

Name _____ # _____ Hour _____

A Lesson Before Dying Chapter Question Guide

CHAPTER 1

- (1) Why is Jefferson on trial?
- (2) Why do you think Jefferson decided to stay and steal alcohol and money instead of leaving the scene of the crime immediately after everyone else in the store was killed?
- (3) What do Jefferson's attorney, the prosecutor, the judge, and the twelve-member jury all have in common? Why is this an important detail to note about Jefferson's trial?
- (4) List some of the key points that Jefferson's lawyer makes in his defense argument of Jefferson. If he is on Jefferson's "side," then why would he say these things?
- (5) What are the jury's verdict and the judge's sentence? Why is this not a surprise to someone like Grant?
***Connect to Text:** How does it make you feel to hear Jefferson's lawyer talk about Jefferson the way he does? Why do you think you feel that way?

CHAPTER 2

- (1) Why are Taunte Lou and Miss Emma waiting for Grant when he gets home from school?
- (2) Why does he not want to do what they are asking of him?
- (3) Why does Grant end up going to Henri Pichot's house with Taunte Lou and Miss Emma?
***Connect to Text:** Explain whether or not you agree with Grant's feelings about the task Taunte Lou and Miss Emma want him to take on. Consider and comment on the following quotes:
 - *"Yes, I'm the teacher ... [but] they never told me how to keep a black boy out of a liquor store."*
 - *"Jefferson is dead ... The past twenty-one years, we've done all we could for Jefferson. He's dead now. And I can't raise the dead. All I can do is try to keep the others from ending up like this ..."*

CHAPTER 3

- (1) What's the connection between Miss Emma and Henry Pichot, and how does this tie into the ladies' plan?
- (2) What is the significance of the back door? Why does Grant not want to walk through it?
- (3) What information do we learn about Grant in this chapter?
- (4) What agreement is arrived at by the end of the chapter? What can you infer from Pichot's comments?

CHAPTER 4

- (1) What word is used to refer to the African-Americans in this chapter? Do you believe that this word has a positive or negative connotation? Explain.
- (2) Why does Grant try to hurt his aunt by telling her he will eat in Bayonne?
- (3) List some of the ways that the town of Bayonne is divided between whites and blacks.
- (4) What do you learn about Vivian in this chapter?
- (5) We hear Grant beg Vivian to pack up and leave Bayonne with him so that they can "go someplace where [he] can feel [he's] living. She reminds him that he left Bayonne once to go to California, but he couldn't stay away; he had to come back. Why do you think he came back if he hates it so much in Bayonne?
***Connect to Text:** What do you think of the description of the town of Bayonne? Does it remind you of someplace else, or is it the type of town you could never imagine existing? Explain.
OR
***Connect to Text:** Describe a time when you felt like Grant – you hated/disliked something, but you just couldn't let it go.

CHAPTER 5

- (1) Describe the plantation school where Grant teaches.
- (2) What kind of lives do Grant's students live?
- (3) Why do you think Grant chooses to lecture to his students about Jefferson's impending death and the possibility of going to the prison to teach him?
- (4) What message does Grant receive at the end of the afternoon?

CHAPTER 6

(1) What time does Grant arrive at the Pichot house for his 5:00 p.m. appointment? What time does his meeting with Sheriff Guidry and the others actually begin? What does this tell you about the white men?

(2) Why does Grant refuse to sit down or take any food or drink that Inez offers him while he is waiting?

(3) When the white men finally enter the kitchen to speak to Grant, why is Grant worrying about how he should speak to them?

(4) What decision does Sheriff Guidry make about Grant visiting Jefferson?

***Connect to Text:** Discuss whether or not you would have reacted the same way as Grant did in that kitchen if you were in his shoes – not accepting a chair or any food or beverages and not “dumbing” himself down in front of the white men. Explain your choice.

CHAPTER 7

(1) Why is Grant so upset by the superintendent’s visit to the school?

(2) What does Grant compare Dr. Joseph’s inspection of the children’s mouths to?

(3) Why is the following statement by Grant an example of verbal irony: “I appreciated [the superintendent’s] humanitarianism.” (This was said about Dr. Joseph after he had inspected the students’ mouths.)

CHAPTER 8

(1) What memories resurface for Grant when the delivery of firewood arrives to the school?

(2) What happened to Grant’s childhood friends?

(3) Why did Grant’s teacher, Matthew Antoine, hate Grant?

(4) If Matthew Antoine hated being in the plantation school, why did he stay?

CHAPTER 9

(1) This chapter displays other ways that blacks are separated from whites in this town. What are the two examples given here?

(2) How is Paul, the prison guard, described? What does Grant think of him?

(3) What happened during the first meeting with Jefferson?

CHAPTER 10

(1) What happens on the fourth visit that Grant is upset about?

CHAPTER 11

(1) Why does Jefferson ask if Grant has brought corn for his meal?

(2) What argument does Grant try with Jefferson to get him to eat, talk, and try to get through this ordeal with dignity?

***Connect to Text:** Do you believe that Grant will be able to make Jefferson a man before Jefferson dies? Explain why or why not.

CHAPTER 12

(1) Why does Grant go to the Rainbow Club after his solo visit with Jefferson?

