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Lesson Ten

FOCUS: A Great Novel

The topics in this guide reflect the fundamental elements of the novel. The writer's voice, rhythm, and sense of poetry enchant us, providing literary pleasures while making statements about our humanity. The pacing of the novel's plot allows us insight into the tempos of another life. As the protagonist navigates challenges, we are guided through our own adventures by the successes and failures of the central character. Finally, great stories articulate and explore the tensions and conflicts within our daily lives.

Discussion Activities

Ask students to make a list of the characteristics of a great book. Put these on the board. What elevates a novel to greatness? Then ask them to discuss, within groups, other books they know that include some of the same characteristics. Do any of these books remind them of *To Kill a Mockingbird*? Is this a great novel?

A great writer can be the voice of a generation. What kind of voice does Lee provide through Scout and the Finch family? What does this voice tell us about the concerns and dreams of her generation? How does this voice represent the era of the Great Depression and Jim Crow?

In response to Ewell's death, what does Scout's concluding comment, "Well, it'd be sorta like shootin' a mockingbird, wouldn't it?" (p. 276) mean? How might Lee's portrayal of Scout, in this scene, make this a great novel?

Writing Exercise

If you were the voice of your generation, what would be your most important message? Why might you choose to convey this in a novel rather than a speech or essay? What story would you tell to get your point across?

Have students work on their essays in class. Be available to assist with outlines, drafts, and arguments. Have them partner with another student to edit outlines and/or rough drafts. For this editing, provide students with a list of things they should look for in a well-written essay.

Homework

Finish essay. Students will present their paper topics and interpretations to the class. Celebrate by participating in a Big Read community event or show Horton Foote's film version of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.