



**A Lesson Before Dying (Oprah's Book Club) 1st
(first) Edition by Gaines, Ernest J. published by
Vintage (1997)**

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Set in the fictional community of Bayonne, Louisiana, in the late 1940s, *A Lesson Before Dying* tells the story of Jefferson, a twenty-one-year-old uneducated black field worker wrongfully accused and convicted of the robbery and murder of a white man, and sentenced to death by electrocution. At his trial, Jefferson's court-appointed defense attorney argues that Jefferson lacks the intelligence to plan a robbery, and that, even if he had been involved in the killing, sentencing him to death would be like putting a hog in the electric chair. In spite of this so-called defense, the all-white jury finds Jefferson guilty. To compound the horror of his situation, Jefferson internalizes the attorney's racist depiction of him as a dumb animal. Determined that Jefferson will die with dignity, his godmother ("nannan"), Miss Emma, turns to Grant Wiggins, a black teacher at the local plantation school, and asks him to teach Jefferson to be a man. Although convinced that there is nothing he can do, Grant reluctantly agrees to visit Jefferson in jail. Over the next several months, while Jefferson awaits execution, he and Grant forge a bond that enables both men to regain their dignity, reconnect with their community, and learn "the importance of standing."

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