

A Lesson Before Dying
By Ernest J. Gaines

Double-Entry Reading Journals

As you read *A Lesson Before Dying*, complete a double-entry journal for each of the quotations listed below. A double-entry journal consists of a quotation from the text in the first column and a response to that quotation in the second column. Your response should be a minimum of 150 words and consider what the quotation reveals about the characters, themes, setting, action, and/or technique of *A Lesson Before Dying*. Do not simply paraphrase the quotation; rather focus on the significance of the quotation in the context of the work as a whole.

1. "I was not there, yet I was there." [p. 3: the first sentence of the novel]
2. "Living and teaching on a plantation, you got to know the occupants of every house, and you knew who was home and who was not.... I could look at the smoke rising from each chimney or I could look at the rusted tin roof of each house, and I could tell the lives that went on in each one of them." [pp. 37-38]
3. "Everything you sent me to school for, you're stripping me of it,' I told my aunt.... `The humiliation I had to go through, going into that man's kitchen.... Now going up to that jail.... Anything to humiliate me. All the things you wanted me to escape by going to school. Years ago, Professor Antoine told me that if I stayed here, they were going to break me down to the nigger I was born to be. But he didn't tell me that my aunt would help them do it.'" [p. 79]
4. "I had gone to bars, to barbershops; I had stood on street corners, and I had gone to many suppers there in the quarter. But I had never really listened to what was being said. Then I began to listen, to listen closely to how they talked about their heroes, how they talked about the dead and about how great the dead had once been. I heard it everywhere." [p. 90]
5. "All the furniture in the room was old. Faded overstuffed chairs; an old overstuffed love seat; an overstuffed couch; and a rattan rocker with a pillow. The lamp tables were old, and the lamps and lamp shades looked just as old." [p. 155: referring to the furniture in the big house]
6. "We black men...stay here in the South and are broken, or we run away and leave them alone to look after the children and themselves. So each time a male child is born, they hope he will be the one to change this vicious circle—which he never does. Because even though he wants to change it, and maybe even tries to change it, it is too heavy a burden because of all the others who have run away and left their burdens behind.... I can give them something that neither a husband, a father, nor a grandfather ever did, so they want to hold on as long as they can. Not realizing that their holding on will break me too." [pp. 166-67]
7. "Me, Mr. Wiggins. Me. Me to take the cross. Your cross, nannan's cross, my own cross. Me, Mr. Wiggins. This old stumbling nigger. Y'all axe a lot, Mr. Wiggins." [p. 224]
8. "i kno you paul an i kno ole clark and i kno you too shef guirty and you mr picho and mr mogan an all the rest of yall i jus never say non of this befor but i know yall everlas one of yall" [p. 230]
9. "Yet they must believe. They must believe, if only to free the mind, if not the body. Only when the mind is free has the body a chance to be free." [p. 251: Reverend Ambrose]