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Lesson Nine

FOCUS: Themes of the Novel

Themes are the central, recurring subjects of a novel. As characters grapple with circumstances such as racism, class, or unrequited love, profound questions will arise in the reader's mind about human life, social pressures, and societal expectations. Classic themes include intellectual freedom versus censorship, the relationship between one's personal moral code and larger political justice, and spiritual faith versus rational considerations. A novel often reconsiders these age-old debates by presenting them in new contexts or from new points of view.

Like many young adult novels, *A Wizard of Earthsea* focuses on growing up, the passage from childhood to maturity, coming of age. Among other themes it examines the proper use of power, the need to embrace all aspects of oneself, the importance of community and trust, the value of altruism as well as courage.

Discussion Activities

Have students share the two themes they identified in last night's homework, citing passages that explore these themes. In addition to themes students identify, discuss the following subjects:

Coming of Age: How does Ged's journey reflect a typical coming of age journey? Does this journey reflect modern coming of age tales? Why or why not?

Psychological Battle: How might psychologists explain Ged's battle with his shadow? How might individual development be challenged by a battle between dark and light forces?

Creative Power: How might the novel reflect a statement about creative power? How does sorcery and magic capture a latent human power that can be used toward good or evil?

Knowledge: How does knowledge and experience temper Ged's ability to make solid judgments? How does knowing names contribute to one's ability to act heroically or justly?

Writing Exercise

Choose one of the themes. Ask students to write a brief overview of how they would teach the novel to a class. They should identify a theme to explore and select a focus topic (genre, symbol, character development, or figurative language) to develop. Have them identify several passages that show what is happening in the story. These lesson plans should include two lessons that relate to the theme and topic selected. Have students share their plan with the class.

Homework

Students can begin developing an essay topic for the novel. They can choose from the topics provided in their guide or develop their own questions.