

**Study Questions for A Lesson Before Dying = Answer Key
(selected chapters only)**

Chapter One:

1. What is the name of the defendant? Jefferson
2. On what day is the trial held? Friday
3. For what is he on trial? Murder and robbery
4. On what day is sentencing held? Monday
5. What is the verdict? Guilty
6. What is the sentence? Death by electrocution
7. Contrast the portrait that is painted of Jefferson. How does the prosecution present him? How does the defense present him? Defense: innocent by way of lack of intelligence enough to understand what happened; it would be like killing a hog. Prosecution: the murder and robbery were done with intent.

Chapter Two:

1. Who is the narrator? Grant Wiggins
2. What is his occupation? Teacher of the only black school
3. Who are the two women? Jefferson's grandmother Miss Emma Glenn (Nannan) and Grant's Tante Lou
4. What do they want Grant to do? Help Jefferson die like a man.
5. Why do they need permission from the Sheriff for what they want Grant to do? Only the sheriff can approve visitors to a condemned man.
6. Why does Grant say that Jefferson is already dead? There is no hope for parole or appeal for a black man accused of killing a white man.
7. Why does Grant not want to go to Mr. Henri's house? Only servants and subservient workers go through the back door. Tante Lou gave him a college education so he would never HAVE to go through any back door.
8. What color is Henri? white
9. What color is the narrator? black

Chapter Three:

1. What is symbolic about going through the back door? That you aren't treated as an equal or as worthy of being considered company
2. What does Miss Emma ask Mr. Henri to do? Allow Grant to teach Jefferson that he isn't a hog, but rather a man.

Chapter Five:

1. The church is the meeting place for what? The black kids' school
2. Why did school only meet 5 ½ months? Kids were needed in the fields the rest of the time.
3. Why does Grant go into such detail about the process by which Jefferson will be killed? To draw an image of why he wants his students to stay in school, learn, and break out of this white supremacist society.

Chapter Six:

1. Where has Grant gone? Henri Pichot's house
2. Where does he wait? The Kitchen
3. Why does Edna make Grant reach in order to shake hands? To show her superiority
4. How long does Grant wait before getting to see the men? Two and one half hours.
5. How did Grant act that was insulting to the white men? Intelligent; doesn't follow the "rules;" acts "too smart for his own good."

Chapter Eight:

1. Once the wood is delivered who has the job of cutting it? The boys of the school

2. When Grant begins to speak of his teacher, Matthew Antoine, what does he say he wanted from the teacher that other students didn't? To learn as much as Mr. Antoine could teach him
3. What does Antoine say Grant should do? Runaway
4. Which year was Grant's first year as a teacher? 1942

Chapter Nine:

1. Where is Grant taking Miss Emma? Why? Bayonne to see Jefferson
2. How does Grant feel about this trip? He hates it.
3. What does Miss Emma bring for Jefferson? Food and clean clothes
4. What instruction does Paul, the deputy, give Grant? Empty his pockets
5. For what do the other prisoners ask? Cigarettes and money
6. Describe Jefferson's cell in detail. Six feet by ten feet "with a metal bunk covered by a thin mattress and a woolen army blanket, a toilet without a seat or toilet paper; a washbowl, brownish from residue and grime; small metal shelf ...a pan, a tin dup, and a tablespoon...a single light bulb...and barred window.. opposite the door." (71)
7. At the end of Chapter 8 Antoine tells Grant, "But it won't matter." What are Jefferson's first words to his aunt? "It don't matter."
8. What "doesn't matter?" Trying to help him.
9. What question does Jefferson have for his aunt? When are they going to execute him?
10. What question does he have for Grant? Is he the one who will "jerk the switch"? Will Grant be the one to execute him?

Chapter Ten:

1. Miss Emma left the cell doing what after each visit? Crying
2. Chapter ten marks what visit with Jefferson? The 4th
3. Why is this visit different than the others? Grant goes alone without Miss Emma
4. How does Grant feel about this visit? Feels that it has been planned all along by his Aunt and Miss Emma

Chapter Eleven:

1. Why does Jefferson say, "That's what hogs eat." Asks Grant if the food he brought to his cell from his Nannan is corn; he is already stripped of any connection to being a man.
2. How do Jefferson's responses differ from previous visits? He talks directly to Grant
3. Why would he act like he does? Hopeless; perhaps he sees Grant as a teacher and one who may help him some.

