



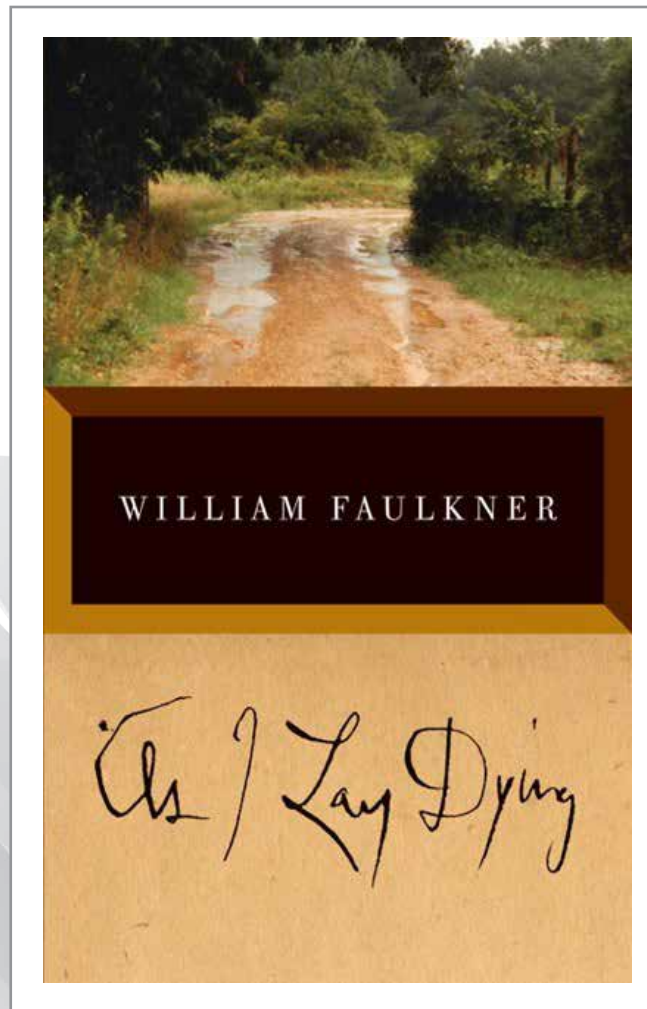
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 9-12**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# As I Lay Dying

William Faulkner



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# As I Lay Dying

William Faulkner

## TEACHER GUIDE

### NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

sales@novelunits.com

novelunits.com

## Table of Contents

<b>Summary</b> .....	3
<b>About the Author</b> .....	3
<b>Initiating Activities</b> .....	4
<b>Vocabulary Activities</b> .....	9
<b>Eight sections</b> .....	11
Each section contains: Summary, Vocabulary, Discussion Questions, and Supplementary Activities	
<b>Post-reading Discussion Questions</b> .....	27
<b>Post-reading Extension Activities</b> .....	28
<b>Assessment</b> .....	34

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## Summary

Years earlier, Addie Bundren had said that she wanted to be buried among her people in Jefferson, so when she dies, her husband and children put her home-made coffin in a wagon and set off on a trial-filled forty-mile journey. Set in Mississippi during the 1920's, *As I Lay Dying* is told in 50 interior-monologue narratives by fifteen different narrators whose alternating voices are distinguished by variations in diction and style.

The story of Addie's life, death, and burial odyssey is told through dozens of interwoven chapters reflecting these points of view: Anse, Addie's self-pitying, penny-pinching husband; Cash, the oldest son, who crafts Addie's coffin with painstaking care; Darl, the son people talk about because he is not quite right; Jewel, Addie's son by another man; Dewey Dell, Addie's secretly pregnant daughter; Vardaman, Addie's youngest—still a boy; Addie, herself, an unhappy woman who learns what her father meant when he said that the purpose of living is to get ready for staying dead; Whitfield, a minister and Jewel's father; Cora, Addie's pious, self-righteous neighbor; Vernon Tull, Cora's husband; Samson, who puts the family up for a night; Armstid, who puts the family up another night; Moseley, the pharmacist who sends Dewey Dell away; Peabody, the doctor who scolds Cash for letting his father pour cement on his broken leg; and MacGowan, the drugstore clerk who takes advantage of Dewey Dell when she seeks him out for an abortion.

## About the Author

Regarded by many critics as the greatest American novelist of this century, William Faulkner was born into an illustrious Southern family in New Albany, Mississippi in 1897. His great-grandfather was a fairly successful novelist and railroad builder. The family had fallen on somewhat hard times after the Civil War, though, and young William attended school only off and on after grade school.

