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## Lesson Five

### FOCUS: Figurative Language

Writers often use non-literal language to invite readers to visualize events, view internal conflicts, glimpse social themes, or grasp abstract concepts like beauty, truth, or goodness. An author uses figurative or non-literal language to stretch our imaginations, challenging us to decode the references and meanings bound within images, similes, metaphors, and symbols. Such devices require a reader to participate actively in the novel, as the reader begins to (implicitly or explicitly) interpret non-literal elements of the tale.

Gaines vividly describes the Louisiana countryside throughout *A Lesson Before Dying*. Imagery, a description that appeals to one or more of the five senses (touch, taste, smell, hearing, or sight), assists the reader in understanding the time and place where the novel is set. Imagery can also project emotion, enabling the author to imply a mood without disrupting the narrative to inform the reader of a character's emotional state.

### Discussion Activities

One of the most beautiful descriptions of the plantation occurs in Chapter 14 when Grant takes Vivian on a walk down the quarter. Ask students to close their eyes while you read page 107 aloud to the class. What emotions are evoked by the images of “a low ashen sky,” “a swarm of blackbirds,” and the plantation cemetery? How does the mood change once Grant and Vivian turn on the road that leads to the field of sugarcane?

### Writing Exercise

The defense attorney compares Jefferson to a hog by saying, “Why, I would just as soon put a hog in an electric chair as this” (p. 8). Have students write a few paragraphs on why that image backfired as a defense argument. What was the attorney's purpose in using that characterization? Why did the remark affect Miss Emma, Tante Lou, and Jefferson so deeply? Even though Jefferson suggests it, why won't Miss Emma bring him corn to eat?

### Homework

Read Chapters 18-21 (pp. 135-167). Have students pay close attention to Grant's actions during the Christmas program. As the schoolteacher, he is in charge of this event. Why is this an uncomfortable situation for Grant? How does he respond?