

A GATHERING OF OLD MEN

ERNEST J. GAINES

LIVING LITERATURE SERIES

A PERMA-BOUND PRODUCTION

TEACHER'S GUIDE

GUIDE WRITTEN BY MARY ELLEN SNODGRASS

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SYNOPSIS

George Eliot, Jr. aka Snookum: The first speaker recounts hearing Candy calling his grandmother, Aunt Glo, and asking for him. Candy, a 31-year-old white woman, sends him on an errand up the quarters to summon Rufe, Corrine, and Reverend Jameson to the house of Mathu, a black octogenarian, and to tell Miss Merle and Lou also to come quick. On his way, Snookum sees the tractor still running on Mathu's property and the bloody corpse of Beau, a white Cajun, lying in the weeds. Mathu, an elderly black, squats against the wall and cradles a shotgun. At Marshall House, he yells for Janey to call Lou. Janey connects Snookum's urgency with a shot she heard.

Janice Robinson aka Janey: Janey, a black maid, dials Baton Rouge to ask for Lou Dimes. Weeping, she calls Miss Merle, but no one answers. Outside, Miss Bea feels with her stick for pecans that have fallen in the weeds. Janey is terrified of the arrival of Fix and his men in trucks. When Miss Merle arrives, Janey reports the shooting. Miss Merle instructs her to pray.

Myrtle Bouchard aka Miss Merle: On the way to Marshall House to take an apple pie to Bea and Jack, Merle spies Candy's LTD parked in the ditch at Mathu's house, where he, Johnny Paul, and Rafe carry shotguns. Candy admits to killing Beau. From 25 years of knowing her, Merle, who had raised Candy from childhood when her parents died in a car wreck, recognizes her statement as a lie. Candy explains that she wants to assemble Merle and other locals before Sheriff Mapes arrives. She adds that Mathu, Rufe, and Johnny Paul also confessed to the murder. She sends Merle to get more 12-gauge shotguns and empty shells and to stop Mapes from beating confessions from blacks. Merle assumes that Candy is protecting Mathu. Candy declares that Lou and Merle give her strength.

Merle returns to Marshall House. Bea acknowledges Candy's spunk. Merle worries about Fix. Bea replies that tractors have ruined the land. Merle slaps Janey to get her to cooperate in the calling of people who dislike Mapes. Merle recalls how, before World War II, Fix's brother, Forest Boutan, tried to rape Clatoo's sister, who slashed him with a cane knife. She earned a life sentence in the penitentiary.

Robert Louis Stevenson Banks aka Chimley: Chimley and Mat, who have fished every Tuesday and Thursday for the past 10 or 11 years, answer the summons. 72-year-old Chimley admits to being afraid of the Boutans. Mat, who is 71, recalls how Mathu beat Fix for trying to make him return a drink bottle to the Marshall store. Mat thinks they should back Mathu, who was the only black to stand up to white oppressors. Chimley shoots his gun to eject a used shell and tells his wife that he is going to Marshall.

Matthew Lincoln Brown aka Mat: Mat hands his fish to

Ella and phones Clatoo, who had already left in his truck to pick up Jacob Aguiard. Mat dials Leola, a widow who has guns, but can't identify the gauge. He refuses to identify to Ella the business that takes men hunting at midday. To stop her from phoning the sheriff, he pulls the phone from the wall. Mat reminds her that whites let Oliver die at a whites-only hospital. Clatoo arrives with 80-year-old Billy Washington, Cherry Bello, and Jacob. Clatoo plans to drop the men off so they can enter Marshall from the field. Both Cherry and Mat are frightened, but determined to face down whites.

Grant Bello aka Cherry: 74-year-old Cherry sees Yank hop on the truck. A former horse breaker, Yank dresses like a cowboy. Cherry feels proud as Dirty Red joins them. On the dirt road separating the Morgan and Marshall plantations, Clatoo stops to let the men out at the cemetery. The cane field is land that Beau and the Boutans have leased from the Marshalls for the past 25 or 35 years. In slave times, blacks worked the land. Billy shoots at a rabbit, but misses.

Jacob enters the cemetery to weed the grave of his mulatto sister Tessie. On Mardi Gras Day 1947, whites killed her in the St. Charles River for refusing to distance herself from blacks. Other men visit relatives' graves. Dirty Red, an out-cast black, visits the graves of his parents, Uncle Ned, and brother Gabe. Red intends to be buried alongside his family. Cherry remarks that more old graveyards are being destroyed. Clatoo brings Bing and Ding Lejeune, Clabber Hornsby, Jean Pierre, Cedrick Tucker, and Sidney "Old Coot" Brooks, who wears a World War I uniform. Clatoo exults that they are going in like soldiers.

Cyril Robillard aka Clatoo: Clatoo thinks Candy tries too hard to convince people of her guilt. He describes Mathu as a proud Senegalese black of pure African heritage. Glo, her three grandchildren, Hazel, and Beulah sit on the steps. Reverend Jameson is the only unarmed male. Clatoo hides a shoe box of shells under the house. Mathu intends to surrender to the sheriff.

Jameson fumes at the old men for their intent to take the blame for murder. Candy orders him to go home. He tries to get Mathu to turn himself in to keep others from dying. The others ignore the preacher, who warns that their stories will not convince the sheriff. Lou Dimes arrives.

Louis Alfred Dimoulin aka Lou Dimes: Lou attempts to identify the real killer. After knowing Candy for three years, he is surprised that she needs him. About 18 silent men squat and sit around the yard. Candy explains that Charlie and Beau got into a fight. When Beau arrived with a shotgun, she ordered him out of the yard and shot him. At Lou's request, Corrine covers the body with a faded bedspread. Merle had summoned Mapes. Lou predicts that Fix will demand the death of a black for the killing.

Mapes, in his late 60s, arrives with Griffin, an unarmed deputy, in his early 20s. Mapes sends him to turn off the tractor and to radio Russell to keep Fix away from the crime

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scene. Mapes also orders Griffin to summon Herman, the undertaker, without identifying the victim. Mapes assumes that Candy has assembled the old men. Candy explains that Beau started the trouble by beating Charlie in the field.

Griffin leads Billy to Mapes. The sheriff hits the old man twice in the face and sends Griffin for another old man. Candy asks if the sheriff will beat them all. Mapes strikes Gable twice. Candy suggests that Mapes use a stick or hose pipe. Jameson, who fears the sheriff, refuses to make a statement. When Mapes knocks him onto his back, the others show no sympathy. The rest of the men except Mathu line up behind Candy for interrogation.

Mapes asks Lou about Charlie. The sheriff believes that whites will demand a hanging that night when they get drunk for the next day's football game. Mapes believes that Candy lives like her father did a half century before. Mapes admires Mathu, but believes he must arrest him for murder.

Herman arrives and estimates that Beau has been dead two or three hours. Mapes, who arrived at 2:30 P. M., guesses three hours. Griffin helps the undertaker load Beau's corpse for the drive to Bayonne. Mapes manhandles Billy and warns him about dying in the electric chair. Billy replies that he had a motive—the beating of his son, a veteran of World War II. Mapes summons Mathu.

Joseph Seaberry aka Rufe: Candy orders Mathu to stay put and warns Mapes not to strike him. The others stick to their confessions. Ding claims to have shot Beau for mistreating his niece. Beulah, who has a prison record, counters Mapes's threats. Johnny Paul reminds the group of the quarters before they grew weedy and their flowers died. He claims that he stopped Beau before the tractor got to the black cemetery, which was evidence of black lives in the old days.

Tucker speaks of his brother Silas, whom blacks beat to death for being the last remaining black sharecropper. The Marshalls then split the land among Cajuns. Turner recalls how Silas's mules outplowed Felix Boutan's tractor. Turner feels guilty for beating Silas with a stalk of cane. Yank regrets that there are no more horses to break. Mapes calls the change "progress."