Chapter Thirteen:

1. What day is it? Sunday
2. Why doesn't Grant go to church? "When I came back from university, I told her that I didn't believe anymore..."
3. To what day does he flash back? Friday
4. Who is at Miss Emma's house with Tante Lou? Reverend Ambrose
5. Why are they waiting on Grant? To inform them about his visit with Jefferson
6. What response does Grant give them about Jefferson? Initially he says "He was alright" then adds more detail about eating and talking
7. Is he truthful? no
8. About what does Reverend Ambrose want to know? If Jefferson's soul is saved
9. Where are Grant's parents? California
10. Who shows up at Grant's house? Vivian

Chapter Sixteen:

1. What are the children doing? Planning for the Christmas presentation

2. Who does Grant remind them to think of during the Christmas season? To remember Jefferson and his situation
3. What does one of the students come back to tell him? To stop by Miss Emma's house
4. What does Miss Emma say happened at the jail? Jefferson laid on the bunk and would not speak to the group. He wouldn't eat.
5. How much time passes before Grant hears the full story of what happened? Two days
6. Reverend Ambrose tells Jefferson to do what? Put his faith in God
7. Why does Jefferson ask for the food he does? Because it is corn for a hog
8. Tante Lou and Miss Emma tell Grant he's going to do what? Go back to the jail

Chapter Eighteen:

1. What is Jefferson's response to being asked if he wants to meet in the dayroom? "If that's what they want"
2. In what manner does Miss Emma go about setting the table? The same way she would have done at home
3. Before they see him, what do they hear? The chains
4. Did Jefferson say anything during his first visit to the dayroom? Eat anything? no
5. When Grant visits Jefferson about what does Jefferson say he wants to talk? The chair
6. Grant ignores the topic and starts to talk about what? The Christmas program
7. It's obvious that Jefferson has not kept up with the Biblical teachings he was taught because of what? Poor education and necessity of work
8. When does Jefferson think he will be killed? Christmas

Chapter Nineteen:

1. On the night of what does Chapter 19 take place? Christmas program
2. When Reverend Ambrose gives prayer before the start of the program, which two men does he mention without saying their names? Jefferson and Grant
3. Grant says he could see the expressions on people's face change when they looked at the gift under the tree. What was their expression? "shifting eyes" needing "relief from their thoughts"
4. At the end of the play, Grant seems unhappy. Why is he unhappy? He felt that things never changed. There was no progress.

Chapter Twenty:

1. What month is it? February
2. How much time has passed between Chapter 19 and 20? Two months
3. Who came to tell Grant that a date for the execution had been set? Farrell Jarreau
4. Whose house is the "Big House"? Henry Pichot
5. Who were the two men at the big house who wanted to see Grant and Reverend Ambrose? Pichot and Sheriff Guidry
6. What news does the sheriff tell them? The date is set for the second Friday after Easter and Grant should not cause any trouble with Jefferson
7. Why did the Governor choose the date that he did? It couldn't happen during Lent.
8. How much time does Jefferson have? Just over a month
9. What is the date for the execution? April 8th
10. Who does the sheriff call? Why? Called the doctor in Bayonne for Jefferson's nannan

Chapter Twenty-one

1. Who arrives to see Grant at his house? Vivian
2. Where do Grant and Vivian go? To see Miss Emma
3. How do Irene and Tante Lou feel about Vivian's visit? "felt they were interfering with something that belonged to her"
4. Who does Vivian think is in love with Grant? Irene Cole
5. What did Vivian tell Miss Emma? That she was praying for both of them
6. What does Grant say the black women hope for every time a male child is born? They hope he will be the one to change the vicious cycle

7. Who does Grant say can break the cycle? Jefferson

Chapter Twenty-two

1. What day is it? Friday
2. What does Jefferson want for his last meal? A whole gallon of vanilla ice cream
3. What was Jefferson supposed to have done the day of the robbery? Go into the swamp with Gale
4. What is Grant going to bring Jefferson? A radio
5. Where did Grant get the money for Jefferson's gift? Claiborne
6. Grant asks for a radio that is what? One that is brand new and in the box
7. Why did Grant have to wait to pay? A white woman came into the store
8. What type of person is Paul? He is part of the progress in racial equality.

Chapter Thirteen:

11. What day is it? Sunday
12. Why doesn't Grant go to church? "When I came back from university, I told her that I didn't believe anymore..."
13. To what day does he flash back? Friday
14. Who is at Miss Emma's house with Tante Lou? Reverend Ambrose
15. Why are they waiting on Grant? To inform them about his visit with Jefferson
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Chapter Twenty-three

1. What day is it? Monday, 5 and 1/2 weeks until his execution
2. Who is going to see Jefferson? Emma, aunt, Reverend Ambrose
3. Why wouldn't Jefferson go to the dayroom? He can't take the radio
4. Where did they go for the visit? Jefferson's cell
5. Who wanted to see Miss Emma after the visit with Jefferson? The sheriff
6. What did the sheriff say he didn't want? trouble
7. What was Reverend Ambrose's reaction/response when asked about Jefferson's soul? lowered his eyes and did not answer
8. What does Reverend Ambrose say he needs in his cell? God
9. On what day does Grant return to see Jefferson? Wednesday

