

Story Elements for Summer Reading – American Literature – A Lesson before Dying

Note: A 25-50 point quiz will be given on Monday, 8/24/09, using material from the questions listed below. In order to perform well on this quiz, and to participate in class discussions, students should answer these questions in writing for themselves before the first day of school.

Plot:

- What happens in the story?

Point of View:

- Is the story written in the first person ("I") or in the third person ("she," "he")?
- Does the story-teller seem reliable in telling what really happened?

Characters:

- Identify the main character or characters.
- Are the characters developed fully or in a sketchy way?
- Does the author want the reader to like or dislike the characters? Which characters are "good" and which ones are "bad?"
- What does each main character want?

Conflict:

- What or who stands in the way of the character getting what he or she wants?
- Does each character actually get what she or he wants?
- How does getting that thing—or not getting that thing—make the character feel?

Setting:

- What is the setting of the story? Where does the story take place?
- Could the story take place somewhere else, or is the setting significant to what happens?

Theme:

- When the story is finished, how does the author want the reader to feel?
- What is the story's "big idea"—what's the message?

Symbols:

- Does the author give a special place or thing a deeper, richer meaning than it has normally? For example: does a sprouting tree represent a growing relationship? Does a pair of broken glasses represent a character's inability to see what's really going on?