(2) While Grant is at the Rainbow Club, who are the other customers discussion? Why is this man important to them?

(3) Vivian insists that Grant cannot leave this community. What reason does she give?

(4) Why is it important to know that Grant’s parents are living in California?

CHAPTER 13

CHAPTER 14

CHAPTER 15

(1) What is Vivian’s family background?

(2) How do Tante Lou and her friends react upon meeting Vivian?

CHAPTER 16

- (1) What plans are being made at Grant's school in the beginning of this chapter?
- (2) What surprising thing happens when Miss Emma and her group visit Jefferson?
- (3) Miss Emma is now even more upset than she had been and insists that Grant return to Jefferson's cell and continue to work with him. What reason does she give for wanting him to back?

CHAPTER 17

- (1) Which white man is Grant beginning to trust? Explain why.
- (2) Grant has an interesting and unexpected reaction to Jefferson's nasty comments, implying bad things about Vivian. What is the reaction and why is it unexpected?
- (3) What is different about the visitation rules after this visit?

CHAPTER 18

- (1) In their first dayroom visit, Grant brings up the words "moral obligation" for discussion with Jefferson, saying that Jefferson has a moral obligation to his godmother, Miss Emma, that he owes her something. What does Grant mean when he tells Jefferson this?
- (2) Grant often stays with Jefferson even after Jefferson has shut down and refuses to speak. Why does Grant do this?
- (3) At the end of the chapter, Vivian disagrees with Grant's perception that nothing he is doing is doing any good for Jefferson. He says, "I'm not doing any good up there, Vivian, ... Nothing is changing." Vivian disagrees with him though, saying, "Something is." Vivian's comment is a sign of foreshadowing though, because things are indeed beginning to change. Explain what changes are starting to take place.

CHAPTER 19

- (1) Christmas has arrived and, with it, the annual Christmas program at Grant's school. What is different about this event this year?

CHAPTER 20

- (1) Why has the governor chosen the second Friday after Easter for Jefferson's execution?
- (2) How long does Jefferson have left to live at this point?

CHAPTER 21

- (1) How does Vivian handle the news about the execution date? What does this say about her character?
 - (2) Grant tries to explain a very complex phenomenon he believes is in play in this chapter. Briefly summarize his explanation.
- *Connect to Text:* Discuss whether or not you agree with the complex phenomenon that Grant tries to explain to Vivian.**

CHAPTER 22

- (1) How does Grant know that Paul does not want to search him before his visits with Jefferson?
- (2) This chapter contains the first real conversation that Grant and Jefferson have. What does Jefferson get excited about?
- (3) Grant gets a brilliant idea during their conversation. What is it?

CHAPTER 23

- (1) Things do not go well during the next visit from Miss Emma, Aunt Lou, and the Reverend Ambrose. Why are they upset with Grant?
- (2) Grant is beginning to get excited about working with Jefferson. What happens to give him some inkling that he is beginning to reach Jefferson?

CHAPTER 24

- (1) Describe what happens during the next visit that involves Jefferson, Miss Emma, Reverend Ambrose, Tante Lou and Grant.

CHAPTER 25

- (1) Why is Grant in such a good mood in the beginning of this chapter?
- (2) What ends up spoiling his mood?

CHAPTER 26

- (1) What has Vivian so upset in this chapter?
- (2) How does Grant take Vivian's concern?

***Connect to Text: (from Chapter 24) Discuss whether or not you agree with Grant's description of a friend. If you do, tell whether or not you have a friend that fits that description and explain why you do or do not have one. If you do not agree with Grant's description of a friend, explain why.**

OR

***Connect to Text: (from Chapter 24) Discuss whether or not you agree with Grant's description of a hero. If you do, tell whether or not you have a hero that fits that description and explain why you do or do not have one. If you do not agree with Grant's description of a hero, explain why.**

CHAPTER 27

- (1) Most of this chapter deals with a discussion between Reverend Ambrose and Grant. What are some of the subjects they discuss?
- (2) Why is it that Reverend Ambrose thinks he is the educated one of the two of them?

CHAPTER 28

- (1) How can Grant tell that Jefferson has been working hard writing in his notebook without looking at the notebook?
- (2) What does Grant ask Jefferson to do for his Nanaan?
- (3) Why does Grant tell Jefferson, "You're more a man than I am, Jefferson?"

CHAPTER 29

- (1) What are some surprising things the reader learns from reading Jefferson's thoughts?

CHAPTER 30

- (1) This chapter is different from the others in its pacing. What has the author done here to increase the tension in this section?
- (2) What do all of the details at the end of this chapter suggest about Jefferson? Will he or will he not die like a man?

CHAPTER 31

- (1) How is the grim importance of this day emphasized throughout the quarter?
- (2) How long has it been since Jefferson went to jail?
- (3) While Grant waits for news of the death, he does a great deal of deep soul searching. What are his thoughts about?
- (4) When does Grant see the butterfly? What does the butterfly symbolize?
- (5) Did Jefferson die a coward or the man Grant was trying to teach him to be?
- (6) What hope does the author give the reader that suggests the situation in the town of Bayonne is truly changing?
- (7) The final scene shows Grant back in the classroom. What reason might one have to believe that he will be a better teacher from this day on?