Russell reports that Herman arrived safely and that all is quiet. Hilly patrols the highway near Marshall. Gable blames whites for the execution of a 16-year-old retarded male for supposedly raping a poor white girl. The event occurred over forty years before in 1931 or 1932 when Huey Long was in Washington. The first attempt didn't kill the prisoner, who believed he was in heaven. Coot recalls fighting with a black regiment in France. On return, a Cajun forced him off the river and told him to stop wearing his uniform and medal. When Curt's son returned from World War II, whites emasculated him for posing with a white German girl in a photo. Politicians wouldn't let a black Korean War hero be buried at Arlington. Jameson interferes and claims the land belongs to him.

Beulah offers to have the women cite examples of white cruelty. Mapes accuses them of casting all their hatred on Fix. Corrine complains that whites keep blacks off the St. Charles River. Mapes, who is also banned from the river, thinks that Fix is also a victim of the times. Beulah accuses Fix of drowning two children. She blames his offspring for perpetuating racism and goads Mapes to arrest her if he takes Mathu. Candy worries that Mathu suffers dizzy spells

Thomas Vincent Sullivan aka Sully or T. V.: Sully and

Gilbert "Gil" Boutan arrive at the coach's office to discuss the game between LSU and Ole Miss. A win could put LSU into the Sugar Bowl on New Year's Day. Gill grieves for his brother, Beau. Four hours after the murder, the two men drive across the Mississippi River to Marshall Quarters but it is too late to view the body. Mapes explains that Russell is posted to keep Fix away. Mapes promises to have the killer in jail by sundown. Gil accuses Candy of disliking Beau and the Boutans.

Lou Dimes: For over an hour, Lou notices people going to Mathu's back yard toilet one by one and returning with a nod. Mapes disapproves of Griffin, who investigates with pistol in hand. Merle drives up and distributes sandwiches and ice water. She wants the interrogation to end. Mapes thanks her for the food.

Sully: At Bayou Michel, Cajun country, Sully accompanies Gil to his parents' home. Gil tucks in his shirt and slams his .38 revolver into the dash of the car. Fix asks why Mathu would shoot Beau. Gil explains that Beau threatened Charlie with a gun. Fix tells Luke Will that he doesn't deserve to speak to the family. Luke Will claims to have been Beau's friend.

Gil tells Fix about the aged men who sit proudly awaiting arrest. Gil hurts when he hears blacks blame the Boutans. To be an All-American football player, Gil needs Cal, his black friend. Jean must live with blacks to run his butcher shop. Jean thinks they should let Mapes settle the crime. Luke Will insists that Mapes will fail. Gil thinks the days of vigilantism are over.

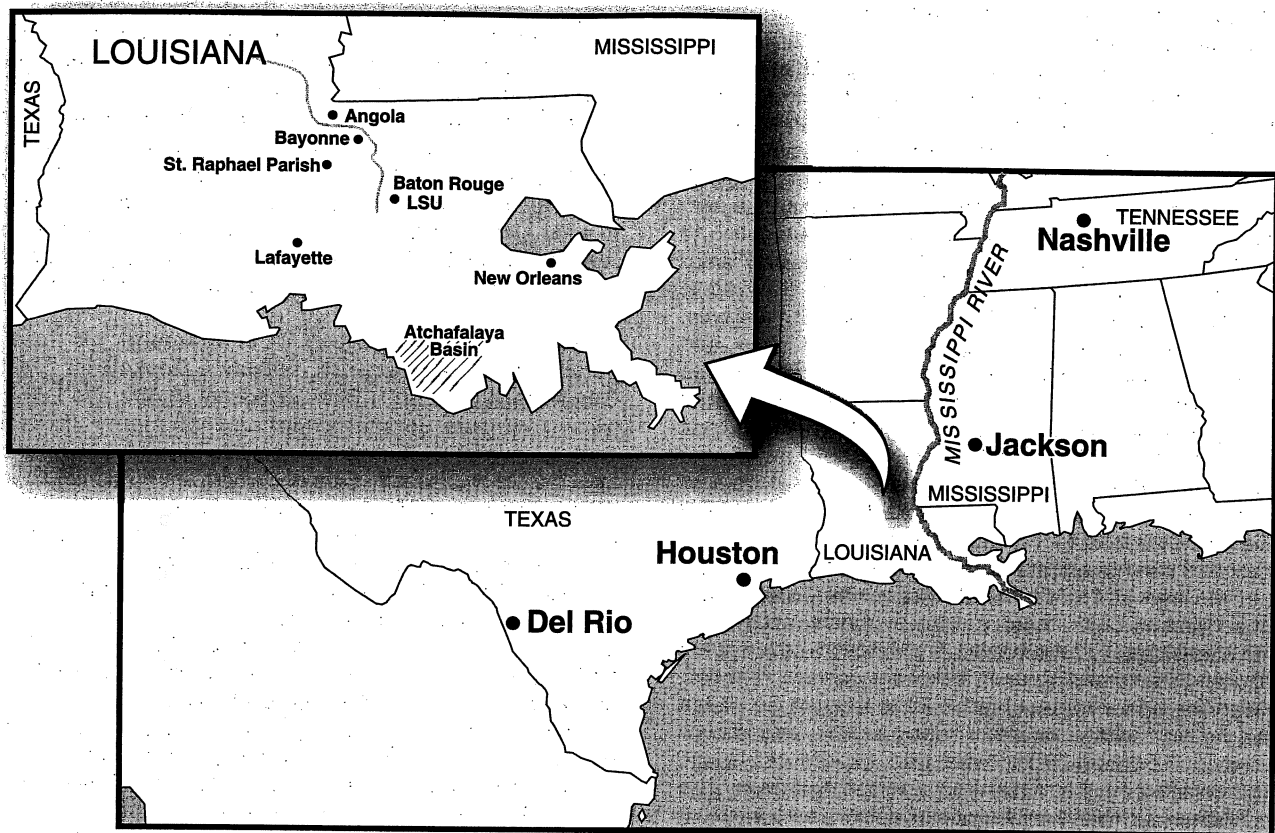
Fix, who holds 'Tee Beau, the dead man's son, regrets that the boy has no father and that Doucette has lost her husband. Fix mediates between Luke Will and the peace-loving extreme and exiles Gil from home. Gil begs to stay. Russell leads Gil away and urges him to play a good game. Gil sinks into thought.

Jacques Thibeaux aka Tee Jack: At his bar, Tee Jack recalls that the "nigger room" closed 15 to 17 years before. He pities Jack Marshall, who comes into the hostile environment for his daily drinks. Robert Jarreau called at 2:15 to learn why Beau had not appeared with the next load of cane, which Charlie delivered six days a week during grinding. Robert arrives to tell the bartender about Beau's death.

The white teacher from USL hopes that the area has progressed from violent racism. Luke Will and his friends enter the bar and demand a bottle. He accuses Jack Marshall's blacks of the crime and intends to help Mapes punish the killer. Luke Will blames Gil for talking Fix out of retaliation. Tee Jack declares his statement a lie. Jack Marshall urges the teacher to go back to Texas. Luke Will orders the teacher out of the bar. The bartender takes the side of his regular customers. Around 10:00 P. M., he warns them that it is closing time for Fridays. Menaced by Luke Will, the bartender keeps the place open and serves free drinks. Leroy laughs at the frightened owner.

Albert Jackson aka Rooster: After Merle leaves with the food baskets, Chimley returns from getting a shell from the shoe box and loading his gun. Mapes reports that Fix is not coming. Johnny Paul calls Mapes a liar. The sheriff knows that the Fix who would have lynched Mathu 30 years before had started mellowing about 15 years earlier. The blacks gather around Candy and raise their guns. Clatoo asks to speak in private to Mathu without Candy's presence. Mapes accuses her of enslaving blacks.

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Mathu informs Candy that he must go with Mapes. She recalls that Mathu knew Grandpa Nate Marshall during the Civil War and raised him, Candy's father, then Candy. Lou picks her up and carries her to her car. Mathu declares himself changed, not by the white man's God, but by his fellow blacks who came to his defense. Charlie runs in from the swamp and advises Mathu that he doesn't have to go to jail.