He was a volunteer in the Royal Canadian Air Force during World War I, returning to Oxford, Mississippi at the end of the war. (Jefferson, where most of Faulkner's stories are set, is a fictional version of Oxford.) He took a few courses at the University of Mississippi, held a variety of jobs (carpenter, house painter, fireman, night watchman, postmaster), and published his first book (*The Marble Faun*, a collection of poetry) at age 27.

He lived with Sherwood Anderson, who encouraged his writing, in New Orleans, and also spent time in New York and Europe before returning to Mississippi. There he turned out a long line of novels and short stories—most set in mythical Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi. Some critics faulted him for what they saw as sensationalism and obscure prose, but few denied his innovative daring and literary skill. His experimental style with its shifting viewpoints, stream-of-consciousness, and intricate syntax, was distinctly "Faulkner-esque." In 1949 he received the Nobel Prize for Literature. However, Faulkner was never to enjoy great commercial success. He died on July 6, 1962 in Oxford.

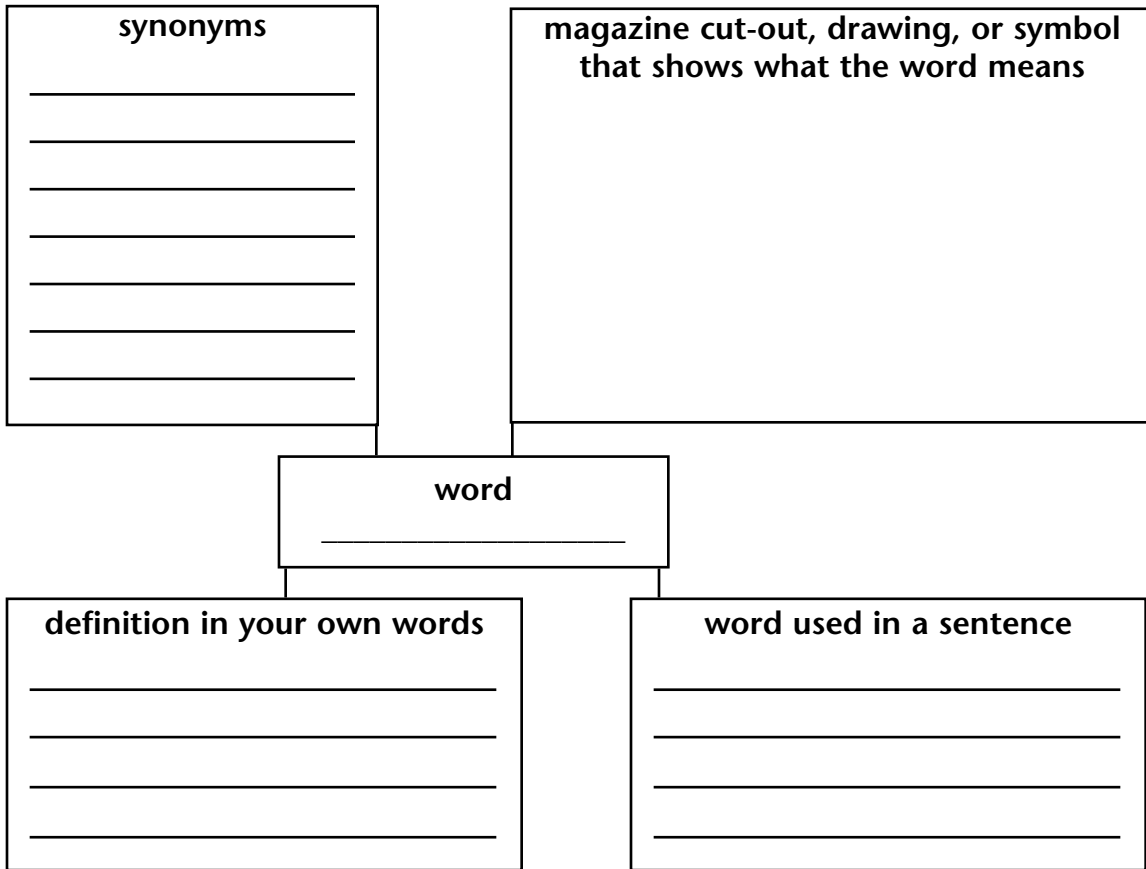
His best-known novels include: *The Sound and the Fury* (1929)—a novel of resounding critical acclaim, which chronicled the degeneration of the wealthy Compson family; *Light in August* (1932)—a complex tale of murder and racial guilt; *As I Lay Dying* (1930)—a macabre, yet comic tale about a strange family pilgrimage; and *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) a highly-praised work about the rise and fall of the Sutpen family.

## Vocabulary Activities

1. Have students keep a running list of words in the play that are unfamiliar to them. Instruct them to write down what they think each word means from its context, and why. Then they should consult a dictionary, write down the appropriate definition, and use the word in a sentence.