10. How is the visit with Jefferson? Grant thinks it goes well – he gets Jefferson to agree to talk to Emma and the Reverend and write his thoughts down

Chapter Twenty-four

1. What does Grant stop to purchase before going to the courthouse? Notebook and pencil
2. Grant begins to eat before what? The blessing
3. Instead of sitting at the table the entire time, what do Jefferson and Grant do? Walk around the perimeter of the room
4. Who is not a hero according to Grant? *He* is not a hero
5. Who is a hero? Hopefully Jefferson
6. What does Grant say a myth is? An old lie people believe in
7. How does Jefferson respond to Grant? He cries

Chapter Twenty-seven

1. What day is it? Sunday
2. What does Grant's aunt say is bad luck? Lying on the bed in the form of a crucifixion
3. Approximately how much time is left for Jefferson? Not quite three weeks
4. What is Reverend Ambrose's concern regarding Jefferson? He is not saved
5. Who does he say is not educated? Grant
6. The Reverend wants Jefferson to do what before he walks to the chair? Fall to his knees
7. In what does Grant not believe? heaven
8. Reverend Ambrose says he has done what many times? lied

Chapter Twenty-eight

1. When Grant reads what Jefferson has been writing in the notebook, about what does he see Jefferson has been writing? The electrocution
2. Is Jefferson beginning to accept that he is not a hog? Yes, he realizes he is not being killed like a hog but like a human
3. What is Grant going to bring for Jefferson? Pencil sharpener
4. Who does Grant say Jefferson should have asked to sharpen the pencil? Paul
5. Why doesn't Jefferson think there's any reason to pray about going to heaven? His nannan doesn't need any help getting there
6. Grant says he doesn't pray because of what reason? He is lost
7. How old was Jefferson when he went to work in the field? 6
8. Who does Grant say needs Jefferson? everyone
9. Jefferson says he hopes the execution is what? "not long"

Chapter Twenty-nine

1. In whose point of view is this chapter told? Jefferson
2. What does Jefferson's writing show about him? Uneducated
3. About what does he continue to dream? The door leading to the electric chair
4. Who came with the sheriff to check on Jefferson? Pinchot
5. What did they ask Jefferson if he wants? A new pencil
6. What does Mr. Pichot give Jefferson? The knife he uses to sharpen the pencil
7. Who else has visited Jefferson? Everyone from the quarter
8. What does Bok give Jefferson? A marble
9. When was the first time Jefferson cried? Why? When Bok gave him the marble and the people came to see him, no one ever went out of their way for him before
10. What types of preparations are completed to get Jefferson ready for the electric chair? The chair has to be delivered and hooked up, the instruments had to be tested, Jefferson had to be shaved, Jefferson's things are distributed according to his wishes
11. What does the sheriff agree to leave on for Jefferson's last night? The light

Chapter Thirty:

1. In whose point of view does this chapter begin? Sidney DeRogers
2. When Sidney arrives in town in the area of the courthouse what are all the people doing? Watching the truck unload the electric chair
3. Where did Tante Lou spend the night? With Miss Emma
4. At what time are the witnesses to report to the courthouse? 11:30 AM
5. Where were Grant and Vivian the night before the execution? The Rainbow Room
6. What does Vivian say she will have her students to until she "hears" what has happened? Kneeling and praying
7. How has the execution affected the minister? It has brought him closer to God
8. The sheriff tells us the exact location of the chair. Where will it be placed? In the storeroom on the bottom floor in the back of the courthouse
9. Which character sees the chair being removed from the truck? Melvina Jack
10. Which character tells about the chair being brought into the courthouse and carried through the halls? Fee Jinkins
11. Who was told to take care of arrangements for having Jefferson's head shaved? Paul
12. Jefferson tells Paul to give the notebook to whom? Wiggins
13. Who will get the radio? The other inmates to use in the dayroom
14. Who gets the marble? Paul
15. What question does Jefferson have for Paul? If Paul will be at the execution

Chapter Thirty-one

1. Grant tells the kids they will do what beginning at noon? Kneel and pray
2. What group of people was not working today? No African-Americans
3. Grant believes which two people are stronger than he is? Reverend Ambrose and Jefferson
4. How does Grant feel about the justice in this situation? That Jefferson was not judged by his peers
5. Grant thinks the butterfly signals what? Jefferson's soul leaving his body
6. Who brought Grant the news that the execution had happened? Paul
7. What does Paul bring Grant? Jefferson's notebook
8. Who does Paul say was the strongest man in the room? Jefferson
9. What were Jefferson's last words? "Tell Nannan I walked"