Lou Dimes: At dark, Candy sulks in the car. Lou claims that Mathu is free of her protection and demands that she decide whether she will marry Lou. She slaps him. Fifty-year-old Charlie Biggs tells Mapes that the trouble with Beau started 45 years past. Charlie explains how Beau threatened to beat him. Beau struck him with a cane stalk; Charlie swung a stalk and made his head bleed. When Beau raised his gun, Charlie shot him. Charlie ran for the swamp and heard a voice summoning him back. Mapes leads Charlie away when Luke Will demands custody.

Sidney Brooks aka Coot: Charlie refuses to be cowed by Luke Will, who intends to lynch him. Griffin refuses to rescue a black confronting a white. Luke Will shoots Mapes. Charlie and Clatoo move right and left of the porch as shooting breaks out. While Jameson prays, the black men spread out into the weeds and shoot one of Luke Will's men.

Snookum: Snookum hears the shooting and refuses to return to his grandmother. Mapes, who is unable to get up, puts Lou in charge.

Horace Thompson aka Sharp: Leroy cries from the pain of his wound. Luke Will denies that he shot Mapes, who blames him anyway. Charlie refuses to surrender. Luke Will reloads to deal with Charlie.

Antoine Christophe aka Dirty Red: Lou urges Charlie to turn himself in rather than escalate self-defense into murder. Charlie finishes a smoke and heads for the tractor. Both he and Luke Will shoot each other and die.

Lou Dimes: Two days later, funerals honor Beau, Luke Will, and Charlie. A week later, the men come to trial. Judge Ford Reynolds presides over the three-day hearing. After a three-hour deliberation, the jury returns the verdict to the judge, who noted that Luke Will and Charlie, the two killers, were both dead. The judge puts the old men on five-year probation. Candy squeezes Lou's hand as Clatoo drives the old men away in his truck.

TIME LINE

- 1928 Huey Long becomes governor of Louisiana.
- 1931-35 Huey is a United States senator.
- ca. 1931 Whites kill a retarded 16-year-old black for supposedly raping a white girl.
- 1934 Beau first threatens Charlie.
- ca. 1940 Forest Boutan tried to rape Clatoo's sister.
- 1945 Whites beat Billy's son, a veteran of World War II. Curt's son is emasculated for posing with a white German girl for a photo.
- 1947 **Mardi Gras Day** Whites killed Tessie.
- 1948 Candy is born.
- ca 1954 The Boutans leases the Marshalls' land.
- ca. 1954 After Candy's parents die in a car wreck, she passes to the care of Mathu and Miss Merle.
- ca. 1976 Lou Dimes meets Candy.

AUTHOR SKETCH

An accomplished artisan, Ernest James Gaines can look

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back with a chuckle at his part-time job at an insurance agency when he slipped into the bathroom to compose on paper towels. An introspective loner of Anglo-African-Native American lineage, Gaines, who no longer has to sneak to write, has earned a respected niche in American literature, particularly for his efforts to break black stereotypes. Eldest son of Adrienne J. Colar and Manuel Gaines, a black Louisiana sharecropper coexisting with snobbish Cajuns, Gaines, a descendent of sugar plantation workers dating to the 1830s, was born January 15, 1933, on River Lake Plantation near New Roads, Pointe Coupée Parish. He lived in Cherie Quarters, a block of laborers' shacks built by slaves, and worked in the fields from age eight. He, his sister, and brothers were raised by their disabled great aunt, Augusteen Jefferson, who inspired him by crawling to keep house and tend a garden and by encouraging visitors to tell folk stories and ghost tales. He entered a black school in a nearby church in New Roads, the town he calls Bayonne in his novels. After developing a neat round hand, he served as local scribe and wrote letters for illiterate neighbors.

Gaines's parents separated in 1941. He moved to California at the age of 15 to live with his mother, stepfather, Raphael Norbert Colar, a sailor in the merchant marine, and seven step-siblings. At his stepfather's direction, he left street loafing and discovered libraries that were open to all races. Looking for works representative of the South he called home, he read widely, located no recognizable settings like his home, and determined to write from experience. At age 16, he completed his first novel on a rented typewriter. The work, influenced chiefly by European authors who wrote of peasant life, came back swiftly from its first reading by a New York publisher; Gaines burned the package. He was educated at Vallejo Junior College and, while he was serving in the army from 1953 to 1955, won some short story contests. On the GI Bill, he studied creative writing at San Francisco State College and Stanford University.

After reading Gaines's "The Turtles," Dorothea Oppenheimer, a literary agent, encouraged him to write professionally. He took a series of odd jobs—dishwashing, printers' helper, postal delivery, and mail room clerk. His lifestyle was humble to the point of penury until he published his third novel, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, which is influenced by William Faulkner's Southern regionalism—and told through the unmistakable voice of a believable fictional character. Shortly before taking a teaching post at the University of Southwestern Louisiana in Lafayette, Gaines was strapped financially and facing knee surgery.

With the encouragement of the university, Gaines moved into a campus residence, where he continues to teach, works daily at the trade of fiction, and has served as writer in residence at Denison and Stanford universities. In addition to a full schedule of writing, lecturing, and teaching, he regularly renews his ties with the rural south by visiting his Louisiana roots.

CRITICS' CORNER

Gaines's strength lies in his ease with Southern rural folk and their complex interaction. Time credits Gaines' patience in dealing with potentially explosive issues, notably racism and social change. Other critics compliment Gaines's dignity, control, and narrative gift. He acknowledges the influence of William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway as well as Gustave Flaubert and Guy de Maupassant. Also, from a study of

Gogol, Turgenev, and Chekhov, Gaines has evolved a style of looking at grassroots origins and their influence on tradition. As he describes the drive to create, "If the book you want doesn't exist, you try to make it exist."

Because he opposes the 20th-century trend toward visualizing black characters in a ghetto setting, Gaines avoids the strict "Southern négritude" school of fiction and prefers to reflect all of Western culture. In much of his work, he returns to early Afro-American history and its ties with agriculture. For *A Gathering of Old Men*, Gaines allows a black graveyard to serve as a symbol of history that technology and indifference threaten to erase.

Gaines has earned a long list of awards for his honest portrayals of black America, notably a Rockefeller grant, Guggenheim fellowship, Black Academy of Arts and Letters award, Wallace Stegner award, Joseph Henry Jackson award, National Endowment of the Arts stipend, two awards from the Commonwealth Club of California, Louisiana Library Association award, MacArthur Foundation prize of \$355,000, San Francisco Arts Commission award, and an honorarium from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. *A Lesson Before Dying* earned the 1993 National Book Critics Circle Award. Gaines holds honorary doctorates from Denison University, Brown University, Bard College, Whittier College, and Louisiana State University. His work has been chosen as Book-of-the-Month Club alternate.

Three of Gaines's novels and one short story have adapted well to television. *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, which CBS-TV aired in 1974, featured Cicely Tyson in the lead role and won nine Emmy awards. A short work, "The Sky Is Gray" aired in 1980 as part of *The American Short Story* series. Directed by Stan Lathan and starring Olivia Cole, Margaret Avery, and Cleavon Little, it is available on video.

A Gathering of Old Men also aired on CBS-TV on May 10, 1987, starring Lou Gossett, Jr., Holly Hunter, and Richard Widmark. HBO showcased *A Lesson Before Dying* on May 26, 1999, starring Don Cheadle as Grant Wiggins and Mekhi Phifer as Jefferson. Critics lauded the quality of director Joseph Sargent's craft and the performances of Cicely Tyson, Lisa Arrindell Anderson, and Irma P. Hall.