Word	Pg.	What I Think It Means	Dictionary Definition
<b>Sentence:</b> _____ _____			

2. From the vocabulary lists provided in this guide, choose selected words. Have students work individually or in a group to map the words, using the following graphic organizer.



- 
3. Is this a family to which you would like to belong? What signs of mutual support do you see? (*The brothers work together on the farm.*) What evidence is there of conflict? (*Jewel is angry that Cash is working on the coffin in front of their mother.*)
  4. Who is Cora? (*a neighbor, friend of Addie's*) Does she remind you of anyone? Why is she at Addie's deathbed? (*She probably considers it her "Christian duty."*) How good a friend do you suppose she has been to Addie?
  5. Why is Anse going to bury Addie 40 miles away? (*Addie asked to be buried in Jefferson with her people.*) What do you think of that decision? Is Cora right to be outraged?
  6. What does Darl know about Dewey Dell and Lefe? (*that they have had relations*) How does he know? (*He seems almost clairvoyant.*) How do you think he feels about their behavior? non-judgmental? shocked? upset? indifferent?
  7. How do you explain Cash's behavior as he works on the coffin? Why is he being such a perfectionist? (*Maybe this is his way of handling his grief.*) Is he insensitive—as Jewel believes—to work on the coffin right under his dying mother's window?
  8. Tull notices the care Cash takes in making the coffin and thinks of the work Cash will do on Tull's barn. What is the attitude of the author toward his characters? (*perhaps mildly ironic*) Is Tull being selfish and cold, or merely matter-of-fact in the face of death?
  9. How readable do you find the novel, so far? In what ways does the unusual structure enhance your reading, or detract from it? What do you notice about the way each character uses language? What effects is Faulkner trying to achieve? Why, for instance, do you think Faulkner has Darl repeat "worn [smooth] by feet" in his opening description of the path? What sorts of unusual words do you find in this section? (*e.g., "scuttering" and "pussel-gutted," page 13; Point out that Faulkner uses many uncommon adjectives and verbs, and even makes up his own words. Some of these words are explained on pages 266-267.*)
  10. **Prediction:** What will happen to the fish Vardaman caught?

## Supplementary Activities

### Literary Analysis: Point of View

The point of view is the vantage point from which the author tells the story, through whose eyes the story is told.

Faulkner has chosen a distinctive narrative structure for *As I Lay Dying*, one with multiple points of view. (The novel reveals the inner psychological voices of 15 different characters.)

Identify the points of view from which the story has been told so far—and how different styles are used to discriminate one point of view from the other.

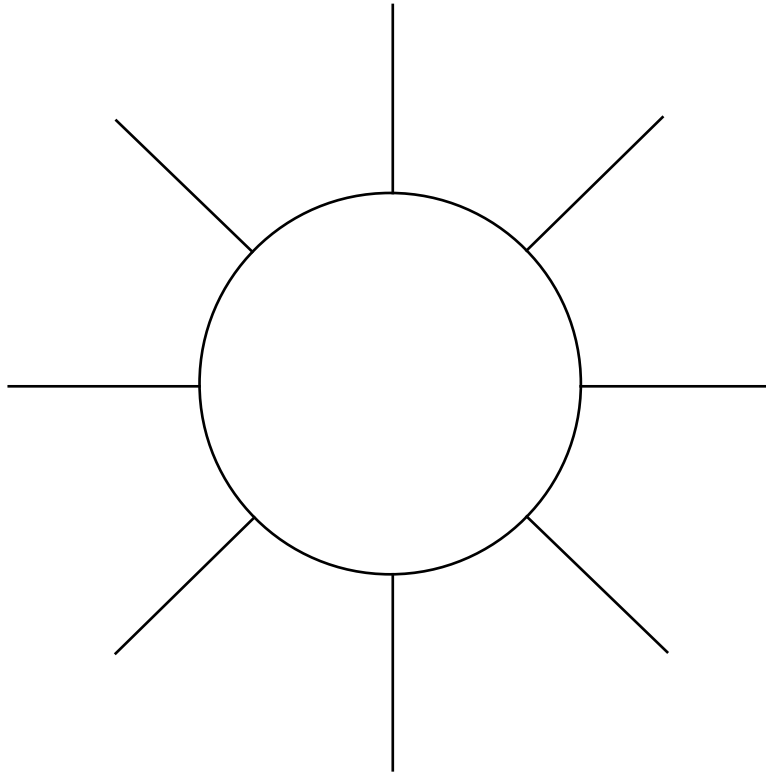
### Writing Ideas

1. Think of a recent argument (real or imagined) in your household or among your friends. Describe what happened—from three points of view.

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## Thematic Analysis

**Directions:** Choose a theme from the book to be the focus of your word map. Complete a web and then answer the question in each starred box.



★ What is the author's main message?

★ What did you learn from the book?