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Instructor

Course

Date

A Lesson Before Dying by Ernest J. Gaines

Introduction

The book is set in Bayonne, in the 1940s. The book is called “A Lesson Before Dying,” which was written back in 1993 by Ernest J. Gaines. It is a story about Jefferson, who is a black, uneducated man. He is wrongfully accused of murder and therefore sentenced to death. Even though Jefferson’s attorneys argue that Jefferson is not smart enough to stage such a killing, the jury which is made up of only white people sentences him to death. Ideally, most of the content of the book concentrates on the life of Jefferson and how he internalizes the situation facing him. It is clear that the book features on the hardships that people of color had to go through, and the various themes used to stress on the issues are clearly shown below.

Body

In the book, it is clear that death is an experience that can alter the thoughts of the community as a whole. The theme of death and how a person can be redeemed through the experience has been shown clearly. Jefferson, a man who is convicted of a crime he did not commit, becomes angry and loses the desire to continue living. Because he is thought to be a cruel man by the white people, Jefferson starts acting like an evil person. The theme of death and redemption is further shown through symbolism. The notebook given to Jefferson acts as a tool

used to make Jefferson better and bring him to his senses. He shows the loss of hope at first, but after he is given a notebook to write down his thoughts, he starts to reconcile with himself and the world. After the notebook, Jefferson starts thinking carefully about the death sentence and develops different feelings towards the situation. The theme of mortality and redemption develops steadily, because Jefferson eventually starts to believe that his death may mean a lot more if he died with dignity. Jefferson believes that the wicked persecutors would feel ashamed and the society would see him as the man that he thought he was if he died with dignity. Paul said that “I don’t know what you’re going to say when you go back in there. But tell them he was the bravest man in that room today “(Pg 90). He was explaining the bravery that Jefferson was portraying, which was supposed to make the community proud.

The writer dwells significantly on the past of several characters, making it clear that the past can be inevitable. The theme of the past and how people cannot escape it is shown in the literature. Grant and Vivian are some of the characters that are affected by their past experiences. In the situation of Grant, the mistreatment shown by white people towards him as he was growing up still affects him negatively. The discomfort that comes with the thoughts of mistreatment by the white population still disgusts Grant. On the other hand, Vivian realizes that she has no option but to deal with her past. The past affects her relationship with Grant in various ways. Vivian and Grant deal with their pasts in different ways. The writer uses the symbol of the church to show society the hope of change. The people who go to church feel that in the face of discrimination and prejudice, the church is where comfort lies. In chapter 27, the Reverend asks Grant “You think a man can’t kneel and stand?”(Pg 95). Ideally, the Reverend tries to explain to Grant the importance of finding comfort, not in church only, but in integrating with his

community wholeheartedly. In that situation, Vivian shows she wants to move on from the past and strives to teach Grant how to love his community, despite the inevitable past.

The theme of lying has been shown, with the Reverend telling Grant that the black community has to lie to survive the life in the South. The reverend insists that the black people have to believe that God and heaven exist. Because Grant constantly looks down upon people who lie, the reverend asks him not to judge people because of the lies they tell. He justifies his claims by explaining to Grant that he earned his education solely because of the lies that his Aunt told. In fact, the reverend admits that "I lie at wakes and funerals to relieve pain"(Pg, 120). Clearly, the reverend admits that he occasionally lies to people to comfort them. The writer strengthens the theme of lying in situations where black men and women always have to lie and cheat to stay alive in the racist South. Ideally, the black people were not expected to sit back and give up in life. To the contrary, they are supposed to live by all means, even if it means they constantly lie.

Conclusion

The themes in the book show that most of the conflict lies within Grant, and all the other characters. Even though most people are trying to struggle in a society that is full of racism, the ultimate struggle remains in their minds. Different characters are brought to life through various themes. The themes help to appreciate different situations as well as explain them. Clearly, racism was rampant in the South, and the people of color have to survive the cruelty however they could.

Work Cited

Gaines, Ernest J. *A Lesson Before Dying.* , 1993. Print.