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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 novel to greatness? Then ask them to discuss, in groups, other books that include some of these characteristics. Do any of these books remind them of *Housekeeping*? Is this a great novel?

A great writer can be the voice of a generation. What kind of voice does Marilynne Robinson create in *Housekeeping*?

Writing Exercise

Ask students to write a short essay exploring their personal reactions to *Housekeeping*. Students should go beyond expressing like or dislike. Ask them to make a list of emotions they felt while reading the novel, and to examine why. Which characters and scenes did they relate to, and which remained strange or difficult to comprehend? Was the resolution of the novel satisfying? Comforting? Disturbing? Why?

Homework

Select an essay topic, or have students choose from the list of Essay Topics provided in this guide. Ask students to come to the next class with a draft of their thesis for the essay.