OTHER WORKS BY ERNEST J. GAINES

Catherine Carmier (1964)
Of Love and Dust (1967)
Bloodline (1968)
The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman (1971)
In My Father's House (1978)
A Lesson Before Dying (1993)

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the impact of racism, injustice, and oppression
2. To account for changes in use of land
3. To interpret social and community customs
4. To contrast the legal and folk points of view toward murder
5. To discuss the themes of grudges and self-sacrifice
6. To explain the main events in terms of mounting community involvement
7. To analyze causes of anger and retaliation
8. To describe reasons for paternalism
9. To characterize elements of atmosphere and tone
10. To analyze explosive tension, martyrdom, and causes of incidental humor

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To explain why people rally around Mathu
2. To analyze the importance of age to the men's vengeance
3. To account for Candy's role as organizer
4. To contrast Lou as a rescuer and replacement for the sheriff
5. To justify suspicion toward the teacher in the bar
6. To predict how the old men will react to their probation
7. To summarize the childhoods of Candy and Charlie
8. To discuss the implications of Lou's breakup with Candy
9. To summarize the roles of Miss Merle, Griffin, Fix, and Luke Will
10. To list examples of regret, suspicion, cruelty, and threat
11. To characterize the men's behavior in the graveyard

12. To analyze details, particularly the basket of sandwiches and the shoe box of shells

LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

For a better understanding of Ernest Gaines's narrative style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

dialect language peculiar to a limited population in a small geographical area. Often the language of the streets or the patois of a poorly educated segment of the population, dialect increases the authenticity of local people's speech, as with dirt/dobber/dirt dauber, go'n/going, y'all/you all, 'buse/abuse, 'cause/because, kilt/killed, snagged-teef/snag-gled teeth, 'tato/potato, garry/gallery, plarines/pralines, gram mon/ grandmom, Tee Beau/Petit Beau, Gi-bear/Gilbert, A-goose/Auguste, s'posing/supposing, no'm/no ma'am, and Singaleese/Senegaleese. A few terms set the area of Bayonne one apart from the greater South, in particular, 'Tee for petit [little], parish for a civil division of land, and parrain, a holy relationship of godparents committed at the baptism of an infant as surrogate parents. Gaines compares Fix's family's broken English with that of local blacks, both of whom develop and use their own dialect.

first-person narrative a story or series of actions told from the vantage point of a single observer. Ernest Gaines examines a tense standoff between local blacks and the sheriff and his deputy by distributing first-person narratives among blacks and whites. The text even departs from Marshall House to examine the relationship of Gil with his white teammate at college and the sad home gathering, where the Boutans mourn Beau and determine how to proceed in assuring vengeance against his killer. It is significant to the story to begin with the view of Snookum, a young child staying with his grandmother Glo, before passing the narration to a series of old men.

idiom expressions or metaphors that function as vigorous, colorful synonyms for simpler, less demonstrative terms, e. g., necktie party for lynching, a ghoulish witticism among men who gather at a bar to prepare themselves for a shootout with blacks who confess to the murder of Beau Boutan. Luke Will makes light of assaulting Officer Hilly, whom he "put to sleep" to free the way down the road to Marshall House. Another light-hearted expression characterizes the wound to Mapes's arm as "winging."

THE IMPORTANCE OF SETTING

A Gathering of Old Men is set in the agrarian South along the Mississippi Delta on the Gulf of Mexico. Set on former plantations, the story contrasts life for blacks and whites by characterizing people in their homes. When Janey learns of the murder, she is serving the Major and Miss Bea with mixed drinks. The Major, curled in a swing, sleeps after drinking a glass of watered whiskey. Miss Bea, the mistress of the house, rustles with her cane through pasture grass in search of pecans hidden in the weeds. Gone back to dusting, Janey hurries to the front gallery upon the arrival of Merle and runs to meet her in the yard.

Upon Sully and Gil's arrival at Fix Boutan's home at Bayou Michel five miles along the St. Charles River, they find Cajun country marked by French names—Jarreau, Bonaventura, Mouton, Montremare, Broussard, Guerin, Hebert, Boudreaux, and Landreaux. The family, gathered in their white frame house with screened-in porch, leave trucks and

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cars parked outside. Gil finds Fix, the patriarch, seated in a soft chair by the window and holding 'Tee Beau, the dead man's son. The child sucks his thumb and leans on his grandfather's chest. Crucial to Fix's arguments for family loyalty is the bed on which the women sit and on which Gil's mother gave birth to her children. In Fix's philosophy, family members who won't fight blacks desecrate his wife's memory.

Late in the novel, Gaines turns to the inside of Mathu's house, one of the few remaining clapboard houses along dusty roads that line the quarter. Lighted by a single globe turned on with a string, the pitiful, stuffy dwelling is marked by faded and torn wallpaper, dirt daubers' nests on walls and picture frames, cobwebs dangling from the ceiling, a washstand and china bowl separated from the matching pitcher, sagging brass bed, and bench and rocking chair by the fire-half, an obsolete word for hearth. Mathu's few belongings include a tin cup on the mantel and a coal-oil lamp for use when the electricity goes out. The overview suggests neglect and poverty of an octogenarian who once served his master, Nate Marshall, during the Civil War.

CROSS-CURRICULAR SOURCES

Novels

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Claude Brown, *Manchild in the Promised Land*
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William Portis, *True Grit*
Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men*
Richard Wright, *Native Son*

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Videos/DVDs

The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman

A Gathering of Old Men
The Green Mile
A Lesson Before Dying
Ragtime
Sounder

MEANING STUDY

Below are significant words, phrases, or sentences from the novel. Explain each in context. Chapter name and page numbers pinpoint each entry so that you can re-read the passage in which it appears.

1. Y'all got any tea cakes or plarines in there?" ("George Eliot, Jr. aka Snookum," p. 9)
(*The praline is a crispy nut and sugar candy, the signature love token of Count Cesar du Plessis-Praslin, ambassador to Turin and commander of the French army during the Thirty Years War. In 1649, he courted women with almond candies that his cook made as the count's calling card. One of his sweethearts, who emigrated to New Orleans, had her cook substitute local pecans and applied the count's name. The candy, altered from Praslin to praline, developed into a south-east Louisiana specialty.*)
2. About time she shot one of them Cajuns, messing up the land with those tractors. ("Myrtle Bouchard aka Miss Merle," p. 23)
(*The Acadians or Cajuns, immigrants from Nova Scotia, developed an antipathy for blacks, their competitors for jobs in Louisiana after slaves gained emancipation at the end of the Civil War. Because Cajuns use mechanized farming rather than plowing with mules, free blacks blame them for the gradual encroachment of plowed cane fields on the local black graveyard, which contains the remains of people who suffered and died in a racist society.*)
3. He works in mysterious ways, don't He?" ("Robert Louis Stevenson Banks aka Chimley," p. 29)
(*Mat refers to William Cowpers's hymn "Light Shining out of Darkness," one of the Olney Hymns, compiled in 1779.*)
4. I was still looking across the field when I heard the shot. I turned just in time to see a little rabbit bobbing across the empty rows. ("Grant Bellow, aka Cherry," p. 43)
(*The rabbit that scoots out of range of Billy Washington's shotgun symbolizes the blacks' effective avoidance of white violence. Joel Chandler Harris employed the image of the small mammal in his Uncle Remus Tales, plantation-era animal fables in which Br'er Rabbit becomes an emblem of black wit and self-preservation.*)
5. She was one of them great big pretty mulatto gals who messed around with the white man and the black man. ("Grant Bello aka Cherry," p. 45)
(*A mulatto is a person of mixed racial parentage, usually equal parts Caucasian and Negro. The term also applies to the children of Creoles. Depending on point of view, the term can be either a pejorative, racial slur, status symbol, or elitism. Among all white majorities, a mulatto is of lesser quality; among non-white majorities, a mulatto is different from the rest by virtue of having a white parent.*)
6. Bing and Ding Lejeune from the Two Indian Bayou was a step behind him. ("Grant Bello aka Cherry," p. 48)
(*The poor, landless people who thrive in the Louisiana*

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outback frequently build stilt homes on bayous, slow-moving water courses navigable only by limited-draft canoes or pirogues. Some live by illicit means of earning money—jack-lighting, moonshining, selling the hides and feathers of endangered species, and outright theft. They remain concealed from the law in places that require knowledge of creeks, quicksand, snakes, and alligators for safe navigation.)

