

Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

As I Lay Dying by William Faulkner

- Why is the story told as it is, with all the family narrating in fragments?
- Who in the family speaks the most? Who speaks the least?
- How does the opening chapter reveal the characters of Darl, Jewel and Cash?
- Is there a hero in the novel? Who is it? Is there a villain?
- Does Darl purposefully keep Jewel from Addie's death bed? Why?
- Does Darl have second sight? How does he know things that have happened when he has not been present?
- Why did Addie want to be buried in Jefferson? Is Anse sincere about making the trip to satisfy her wish?
- Almost everyone in the family has another reason for wanting to go to Jefferson, other than burying Addie. What are those reasons? Is there anyone who does not want to go? Why?
- What is the significance of this being a novel about a journey?
- Why does Faulkner have his characters speaking "above themselves": using language and thought patterns they cannot have possessed?
- Are there any examples of love between the family members?
- In what way is Jewel Addie's "cross and salvation"? Does he save her from the flood and from the fire?
- Faulkner often makes incidents both touching and grotesque. Give some examples and explain how these relate to the story as a whole.
- Why is there so much emphasis on the decaying aspects of death, the buzzards and the smell?
- Did Addie love Anse?
- Who are the two children that she loved? Why those two? Have they profited in any way by her love?
- Why does Darl keep saying that Jewel's mother is a horse? Is there any correlation between Jewel's relationship with his horse and with his mother?
- Why does Vardamon think his mother is a fish?
- Was Darl insane from the beginning or has the trip caused him to become so?
- How old is he?
- Do you think of Darl and Cash as being younger than they really are? Why haven't they married?
- Who survives and will endure in the novel?
- Is the novel life affirming or does Faulkner depict life as a cruel joke?

Alternate Questions

- The Bundren family's 40 mile trek to bury Addie Bundren seems to make sense to no one other than the Bundrens themselves. Why does Addie want to be buried in Jackson? Why does her family begin and then persist in so difficult a journey? And why does Darl try to stop it?
- One critic has commented that "[t]here are no heroes and villains in *As I Lay Dying*." Do you agree with this or do you see any of the characters as more heroic or more villainous?
- While you are reading the book, does your opinion of any of the characters change? What prompts this



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re-evaluation?

- What do you make of the ending of the book: Cash's comments on Darl, the casual way the burial of Addie is mentioned, the surprise appearance of the new Mrs. Bundren?
- What do you make of the book's opening vignette: Jewel and Darl walking through the field. What does this scene say about them and their relationship?
- What is the role of the non-Bundren narrators in the novel?
- What is the meaning of Addie's father's saying that "the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead for a long time"?