

# 7

## Lesson Seven

### FOCUS: Character Development

Novels trace the development of characters who encounter a series of challenges. Most characters contain a complex balance of virtues and vices. Internal and external forces require characters to question themselves, overcome fears, or reconsider dreams. The protagonist may undergo profound change. A close study of character development maps, in each character, the evolution of motivation, personality, and belief. The tension between a character's strengths and weaknesses keeps the reader guessing about what might happen next and the protagonist's eventual success or failure.

Because *Love Medicine* features a group of central characters rather than a single protagonist, keeping track of character development is especially complex. Certainly it is easier to consider the growth experienced by characters who appear over and over, like Marie, Lulu, and Nector, rather than the development of characters like Albertine Johnson, who appear infrequently.

Tracking character development in *Love Medicine* is also complicated because the novel does not follow a linear structure—it traces a more circular pattern, beginning in 1981 and then looping back to the 1930s. The Marie we meet in “The World’s Greatest Fisherman” is decades older, and therefore a more nuanced and complex character than the Marie who appears as a girl in “Saint Marie.” The reader’s notions of Marie grow from the older grandmother, to the young girl, then to the early years of motherhood and on into middle age.

### Discussion Activities

Divide students into groups. Assign each group one of the main characters. Each group should discuss how their perception of that character changes in the chapters read so far. Students might want to consider contradictory elements within a particular character. For example, Nector seems to be an upstanding father and community member, except for his affair with Lulu. It might also be valuable to discuss the changes that characters undergo and the major life events that bring about those changes, such as Marie’s departure from the Sacred Heart Convent.

### Writing Exercise

Ask students to write two or three paragraphs about the character in the novel they find the most, or the least, sympathetic. They should describe the traits that make this character sympathetic or unsympathetic, citing specific examples from the text.

### Homework

Students should read “Love Medicine” and “Resurrection” (pp. 226–271) and continue to identify the narrators of each chapter in their reader’s journals.