7. Mathu was one of them blue-black Singaleese niggers. ("Cyril Robillard aka Clatoo," p. 51)
(In a form of black-on-black color discrimination, Mathu is a proud black man who looks down on mixed-blood people. He exults in his Senegalese heritage, which allies him with West Africans from the tropical zone, a major target of slavers.)
8. He must have had great lateral vision, because he knew I was talking to him without ever looking in my direction. ("Louis Alfred Dimoulin aka Lou Dimes," p. 61)
(Blacks refuse to look at whites who address them during the interrogation. Lou acknowledges the ability of people to see from the side of the eye without appearing to focus on the speaker at all.)
9. "Not the other cheek?" Gable asked. ("Louis Alfred Dimoulin aka Lou Dimes," p. 69)
(Gable embarrasses Sheriff Mapes by alluding to Jesus's Sermon on the Mount. The line from Matthew 5:39 instructs people to resist evil by offering the opposite cheek after an enemy first struck them in the face.)
10. The Klans defended Luke Will's friends. ("Lou Dimes," p. 211)
(The Ku Klux Klan is a lawless fraternity of white supremacist vigilantes. Members require secret oaths before a burning cross and allegiance to a central board that assigns sheet-draped members to abase, terrorize, rape, or kill blacks and other minorities such as homosexuals, socialists, union leaders, Jews, Catholics, Muslims, Asians, and non-white immigrants. Justified by an illogical patchwork of biblical and historical lore glorifying Aryan stock, this male-dominated racist group began as an outgrowth of poor whites' frustration with the end of slavery during the Civil War. General Nathan Bedford Forrest started the group in 1866 in Pulaski, Tennessee, and served as the first Imperial Wizard. The Klan enjoys brief revivals during civil rights marches and demonstrations for gay rights.)

COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers with quotations from the novel.

Motivation

1. What incidents induce Charlie to kill Beau?
(Over a 45-year period, 50-year-old Charlie Biggs suffered the badgering of Beau Boutan, a self-important Cajun cane worker who forces Charlie to do the heavy work. On the day of the murder, Beau threatened Charlie, whom Gaines describes as "the quintessence of what you would picture as the super, big buck nigger." Weary of racist menace, Charlie obeyed Mathu and determined to stop running from trouble.
While working as Beau's helper, Charlie recoiled from

Beau's cursing and threats of beating. In Charlie's words, "I told him no, I wasn't go'n 'low that no more, 'cause I was fifty years old—half a hundred." Beau replied that he would "show me how he treated a half-a-hundred-year-old nigger." Charlie left the loader to return home. When Beau threatened with a cane stalk, Charlie armed himself similarly and swung on Beau, cutting his head. Charlie feared that he had killed Beau.

After Charlie retreated to Mathu's house, Beau followed on the tractor, on which he kept a shotgun. The fight escalated as the two men faced off with guns. Beau threatened to hunt Charlie like a rabbit. When Beau raised his gun, Charlie shot him and fled the scene. After his return from the swamp, Charlie sits on Mathu's bed and ends the contretemps by saying, "One of y'all standing round ain't doing nothing, go find the law.")

Setting

2. Describe the quarter.

(The black characters share a community that has its roots in slavery. Around the parish of St. Raphael, blacks live like one large family among cane fields that stretch outward from dirt lanes and properties known as the Marshall House and Morgan House, the few white clapboards that survive on the dusty roads. Workers begin learning in childhood the seasonal rhythms of cane harvesting and grinding. Locals like Billy Washington attend the Baptist church and attempt to live Christian lives. Others admire good food, flower beds of four o'clocks, growing children and grandchildren, and members of the community like Silas and the black veterans who have displayed pride and self-determination in defending their country.

Candy Marshall, whose parents died around 1954, accepts the surrogate parentage of Miss Merle and of Mathu, the elderly man who had known Candy's grandfather, Nate Marshall, and had helped raise her father. Blacks respect Mathu, who hunts with Sheriff Mapes. Concern for ties with Louisiana's past center on the graveyard, the black burial ground that holds numerous bodies of people harassed and murdered by racist Cajuns like Fix Boutan and his family and equally vengeful retainers. Apart from Bayou Michel, where Fix rules as a white supremacist figurehead, the black quarter retains its dignity and interdependence until Beau's murder galvanizes residents into action to halt a century of abuse.)

Character Development

3. How does Fix develop as a character?

(From the first mention of Fix's name in Miss Merle's chapter, Gaines implies that he represents the epitome of white racism and endangerment of blacks through intimidation and lynching. At the highway outside Marshall House, Sheriff Mapes posts Hilly to keep Fix from interfering with the investigation and arrest of Beau's murderer. Other characters share facts and rumors about Fix's involvement in the drowning of children, hangings, and other crimes committed against blacks in St. Raphael parish.

When Gaines reveals the character in person, Fix sits peacefully amid his family. He ponders the suffering of the fatherless Tee Beau and of Doucette, his widowed daughter-in-law. Fix awaits the return of Gil as though

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expecting leadership from the one family member who has fled Bayou Michel and local ignorance to play football while attending LSU. When Gil opts for a peaceful solution to the murder of his brother, Fix banishes Gil from the house, charging him with disrespect for his mother, who gave birth to the Boutan children on the very bed in the room where the family gathers. To Gil's cries for mercy, Fix sits like stone, "not hearing anything anymore.")

Historical Milieu

4. How does the novel express the tensions in the South in the late 1970s?

(Long after blacks pressed for Civil Rights through sit-ins, marches, speeches, boycotts, and acts of civil disobedience, the South grudgingly accepted the black presence in public facilities, schools, sports arenas, and job sites. Along the St. Charles River, Gaines depicts the tension of Tee Jack's bar, where the black room no longer segregates customers, but where blacks and even Jack Marshall still receive no welcome to conduct business and drink with racist whites. At LSU, Gil Boutan earns a name for himself by pairing with Cal in a white-and-black sports partnership known as Salt and Pepper. Citizens admire Gil's contribution to local pride, but Gil's father can't understand why playing a football game inhibits Gil's avenging his brother's murder by a black.

Central to ill feeling among blacks is the unfair burden of justice on blacks accused haphazardly of raping white women or even posing for a photo with a white German girl. The law from the time of Sheriff Guidry has been eager to right wrongs and suspected wrongs of blacks against whites, but has turned aside from pervasive stalking, harassing, waylaying, lynching, and dehumanizing blacks. As tractors subvert black livelihood through mechanized agriculture and force tenants from the best farm land into the swampy bottoms, blacks grow discontent at the unfairness of their lot. The tense situation reaches its height in Charlie's refusal to be bullied and beaten by a blustering Cajun.)

Theme

5. What does the author reveal about self-esteem?
(The characters of the novel carry a heavy load of past insults to their pride. The men who confess to Beau's murder are too old for stalking with shotguns, yet they fire shells to prove that they are capable of stopping the white Cajun who lorded over them his tractor and his superiority. In defiance of the sheriff, the elderly black men support Mathu and face down threats to their manhood. Coot, dressed in the uniform and medal from his World War I days, represents the veterans who returned from war to find the community even more eager to put them back into their place as second-class citizens and pseudo-slaves.

Arrival by way of the back road and cemetery puts contenders face-to-face with past wrongs. As though trimming the hesitance and delay from their lives, they stoop to weed neglected gravesites, say prayers for their families, and contemplate their own burial in traditional family plots. During interrogation and at the three-day trial, the men maintain so strong a front against community violence and bullying that the 70-year-old judge exclaims "from the beginning that not only had he never

presided over a case quite like this one, but that he had never heard of one like this in all his thirty-five years on the bench." Still cloaked in self-righteous indignation, the men accept probation and pile into Clatoo's truck in front of the courthouse to return to the quarter.)

