

As I Lay Dying Socratic Seminar

As we finish Faulkner's novel, it is appropriate to discuss many elements of the novel in a Socratic seminar. Socratic seminars are named for their embodiment of Socrates' belief in the power of asking questions, valuing inquiry over information and discussing over debating. Socratic seminars acknowledge the highly social nature of learning.

Wednesday (1/28), Thursday (1/29), and Friday (1/30), we will have our discussion in class. In order to prepare, make sure you have finished reading the book. In addition, answer 5 of the following discussion points (thoughtful answer with multiple pieces of text evidence – and analysis) and write 3 questions of your own. Be prepared to contribute to our discussion. Your 5 answers and 3 questions are due to TurnItIn.com at 11:59pm on Tuesday, (1/27).

1. What obstacles interfere with the Bundrens' journey? Think about not only the obvious obstacles, but to other subtle ones as well.
2. How does *As I Lay Dying* rework traditional elements of the epic journey or quest narrative?
3. Why does Darl set the barn on fire? Is he really insane? Give as much support as possible to the proposition that seen against the Bundren world, Darl is insane.
4. Define "tragic hero". Could a character in the novel be defined as a **tragic hero**?
5. When you consider **archetypes** such as the hero, the devil figure, the quest, etc., which characters (or events) might represent an archetype?
6. What is Jewel's special attachment to his horse? Why does he give it up?
7. Why doesn't Dewey Dell ask any of her family members for help? Is Faulkner more or less sympathetic toward the plight of the only (living) female in the Bundren family than males?
8. What does *As I Lay Dying* say about family? Is Faulkner suggesting that the Bundrens represent all families? Or just a certain type of family?
9. Is *As I Lay Dying* meant to be funny? Disturbing? Both? Make an argument about the **tone** of the novel.
10. Is *As I Lay Dying* a comedy? A tragedy? Make an argument about Faulkner's use of classical genres in the novel.
11. The novel contains many "unrealistic" or "impossible" narrative elements: dead characters narrate; characters narrate events they could not have seen; others narrate in a diction they could not possess given their level of education. Make an argument about the effect of such strange narrative elements.
12. Consider the Great Depression. Faulkner wrote the novel after the stock market crash. How are the setting and events of the novel depictions of that time period?
13. Using the novel as your basis, distinguish between scenes which are comic and pathetic, or between the tragic and the grotesque. Cite as many specific examples as possible.
14. How is **satire** shown in the novel? Consider satire in individual scenes as well as in individual characters and their conflicts.
15. What exaggerations exist in this novel?