricacies of friendship and love. *The Dispossessed* discusses the characteristics of an ideal society. These novels, and many others, have established Ursula K. Le Guin as one of the most admired and admirable writers of our time.

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? 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 *A Wizard of Earthsea*? Is this a great novel?

Some readers might still argue that a fantasy novel must be escapist entertainment and can never rise to the heights of the greatest literature. After reading *A Wizard of Earthsea*, do you think this is true? Would you read other works of fantasy?

Writing Exercise

Write a one-page statement of why every person should read works of fantasy. If you disagree with this statement, write a one-page as to why you disagree.

Homework

Students will complete their essays, due at the next class session.