

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

As I Lay Dying

by William Faulkner

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Chapter 1: DARL

1. Darl's description of his walk from the fields to the house is filled with precise details about the things he sees. Make a list of descriptive phrases (similes, adjectives, etc.) that are unfamiliar to you. Then, explain how you would convey each image in terms more applicable to your life. For example, you could re-word "straight as a plumb line" to read "straight as an airport runway."
2. Darl draws a strong visual contrast between Jewel and himself, vividly describing their walk together. Consider one of your siblings or friends. Following Darl's pattern, write a paragraph in which you describe a real or imagined situation. You are participating in an activity with the person you've chosen. In your description, visually contrast the two of you in terms of physical characteristics, abilities, or personality traits that are reflected physically in the activity you choose.
3. Darl describes Cash's talent for carpentry, praising him without any sign of jealousy. Choose a friend whose skill in a particular activity you admire. Write a paragraph describing his or her prowess. Then, write a paragraph in which you discuss envy. Consider the following questions: What is the difference between admiration and envy? Is it easy for you to admire someone without feeling envy? Does our society encourage or discourage envy? To what extent do you personally experience envy? Give specific examples to support your thoughts.

Chapter 2: CORA

4. Although Cora's cakes "turned out real well," the woman who had agreed to buy them for a party decides that she doesn't need them after all. Describe a time when you made an agreement with someone and kept your end of the bargain only to have the other person fail to keep his or her word. How did you react?

5. What do you think Kate means by the statement, "...those rich town ladies can change their minds. Poor folks cant"? Do you agree or disagree with her? Explain your opinion to a classmate who just doesn't understand what the quotation means.

6. Carefully note in this chapter the things Cora says aloud (in quotation marks) versus the things she only thinks to herself (not in quotation marks). To what degree do you think she expresses her true feelings? Do you think she is she more or less honest than the majority of people? Write a short email to Cora in which you explain whether you think she is typical or atypical in her honesty. Use specific examples from the chapter to support your opinions.

Chapter 3: DARL

7. At the beginning of this chapter, Darl describes in detail his favorite way to drink water. He prefers it "...when it has set a while in a cedar bucket. Warmish-cool, with a faint taste like the hot July wind in cedar trees smells." He explains that "it has to set at least six hours, and be drunk from a gourd. Water should never be drunk from metal." Write a paragraph describing a food or drink that you enjoy most when prepared or eaten in way that other people may find unusual. It may be a particular way that your family has of cooking or eating something or simply a matter of your personal preference.
8. William Faulkner has a way of exploding a moment, of describing so thoroughly what a character sees, feels, hears, and/or thinks in real time that a reader feels as though he or she has experienced the moment along with the character. Notice the gap between Pa's question, "Where's Jewel?" and on the next page, Darl's answer, "Down to the barn...harnessing the team." In that long separation, only lasting an instant, the reader is able to experience the taste of Darl's drink of water, his memories from summer nights as a child, the glance at his father's feet, the notice of Vernon's manner of dressing, the reflection on Vernon's wife and her reputation, and the insight about the weather. Choose a typical moment of your day, for example, a common exchange between you and a parent such as, "What did you do in school today?" "Nothing." Explode the moment between the question and the answer by describing your memories, thoughts, feelings, observations, etc. Begin your page with the question, and end it with your answer.
9. How would you characterize Jewel's treatment of the horse in this chapter? Do you think he is cruel, or is he acting appropriately toward the animal? Do Jewel's actions disturb you, or do you understand them? Write a letter to Jewel in which you explain your perspective on her behavior toward the horse.

Chapter 4: JEWEL

(No prompts)

Chapter 5: DARL

10. In this chapter, there are at least three instances of someone being told to “Shut up.” How does that expression affect you? Write out your opinion of the usefulness of being polite versus being unnecessarily impolite.

Chapter 6: CORA

11. Cora describes a very different scene than the one Darl narrated in the previous chapter of the decision to try to haul a load with Addie on her deathbed and the rain on its way. Cora, who was not present, attributes her perspective to her husband (Tull) who was there. Make a list of the differences between Darl’s and Cora’s summaries of the decision. Then, write a paragraph explaining why you think their stories differ so much. Answer the following questions: Of the two characters, Darl and Cora, which would you be more likely to believe? Why? Based on what you already have seen of Tull, do you think he would have lied to his wife about what happened? Did she misunderstand what he told her? Can you conceive of another explanation for the radically different stories?
12. Cora’s opinion of Darl is very different from what we see and hear of Darl in his own chapters. Have you ever heard someone you know well described in an inaccurate or unfair way (either better or worse than you know them to be)? Write a short note explaining how it made you feel.

Chapter 7: DEWEY DELL

13. Dewey Dell claims that she and Darl can communicate without words. She says that is how Darl told her that their mother was going to die and also how he knew without her telling him that she'd slept with Lefe. Write about an experience you might have had with a fortune-teller or a psychic. If you have not had this type of experience, write an editorial for a local newspaper about this type of often-fraudulent activity

Chapter 8: TULL

14. In this short chapter, there are many instances of slang and dialect. Make a list of at least a dozen of them and then translate them into standard English.

Chapter 9: ANSE

15. While others may see benefits in living close to a good road, Anse laments that "every bad luck that comes and goes is bound to find" his house now that there is a road running near it. Do you consider yourself to be an optimist or a pessimist? Write a paragraph explaining whether you are more likely to see the best or the worst potential in things. Give specific examples or incidents to support your belief.