Interpretation

6. What does the novel say about righting wrongs?
(The lengthy list of crimes and wrongs that St. Raphael parish blacks hold against whites like Fix Boutan grows burdensome, causing people to jump to false conclusions about who is to blame for their immurement at the bottom rung of society and for ousting them from the St. Charles River. Mapes, who shares enough of local life with blacks like Mathu to know the score, warns Corrine that her repressed anger focuses on the wrong target. Mapes demands, "I can't hunt on that river like I used to. You blaming Fix for that, too? Then you blaming the wrong person. He's as much victim of these times as you are. That's why he's back on that bayou now, because they took that river from him, too."

After Charlie sacrifices himself to Luke Will's murderous coterie, quiet overcomes the uproar. In the dark, blacks gather in the road and ignore Luke Will's death while they focus on Charlie's martyred body. Mathu raises Charlie's head from the dust as he dies from a belly wound. The day's violence ended, black men file past and touch Charlie, as though honoring the voice in the swamps that urged him to sacrifice himself in the name of justice. The women take their turns at touching Charlie's corpse and bring along grandchildren as though treasuring a moment of triumph and an end to senseless violence between black and white.)

Conflict

7. Why does Candy take so much on herself?
(Candy Marshall is the orphan who grew up under the care of Miss Merle, a white matron, and Mathu, the kindly old Senegalese retainer of the Marshall family, who survives from Civil War times. As though her power as a white female confers protection on Mathu and other elderly blacks, Candy stands before them as a slender buffer between the old men confessing to murder and Sheriff Mapes, an experienced law officer who knows that he hasn't completed his role as peacekeeper until he arrests the murderer. Candy feels privileged as a white female landowner to sass the sheriff and deride him for beating elderly black males. Mapes accuses her of patronizing men who long for self-affirmation.

In the falling action, when black men withdraw to Mathu's house to confer in private, they surprise Candy by rejecting her from their private discussion. Lou, the only white to earn the sheriff's respect, forces Candy to give up her position as defender of the elderly blacks. Lou lifts her and sets her into her LTD, a humiliation that leaves her fuming. He challenges her to decide whether she intends to marry him or not. Their ill feelings derive from Candy's self-importance to the black community and her unwillingness to give up the melodrama she has created in Mathu's yard. In the final scene, as the elderly blacks depart the courthouse in Clatoo's truck, Candy squeezes Lou's hand as though accepting marriage to Lou and abandoning her self-appointed role as rescuer.)

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Atmosphere

8. How does the tension ease at the trial?

(Facing white-haired Judge Reynolds, Candy and Attorney Clinton stand alongside the old black men against the traditional power structure of white racists like Fix Boutan, Luke Will, Leroy, and the Klan and Nazi party. A week after the three funerals for Beau, Luke Will, and Charlie, the black survivors—gashed, scratched, cut, sprained, and bruised—appear in court opposite Leroy, the white attacker who survived the shootout. Clean and sweet-smelling for their appearance at the courthouse, the old men appear to have triumphed from making their stand against racism.)

The author compresses three days of proceedings into a few paragraphs. The court, including onlookers and the media, laugh at black nicknames like Rooster, Coot, and Chimley. The height of the hilarity occurs as Mapes explains how he spent the whole fight sitting in the middle of the walk, too weakened by a gunshot wound to arise. The atmosphere of "a Charlie Chaplin movie" leaves locals chuckling. Because the violators died at the scene, the judge has little to do but pass a sham judgment, a formality requiring the old men to give up guns and avoid people with guns. All depart in peace.)

Structure

9. Why does Gaines pass the narration around to fifteen speakers?

(By allotting characters their parts in the description of the crime and its aftermath, Gaines is able to reveal more of the tableau-style situation in the quarters than just Mathu's front yard. From Janey and Merle, readers learn the behaviors of privileged whites like Miss Bea and the Major, who live apart from the action and who perpetuate white supremacy as a natural right. From Sully, Gaines expresses the beginnings of change in integrated society, which unites to support a football victory the next day of LSU over Ole Miss and a possible invitation to the Sugar Bowl on New Year's Day. From Lou, the reliable white man who sees human weakness in all participants, Gaines overrides the residual hatred in Luke Will, an invidious, hate-filled outsider who robs himself in the wrong done to the Boutans as though he were a family member.)

By supplying a vignette of Tee Jack's bar, Gaines expresses the outer tensions that perpetuate racist violence as though it were a male contact sport. The teacher from Texas, who speaks for the author himself, quietly asserts to the most flagrant perpetrators of intimidation that their day has ended. The grim, evil-tinged scene concludes with Luke Will and Leroy primed for action and rushing to the scene to avenge Beau's death. Returning the narration to the child Snookum, Dirty Red, and Lou Dimes, the author evens out the telling of how the day ends and the trial exonerates the conspiracy of old men.)

Purpose

10. Why does Gaines choose elderly men to halt violence?
(The old men serve two main purposes in the novel. First, they bear the collective memory of sufferings of black males since the Civil War. As heads of households, they speak for women, children, and fallen war heroes as well as for the rest of the family dead, who lie

powerless under grave stones as white men's tractors menace their burial ground. To his wife Ella, Mat summarizes the taint of "the years we done struggled in George Medlow's field, making him richer and richer and us getting poorer and poorer." Because the men have witnessed crimes against their people and suffered shame and denigration, they empower themselves with shotguns to stand up for justice.)

The old men also serve the novel as the only endangered characters with nothing to lose. Mathu, in his eighties, and others nearly as old renounce their former impotence to stand on shaky legs before a tough white sheriff with a reputation for battering suspects. Nearing their own rendezvous with the cemetery, they ignore Mapes's summation of their lives as nothing more than eating and napping. The old men offer ebbing strength and pride in self as the culmination of the black rise to civil rights. As they depart from town in Clatoo's truck, they carry with them the retaliation that took a united effort and a huge lie to counter Beau Boutan and men like him who believed that blacks would always collapse before racist bullying.)

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

Gaines stated his longing for Louisiana in "Miss Jane and I" in a 1978 issue of *Callaloo*: "I wanted to smell that Louisiana earth, feel that Louisiana sun, sit under the shade of one of those Louisiana oaks, search for pecans and that Louisiana grass in one of those Louisiana yards next to one of those Louisiana bayous, not far from a Louisiana river. . . . And I wanted to hear that Louisiana dialect—that combination of English, creole, cajun, Black. For me there's no more beautiful sound anywhere." In the dialogue of *A Gathering of Old Men*, he expresses the lingual idiosyncrasies that mark his homeland:

1. Gaines introduces the light-hearted lingo of Snookum, Aunt Glo's grandson, as a model of Louisiana patois learned in childhood: "I checked one of my fist, but he knowed I couldn't hit him, 'cause he had already caught me and Minnie playing mama and papa in the weeds, and he told me I had a year when I couldn't do him nothing no matter what he did me, and if I did he was go'n tell Gram Mon what he caught us doing." The idiosyncratic grammar of the quarter takes shape with "fist" as a plural, "knowed" as the past tense of "know," double negatives in "couldn't do him nothing no matter," and the idiom "do him nothing" to mean "do anything to him."
2. After the standard speech of Miss Merle's chapter, Chimley begins his part and discusses the old days of fishing every Tuesday and Thursday with Mat, who challenges, "Up to ya'll now, I done done my part."
3. Mapes, a cynical lawman who has witnessed years of hard fighting, deaths, and suffering, threatens Uncle Billy with a description of electrocution tinged with Southern derision: "I've seen that chair rattle, I've seen it dance. Not a pretty sight, old man. Is that how you want to go?"
4. To lend stature to Charlie's martyrdom, Gaines speaks the frustration of disenfranchised blacks immured in poverty and injustice: "I ran, I ran, I ran—I don't know how long, but no matter where I went, where I turnt, I was still on Marshall place."

