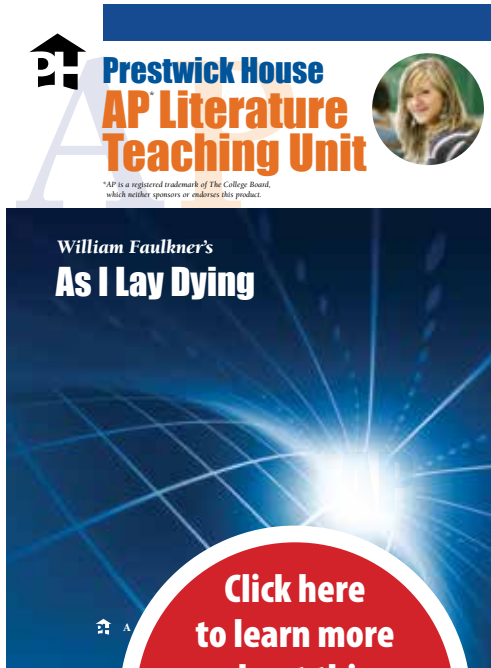




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Teaching Unit

As I Lay Dying

by William Faulkner

written by Elizabeth Osborne



Prestwick House

Item No. 305074

As I Lay Dying

Objectives

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

1. explain how Faulkner experiments with chronological organization and narrative perspective to tell the story.
2. analyze the use of black humor in the novel.
3. explain the relevance and meaning of allusions to the following works:
 - The Bible
 - Homer's *Odyssey*
 - Shakespeare's *Macbeth*
4. trace the development of ideas of fate, eternity, and being that appear in the book.
5. discuss the discrepancy between words and experience in the book.
6. explain the relevance and meaning of the following symbols in the novel:
 - the fish
 - Jewel's horse
 - the wagon
 - Cash's tools
 - wheels and circles
 - the graphophone
 - the toy train
8. analyze the characters' diction, syntax, and figures of speech and explain how the language contributes to characterization.
9. respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
10. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.

Introductory Lecture

WILLIAM FAULKNER

William Faulkner is an author best known to most readers for two things: the difficulty of his works and his invention of the fictional community of Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi.

Faulkner started writing fiction in the 1920s, when authors were breaking away from old conventions and experimenting with form, style, diction, and even the chronological organization of their works. Ernest Hemingway, for instance, wrote in flat, short sentences unlike any seen before. James Joyce, another famously difficult writer, wrote a novel (*Ulysses*) that consists solely of the stream-of-consciousness impressions of its protagonist as he travels through Dublin during the course of a single day. These works are now considered part of the first wave of a movement called Modernism.

The development of automated technology, especially in World War I, contributed to the rise of Modernism. Soldiers and journalists who had experienced the war returned home with the sense that the world had changed; men could be killed in huge numbers by efficient weapons, though there was little gain for any of the warring parties. Painters, writers, and other artists also commented on the way the new society valued the anonymous and mechanical over the individual or handmade. They tried to reflect the strangeness of the new world through radical experimentation in their writing.

Like Hemingway, Faulkner applied to serve in the United States military in World War I and was turned down by the branch to which he applied. Hemingway, however, did witness war atrocities as an ambulance driver for the Red Cross. Faulkner served in the British and Canadian Air Forces, but did not see action. While Hemingway would choose to set some of his most famous stories in wartime Europe, Faulkner grounded his characters in the culture of the place where he had grown up. Lafayette County, Mississippi, was the model for Yoknapatawpha, where almost all of Faulkner's characters either live or originate.

In Faulkner's most famous work, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), the narrative shifts among members of the Compson family. The Compsons, residents of Yoknapatawpha, are of an old (and thus respected) Southern lineage in the area, but are also tragic figures, unable to deal with the passing of the Old South. The novel gained fame because of its stream-of-consciousness narration, which many readers found difficult to follow. Because one of the narrators is the mentally disabled Benjy, and because the other narrators suffer from varying degrees of mental illness, the time and space in which the action occurs can shift without warning.

Faulkner often dealt with the fate of the Old South in his works, usually without much hope. Mental illness, incest, suicide, and loveless marriages occur repeatedly in his novels. He also considers race and class; during the time he was working, the Civil Rights movement in America was just about to begin.

As I Lay Dying

Darl

1. What details stand out about this first chapter? What is Darl's language style? Which person is his main focus?

2. What is Darl's narrative perspective? Give some evidence for this.

3. What signs do we get in this chapter that Darl is a prophet or a seer?

4. Judging by the details in this chapter, what is the occupation of Darl's family?

5. What can we tell about Darl's view of himself and Jewel?

12. What do Kate and Eula think about Addie dying?

13. To whom is Cora referring when she says, “The poor little tyke!”? How do we know?

14. What does the last line of this chapter link to?

Anse

1. How does Anse’s opening statement link him to Darl?

2. Why does Anse say, “Durn that road”?

3. Explain Anse’s reasoning about the danger of roads. What do the contradictions suggest?

- 6. How does Vernon seem to feel towards Vardaman? What hints about why he feels this way do we get?

Darl

- 1. What is Darl's narrative perspective in this chapter? What does it suggest?

- 2. Explain the wagon as a symbol in this scene. Why does Darl choose this metaphor? Compare it to Vardaman's discussion of Jewel's horse in the previous chapter.

- 3. Explain the connection that Darl makes between Jewel and Addie.

- 4. Describe some features of Darl's narrative voice in this chapter and explain how the language contributes to his character.

- 4. Describe the relationship between Samson and his wife. How is it like or unlike the relationship between other men and women in the book?

- 5. Explain Samson's relationship to the Bundrens. How is it like or unlike the relationship between the Tulls and the Bundrens?

Dewey Dell

- 1. What does Dewey Dell mean when she says "it is too soon"?

- 2. Explain Dewey Dell's conflict about existence and observation, especially as it relates to religion.

- 3. How does the author use italics in this chapter?

Darl

1. How does Darl describe the wagon in this chapter? What earlier description does this recall?

2. What signs of Darl's psychological disintegration appear in his narration in this chapter?

3. How is the reassembling of Cash's tool kit symbolic?

4. Why is it important to Tull and the Bundrens that Cash get his tools back? What does it indicate about their relationship with him?

5. How does the family dynamic change when Cash is disabled?

3. Darl says that as Vernon turned back towards the bridge, he started to “flap [his] wet sleeves.” Whose words does this image recall?

4. How does Darl describe Jewel’s interaction with the horse at the end of this chapter? Why does Faulkner include this description?

Armstid

1. Armstid mentions that when he and Anse discuss his team of mules, each knows the other is not being entirely sincere. What does he mean?

2. How does Faulkner build suspense in the retelling of Anse’s trading the horse?

3. What does Anse’s selling of the horse symbolize in terms of Jewel and Addie? Why does Jewel accept the sale?

18. Why does Darl keep saying that he thought Cash would have told him?

19. Why does Cash refrain from condemning Darl at the end of the chapter?

Peabody

1. Describe the style of Peabody's chapter.

2. Does Peabody's opinion of Anse seem to agree with others' in the novel?

3. Does the portrayal of Peabody in this chapter agree with the portrayal of him in other chapters?
