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Literature
Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



A Gathering of Old Men

by Ernest J. Gaines

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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A Gathering of Old Men

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. define and use vocabulary words from the novel.
2. compose a character analysis for each of the following:
 - Candy
 - Lou Dimes
 - Mathu
 - Mapes
 - Fix Boutan
 - Gil Boutan
 - Charlie
 - Luke Will
3. compare and contrast Gil's and Fix's personalities, including the symbolism of their characters.
4. identify and discuss examples of symbolism in the novel.
5. discuss the theme of triumphing over adversity as it pertains to the characters in the novel.
6. identify and discuss the stereotypes used in the novel.
7. discuss how prejudice is used in the novel.
8. discuss the author's use of foreshadowing.
9. identify and discuss the conflict of past versus present in the novel.
10. give examples of the author's use of repetition.
11. compare and contrast the characters of Mapes and Griffin.
12. discuss the motif of control through fear and violence.
13. explain the role of education in society.
14. understand the author's use of rising action, climax, and falling action as literary techniques.
15. have a general knowledge of Cajun history and the Bayou region of Louisiana.
16. analyze and provide examples of character motivation.
17. understand the use of first person narration as a literary style.

A Gathering of Old Men

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Discuss the concept of triumph over adversity as it is used in the novel.
2. Discuss the author's use of varying narrators and why none of the main characters narrates the story.
3. Analyze how appearances and stereotypes lead people to make assumptions about others.
4. What is the basis for self esteem? How can self esteem be enhanced or destroyed?
5. Analyze the following characters:
 - Candy
 - Mathu
 - Lou Dimes
 - Mapes
 - Fix
 - Gil
 - Charlie
 - Luke Will
6. Analyze the relationship between Candy and Mathu.
7. What characters in the novel are stereotypes? Explain what the stereotype is for each and why it is used.
8. Discuss the various forms of racism among the social classes depicted in this novel.
9. Discuss how fear and violence are used as a means of control.
10. What part does religion play within each social class, and how do the characters reconcile their use of violence with their religion.
11. What is the common thread among the stories of the old men, and how is it used as the motivation for their actions.
12. Discuss the nature of mob mentality, and how it is used in the novel.
13. Analyze the relationship between Gil and Fix.
14. Analyze the symbolism of the various modes of transportation the characters use.

Lou Dimes

Vocabulary

archetypal – the original pattern or model

deliberated – consulted formally

NAACP – The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

perpetually – continuing without interruption

presided – to be in the place of authority or control

The Klans – Short for Ku Klux Klan

1. Who else was killed during the shooting?

Luke Will was shot and killed.

2. Who defended each side?

Candy's lawyer, Clinton, defended the old men. The Klan defended Luke Will's friends.

3. What is surprising about two of the attendees at the trial, and what conclusion can be drawn from that?

Gil is there sitting with Fix. They seem to have made amends or are at least presenting a united front for the media.

4. What sentence does the judge give to all the accused?

He places them on probation for five years or until their deaths (whichever comes first.) They are not permitted to carry a firearm or be within ten feet of anyone with a firearm.

5. What is Mathu's response to Candy's offer of a ride home after the trial? Why does he respond that way?

He declines her offer in favor of riding home in Clatoo's truck with the others. He declines because this event has changed his relationship with Candy and with his peers. He no longer needs her to take care of him, and he feels proud to be among the men for whom he has developed respect.

6. What can be surmised from Candy taking Lou's hand at the end of the story?

There are several answers: Candy is letting Lou know in a non-verbal way that she wants their relationship to continue; She has been changed by this event in that she no longer feels as independent as she was, and she is allowing Lou to care for and protect her.

7. How is this chapter an example of falling action?

The chapter is a conclusion and wraps up all the loose ends.

Janice Robinson aka Janey

1. What assumption about Beau has Janey made that she passes on to Miss Merle?

2. What fear causes both women to begin to pray?

3. Although it is not yet clear who Fix is, what can be inferred about him?

4. What literary technique is used in this chapter to emphasize the panic that Janey and Miss Merle feel?

Joseph Seaberry aka Rufe

Vocabulary

- blaspheme** – to speak evil of sacred things
- bootlicker** – someone who seeks the favor or goodwill of another in a degrading way
- chifforobe glass** – the mirror of a piece of furniture used to store clothing
- decorated** – gave distinction or honor to someone by a medal or badge
- derrick** – a crane for lifting cargo
- Medicare** – a government program for healthcare for aged or disabled persons
- militant** – fighting in support of a cause
- Sicilian** – a native of Sicily
- trustee** – a person appointed to administer the affairs of a company or person

1. Describe the unusual relationship between Mapes and Mathu.

2. What does Johnny Paul try to explain to Mapes?

3. How does the author's use of repetition during Johnny Paul's speech create drama?