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ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Business and Economics

1. Describe the labor situation that keeps blacks in virtual slavery to men like Beau, who harvest cane with the assistance of landless blacks.
2. Explain why Felix Boutan takes out frustration against Silas after mules beat the tractor.
3. Deliver a chalk talk contrasting the systems of plantation slavery and sharecropping. Supply photos and descriptions of the laboring class life from James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*.
4. Use internet sources to obtain information about sharecropping and farming, crop investments, potential damage due to weather and pests, insurance costs for farmers and/or farm-related accidents, banking practices for farms, and any mechanized process now used for farming (i.e. satellite and computer-aided fertilization and planting.)

Cinema

View films with imprisoned and condemned blacks, such as *The Green Mile* and *Ragtime*. Compare the movies' settings, themes, and dialogue to those of *A Gathering of Old Men*, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, and *A Lesson Before Dying*. Comment on the interplay of people of different ethnic, social, educational, and religious backgrounds.

Geography

1. Use topographical maps to describe the terrain the story covers, particularly the area around Jackson, LSU, USL, New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Angola, New Orleans, the Mississippi River, and the bayous.
2. Contrast farming in Louisiana's swampy bottoms with upland farming.

History and Social Studies

1. Compose an extended definition of protectionism. Explain why Lou predicts that Mathu will no longer need her.
2. Contrast female characters and their attitudes toward family, responsibility to the law, and vengeance. Consider Aunt Glo, Miss Merle, Bea, Janey, Corrine, Leola, Ella, Candy, and Beulah.
3. Explain why the community takes an interest in the trial and why they might compare it to a Charlie Chaplin movie.
4. Summarize the selection and duties of a parrain. Explain the relationship between Mathu and Charlie. How does it differ from that between Mathu and Candy? between Beau and Luke Will? between Merle and Candy?
5. Outline the Huey Long era of politics in Louisiana. Explain why the media referred to Long as a crook and demagogue.
6. Based on your understanding of the novel, lead a panel discussion of the effects of disenfranchisement, poverty, racism, illiteracy, loss, and violence on family life. Support your opinions with facts from census reports, sociological surveys, and statistics obtained from almanacs and economic and health surveys.

Language and Arts

1. List phrases that underscore the grudges that blacks carry to the graveyard and into the arrest scene. Discuss

why their thoughts center on the wrongs done them after wars.

2. Compose an extended definition of dialect. Analyze the spellings and pronunciations of garry/gallery, plarines/pralines, gram mon/ grandmom, Tee Beau/Petit Beau, Gi-bear/Gilbert, A-goose/Auguste, and Singaleese/Sene-galese.
3. Record aloud descriptive passages from *A Gathering of Old Men*.
4. Pantomime symbolic or significant episodes from the novel.
5. List sense impressions from the novel that give immediacy and force to characterization. Name graphic details such as the sounds of shells entering shotguns.
6. Read aloud from nonfiction, novels, poems, plays, speeches, and stories that describe racism, child abuse, neglect, and poverty.
7. Analyze the sharing of narration. Explain how Gaines uses various witnesses to give alternative views of the events. Suggest why there are no separate entries for Fix Boutan, Griffin, Hilly, Herman, Miss Bea, Doucette, Russell, Corrine, or Luke Will. Outline what one of these characters might have added to the novel, for example, Herman's summary of the state of the corpse or Luke Will's rebuttal of Fix's dicta about violence and retaliation against blacks.

Law

1. Read aloud state laws governing crimes committed in the novel. Determine whether the judge has alternative punishments he could apply to the old men, such as community service.
2. Make a chart of advice to Mathu concerning his rights as a citizen accused of murder. Summarize how the Miranda law and gains in civil rights would end Mapes's accusations and mistreatment of suspects.

Psychology and Health

1. Explain with diagrams the damage that a shotgun does to the body, especially from a belly wound.
2. Summarize methods of determining the time of death from an examination of a corpse.
3. Compose a lecture on emotional trauma as it affects Charlie. Explain why he boasts to Mathu that he is a man and will no longer run from danger.

Religion

1. Compose a graveside service for Beau, Luke Will, Charlie, Jacob's sister Tessie, Candy's parents, the retarded black executed in the electric chair, and a veteran refused burial in Arlington because he is black. Indicate how local people can end racism that causes unrest and violence.
2. Account for the black community's loathing of the Reverend Jameson, who tries to bring peace by praying at the arrest scene.
3. Explain with citations by Jesus from the New Testament why Gable asks Mapes, "Not the other cheek?"

Speech and Drama

1. Organize a discussion of racism and other forms of persecution, classism, and exclusion. Answer these basic questions: What makes people belittle working-class blacks? How does prejudice cause tense situations?

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Why does the teacher leave the barroom without defending his peaceful point of view? Why does Deputy Griffin refuse to defend blacks? How do speeches, books, plays, monuments, music, murals, and other forms of creativity help quell ridicule, hatred, segregation, and prejudice?

2. Compose a presentation to outsiders explaining the racial situation that develops in Louisiana after the Civil War. Express the white landowner's need for black laborers. Characterize the social position of Cajuns who live on the St. Charles River.
3. Draw stage settings for a dramatization of a scene from the novel. Supply sketches of costumes and props.
4. Create a storyboard account of Beau Boutan's murder, beginning with a grudge that dates back 45 years. Indicate at what point Beau forces Charlie to shoot in self-defense. List individual crimes and suggest appropriate punishments for them.

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. List examples of cruelty and racism in various characters.
2. Compile a list of actions that demonstrate community spirit.
3. Compose a scene in which Mathu and Candy or Fix and Gil discuss the outcome of the trial and the violent deaths of Beau, Charlie, and Luke Will.
4. Make a character list and explain the character flaws of each.
5. Account for the recurrence of the motif of respect, especially from Charlie and Candy toward Mathu and among Fix's Cajun children and grandchildren.

ANSWER KEY

VOCABULARY TEST

- | | | |
|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 1. armoire | 6. lateral | 11. farce |
| 2. mulattoes | 7. pawn | 12. vigilante |
| 3. basin | 8. slides | 13. desegregate |
| 4. quintessence | 9. clapboard | 14. parish |
| 5. sharecropper | 10. conspirators | 15. negligence |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. A |
| 2. A | 7. A |
| 3. D | 8. A |
| 4. C | 9. C |
| 5. D | 10. B |

Part II: Matching (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. A | 6. C | 11. E |
| 2. F | 7. H | 12. M |
| 3. L | 8. O | 13. I |
| 4. D | 9. B | 14. N |
| 5. J | 10. K | 15. G |

Part III: Short Answer (20 points)

1. Mapes
2. 10:00 P. M.
3. Hilly
4. whites-only hospital
5. Dirty Red
6. 2:15 P. M.
7. Arlington
8. Sugar Bowl
9. Beau's body
10. cane knife

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. L | 11. M |
| 2. O | 7. I | 12. D |
| 3. A | 8. N | 13. J |
| 4. G | 9. H | 14. K |
| 5. C | 10. E | 15. B |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. T |
| 2. F | 7. F |
| 3. T | 8. T |
| 4. F | 9. F |
| 5. F | 10. T |

Part III: Completion (20 points)

1. Leola, gauge
2. Yank, cowboy
3. Mardi Gras, Tessie
4. Clatoo, shells
5. Mapes, hanging

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

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VOCABULARY TEST

Complete each of the following sentences with an appropriate word from the list below. Place the letter of your response in the blank at left.

armoire	clapboard	farce	parish	sharecropper
basin	conspirators	lateral	pawn	slides
bayou	desegregate	mulattoes	quintessence	sycamore
chifforobe	determination	negligence	sacrament	vigilante

1. I looked through the shells I kept in a cigar box on top the _____ till I found me a number five.
2. He turned to Bing and Ding, the two _____ standing close together.
3. I cross that Atchafalaya _____ every day.
4. He was the _____ of what you would picture as the super, big buck nigger.
5. Cedrick's brother Silas was the last black _____ on the place.
6. He must have had great _____ vision, because he knew I was talking to him without ever looking in my direction.
7. You're just a _____. Somebody they're playing with.
8. Y'all can't tell me y'all can't remember how Jack and Red Rider used to race out into that field on them old single _____?
9. The one or two old _____ houses seemed deserted, causing the place to look like a Western ghost town.
10. I supposed she felt that since we were all _____ together, one was no better than the others.
11. "Old men with guns waiting for old men with guns, Fix, but isn't that a _____?" Auguste said.
12. I'm speaking of the day of the _____.
13. So they quit trying to _____ the white drinking room, and just bought their bottle out of the store, and went outside or in their cars or took the bottle back home to drink it.
14. I don't care what people in this _____ believe.
15. Judge Reynolds cautioned that if he did not answer he could be charged with _____ of duty, seeing that two men had been killed.

