

**Teacher's Rationale**

School: Arrowhead

Teacher: Balistreri/Budzein/Freeberg/Judd

Title: A Lesson Before Dying

Grade or Course: Modern Lit

Approximate date(s) a book will be used:

\_\_\_\_\_ Semester 1

\_\_\_X\_\_\_ Semester 2

This book will be (check one or more):

\_\_\_X\_\_\_ studied by the whole class. (But students are allowed to read an alternative.)

\_\_\_\_\_ studied by small groups.

\_\_\_\_\_ placed on a reading list.

\_\_\_\_\_ placed in a classroom library.

\_\_\_\_\_ recommended to individual students.

\_\_\_\_\_ part of a larger study of (explain):

\_\_\_\_\_ other (explain):

**Ways in which the book is especially appropriate for students in this class:**

One of the themes of this book is the definition and importance of education.

A main character is a young man who is wrongly accused of murder. The circumstances are that he was hanging around with the wrong people when violence erupted. This is a good lesson.

The book allows the teachers to reinforce some of what the kids have been learning about the roots of the civil rights movement in U.S. History.

It gives our suburban, northern, mostly well-off and mostly white kids a glimpse of life in rural southern African-American culture.

It allows us to examine important issues like race, capital punishment, divorce, religion, and education.

**Ways in which the book is especially pertinent to the objectives of this course or unit:**

Ernest Gaines, the author, is a major figure in modern lit. His portrayals of Southern, African American culture have been widely read, frequently given awards, made into movies, and studied in depth since he published The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman over 30 years ago. His books, including this one, are often included in multi-cultural "must read" lists.

The section of this book entitled "Jefferson's Diary" is a brilliant and moving example of stream of consciousness writing.

**Special problems that might arise in relation to the book and some planned activities that handle this problem:**

Strong words, including the "N" word are used a few times by the characters. Class discussion about race and political correctness is beneficial.

**Some other appropriate books an individual student might read in place of this**

**book:**

The Bluest Eye – Toni Morrison

Black Like Me - John Howard Griffin

**Summary of the book:**

See below

**Reviews and/or awards of the book or author:**

A Lesson Before Dying – Ernest Gaines

Set in a small Cajun community in the late 1940s, *A Lesson Before Dying* is an "enormously moving" ("Los Angeles Times") novel of one man condemned to die for a crime he did not commit and a young man who visits him in his cell. In the end, the two men forge a bond as they both come to understand the simple heroism of resisting--and defying--the expected. Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction.

Library Journal (4/1/93)

School Library Journal (July 1993)

Kirkus Reviews

Booklist (3/15/94)

New York Times Books Review (8/8/93)