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As I Lay Dying
William Faulkner

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Prestwick House

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Response Journal

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

Chapter 1: DARL

1. Darl's description of his walk from the fields to the house is filled with precise details about the things he sees. Make a list of descriptive phrases (similes, adjectives, etc.) that are unfamiliar to you. Then, explain how you would convey each image in terms more applicable to your life. For example, you could re-word "straight as a plumb line" to read "straight as an airport runway."
2. Darl draws a strong visual contrast between Jewel and himself, vividly describing their walk together. Consider one of your siblings or friends. Following Darl's pattern, write a paragraph in which you describe a real or imagined situation. You are participating in an activity with the person you've chosen. In your description, visually contrast the two of you in terms of physical characteristics, abilities, or personality traits that are reflected physically in the activity you choose.
3. Darl describes Cash's talent for carpentry, praising him without any sign of jealousy. Choose a friend whose skill in a particular activity you admire. Write a paragraph describing his or her prowess. Then, write a paragraph in which you discuss envy. Consider the following questions: What is the difference between admiration and envy? Is it easy for you to admire someone without feeling envy? Does our society encourage or discourage envy? To what extent do you personally experience envy? Give specific examples to support your thoughts.

Chapter 10: DARL

16. Darl pushes Jewel and Dewey Dell to admit things they don't seem to want to face in this chapter. He says to Dewey Dell, "The reason you will not say it is, when you say it, even to yourself, you will know it is true; is that it? But you know it is true now. I can almost tell you the day when you knew it is true. Why won't you say it, even to yourself?" With whom do you identify more, a person like Darl who believes in calling things what they are, even if the words are difficult to say or with people like Dewey Dell and Jewel who hesitate to say difficult things aloud even if they know they're true? Write a paragraph explaining which group you are similar to. Where possible, give specific examples.

Chapter 11: PEABODY

17. At the beginning of the chapter, Peabody hesitates to rush to the Bundren household to save Addie. He seems to hope that there's nothing he can do. After he's seen for himself that there really is no hope for Addie, though, he asks why Anse didn't call for him sooner and seems to be genuinely –disturbed by Anse's neglect. Why do you think Peabody has such –opposing reactions to Addie's impending death? Why would he both hope and regret that there was nothing he could do? Write a poem about a time in which you experienced very strong opposite reactions to something (both anticipation and dread, both joy and sadness, both confidence and doubt, etc.). Your poem certainly doesn't have to rhyme, but it may. That is up to you.
18. Anse doesn't call for Dr. Peabody until it's too late for the doctor to do anything to help Addie. Do you find it easy or difficult to ask for someone's help? Why? Are there situations in which it is easier or more difficult than others? Is it easier to ask some people than others? Explain.

Chapter 20: TULL

28. How does Tull's description of Addie's funeral compare with funerals you might have attended or heard about? Write a paragraph in which you compare or contrast Addie's funeral to others with which you are familiar.

Chapter 21: DARL

(No prompts)

Chapter 22: CASH

(No prompts)

Chapter 23: DARL

29. Moving the coffin out of the house to the wagon isn't the silent, solemn event one might expect. Write a one to two sentence summary of each of the men's reactions. Then, for each, suggest what his reaction reveals about his emotions following Addie's death.

Chapter 24: VARDAMAN

(No prompts)

Chapter 49: VARDAMAN

58. Authors frequently give hints and foreshadowing to build suspense about events yet to happen or about people. Here Faulkner makes the reader wonder what Vardaman sees “that Dewey Dell told me not to tell nobody.”

Make a list of possibilities that Vardaman saw. Choose the one you think is most likely, and in a sentence or two, explain why you think so.

Chapter 50: DARL

59. After they rescue the animals from the burning barn, Darl refuses to go back for Addie, and Gillespie tries to stop Jewel from returning. Dewey Dell, screaming, has to be restrained by Anse and Mack. Jewel manages to save the coffin by himself, but he is badly burned in the process. Do you think he made the right decision? This chapter is full of vivid images. Write a poem using only words and phrases you find in the chapter. Example:

- lean as a racehorse
- he springs out like a cat
- like a train
- like thunder
- “catch him! stop him!”

Chapter 51: VARDAMAN

60. Though they must have been horrible things to see and feel and hear, Vardaman’s descriptions of Anse and Gillespie cracking off Cash’s makeshift cast and of Dewey Dell putting a salve on Jewel’s back are completely unemotional. Rewrite the events from the perspective of another character, using descriptive language to convey how it must have felt, sounded, smelled, and looked.