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COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Select the phrase that completes each of the following sentences. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- _____ 1. Clatoo stops
 - A. to let Dirty Red pull weeds.
 - B. to have the men straggle in from the field.
 - C. after Candy's car slides into the ditch.
 - D. near enough to the tractor for Leroy to take cover.
- _____ 2. The bartender
 - A. takes sides with his regular customers.
 - B. wishes that racism were a thing of the past.
 - C. informs customers of the shooting.
 - D. agrees with his wife that he should close early on Fridays.
- _____ 3. Mapes is certain that
 - A. Lou wants to take charge of the investigation.
 - B. he will apprehend Charlie by sundown.
 - C. the Boutans will do whatever Fix tells them.
 - D. Luke Will shot him.
- _____ 4. The tractor threatens
 - A. Candy's family and their investment.
 - B. the stability of the cane market.
 - C. burial sites of black farmers who date to the post-Civil War period.
 - D. Charlie and Mathu, who help Beau harvest the cane crop.
- _____ 5. Merle appears to
 - A. force Janey to telephone Leola.
 - B. detest Griffin for his racism.
 - C. need Candy's permission to talk to Mapes.
 - D. feed people on both sides of the legal issue.
- _____ 6. The author implies that
 - A. people like Miss Bea and the Major are worthless citizens.
 - B. Mapes is incapable of upholding the law.
 - C. football is more important than justice in Louisiana.
 - D. Lou is the only witness who realizes the identity of the killer.
- _____ 7. Before entering his father's house,
 - A. Charlie washes off the smell of the swamp.
 - B. Gil knots his tie and tucks in his shirt.
 - C. Cal conceals the .38 revolver.
 - D. Luke Will sneers at Jean, the owner of a butcher shop.
- _____ 8. The women gathered on the front step
 - A. are willing to testify to the cruel racism of whites.
 - B. try to conceal from the children the vigilantes' intent.
 - C. quietly distribute shells from Clatoo's shoe box.
 - D. refuse to take more than one sandwich each.
- _____ 9. The teacher urges
 - A. Salt and Pepper to win the game for LSU.
 - B. Luke Will to keep Fix at home.
 - C. a peaceful end to racial violence.
 - D. the bartender to close early to keep the vigilantes from getting drunk.
- _____ 10. Candy depends on
 - A. Mathu to conceal Charlie's guilt.
 - B. Merle and Mathu as surrogate parents.
 - C. black shooters to pin Luke Will and Leroy at the tractor.
 - D. her attorney to save the black men from execution for murder.

A GATHERING OF OLD MEN

Part II: Matching (30 points)

Match the following actions with places from the list below. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- | | | |
|-------|---|---------------------|
| _____ | 1. Dirty Red thinks about his family. | A. graveyard |
| _____ | 2. Sully waits for Gil. | B. swamp |
| _____ | 3. Cars and trucks take up space near the porch. | C. bar |
| _____ | 4. The old men depart from town. | D. Clatoo's truck |
| _____ | 5. People think they are passing a Charlie Chaplin movie. | E. France |
| _____ | 6. Luke Will stays after hours. | F. coach's office |
| _____ | 7. Men open a door and window to let in some air. | G. Aunt Glo's house |
| _____ | 8. Charlie stands up. | H. Mathu's house |
| _____ | 9. Charlie acquires a musty smell. | I. tractor |
| _____ | 10. A repairman departs to repair an electric chair. | J. courthouse |
| _____ | 11. Coot earns a medal. | K. Baton Rouge |
| _____ | 12. Merle orders Janey to pray. | L. Boutan house |
| _____ | 13. Beau keeps a shotgun. | M. Miss Bea's house |
| _____ | 14. Herman takes the corpse for examination. | N. Bayonne |
| _____ | 15. Snookum rejects turnips. | O. field |

Part III: Short Answer (20 points)

Answer the following questions and explain its significance to the story.

1. Who slaps Billy twice in the face?
2. When does Luke Will insist that Tee Jack keep the bar open?
3. Whom does Luke Will knock unconscious?
4. Where does Oliver die?
5. Whose family is known as trifling?
6. When does Robert Jarreau call about the missing load of cane?
7. Where was a black veteran refused burial?
8. Where does Gil want LSU to play on New Year's Day?
9. What do Herman and Griffin move?
10. With what weapon does Clatoo's sister slash Forest Boutan?

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain why the men walk proudly over the field to Mathu's house.
2. Contrast the racism of Luke Will, Griffin, and Fix.
3. Account for Charlie's change of attitude about running from trouble.
4. Summarize events surrounding Charlie's death.

A GATHERING OF OLD MEN

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

Match each of the following descriptions from the novel with a character name. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- | | | |
|-------|---|---------------|
| _____ | 1. sulks in the LTD | A. Snookum |
| _____ | 2. puts Lou in charge | B. Dirty Red |
| _____ | 3. ignores his grandmother | C. Beau |
| _____ | 4. boasts of spending time in jail | D. Miss Merle |
| _____ | 5. lies under a gray bedspread | E. Luke Will |
| _____ | 6. sucks his thumb | F. Candy |
| _____ | 7. plays under the nickname "Pepper" | G. Beulah |
| _____ | 8. stands up in the field | H. Silas |
| _____ | 9. beat the tractor | I. Cal |
| _____ | 10. orders the teacher to leave | J. Aunt Glo |
| _____ | 11. lives alone in a stifling old house | K. Griffin |
| _____ | 12. serves sandwiches | L. Tee Beau |
| _____ | 13. is known as Gram Mon | M. Mathu |
| _____ | 14. refuses to defend blacks | N. Charlie |
| _____ | 15. prays for his parents, uncle, and brother | O. Mapes |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

- _____ 1. In his fifties, Charlie gives up running from danger to act like a man.
- _____ 2. To protect Candy, Mathu accepts the blame for Beau's murder.
- _____ 3. Judge Reynolds laughs at Mapes for sitting out the shooting.
- _____ 4. The DA instructs the old men to give up firearms and to avoid being with armed people.
- _____ 5. According to Fix, Gil dishonors his mother's bed by preferring football to vigilantism.
- _____ 6. Mapes once hunted with Mathu and thinks of him as a friend.
- _____ 7. Corrine yells at her husband for discharging a firearm in the house.
- _____ 8. Griffin turns off the tractor at the beginning of the interrogation.
- _____ 9. Russell knows that he can't keep Fix and his men off the highway.
- _____ 10. Lou tries to make Candy see that protecting the old men is not the same as helping them overcome racism.

A GATHERING OF OLD MEN

Part III: Completion (20 points)

Fill in the blanks below with a word or phrase which completes the sentence. Place your answer in the space provided at left.

1. Mat phones _____, a widow who has shotguns, but can't identify the _____.
2. _____, a former horse breaker thirty or forty years back, dresses like a _____.
3. On _____ Day 1947, whites killed _____ in the St. Charles River for refusing to distance herself from blacks.
4. _____ hides a shoe box of _____ under the house.
5. _____ believes that whites will demand a _____ that night when they get drunk for the next day's football game.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Describe how residents respond to the shooting of Beau Boutan.
2. Give Candy's reasons for summoning people with the same gauge gun and shells.
3. Discuss Gil's influence on Fix.
4. Account for the limited opportunities for blacks in St. Raphael Parish.
5. Summarize events that occur after Mapes is shot.

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