

Lesson Name : 33

Lesson Title : Faulkner's Nobel Prize Lecture

Course Name : English 2 Part 1 [Honors]

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Essential Instruction

Please read William Faulkner's [Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech](#).



### Rhetorical Work

The speech William Faulkner gave when he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950 is a **rhetorical work**. A **rhetorical work** is one that can be analyzed to see *how* and *why* an author composed a work. A rhetorical work is usually presented to an audience and shows the author's personal feelings, reflections, and convictions, or opinions. When analyzing a rhetorical work, it is more important to determine the author's intentions rather than focus on what he or she is actually saying. You also try to determine how effective the author is in making his or her point.

The first thing that a reader should do when beginning a **rhetorical analysis** is to understand what the work is about. William Faulkner's Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech was given at a time when World War II was ending, but the worldwide fear of an atomic bombing was present. He tried to address this fear in his speech, and to inspire young writers to keep writing. Here is an example from the text.

Our tragedy today is a general and universal physical fear so long sustained by now that we can even bear it. There are no longer problems of the spirit. There is only one question: When will I be blown up?

Next, the reader should try to determine what the author's intent was in writing and delivering this speech. Was the purpose to inform, to criticize, or to persuade? Faulkner accepts the award with gratitude, but tries to persuade his audience and young writers to continue to produce literature and poetry. He tells them to realize

that fear is “the basest of all things,” and after realizing that, they should let go of the fear and not allow it to affect their writing. Here is an example from the text.

He must teach himself that the basest of all things is to be afraid: and, teaching himself that, forget it forever, leaving no room in his workshop for anything but the old verities and truths of the heart, the universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed – love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice.

Now you should think about why the work was effective. Faulkner used some **rhetorical devices** that helped him to connect with his audience. One device that he used was to list the emotions that are important in writing several times throughout the speech. Here is the passage from the text.

It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past.

### Cultural and Historical Significance

It is also important to keep the **cultural and historical significance** of Faulkner’s speech in mind as you are reading it. In the year 1950, World War II had finally come to a close. Then, the Cold War began, which was a conflict between the US and Russia that carried the threat of atomic bombs being dropped on civilians in the US. The American people were scared. Faulkner’s speech acknowledges these emotions, and tells the people to continue to living and writing despite their fears of things that they cannot control.

This speech was one of the first Nobel Prize acceptance speeches that in which the recipient did not simply thank those who helped in his accomplishments. It is said that Faulkner’s accent and a faulty microphone hook up didn’t allow many people to understand the speech as he delivered it live. The next day, after it was reprinted in the newspapers, was when the speech became a success.

### Context Clues

**Context clues** are *helper* words that are used to give meaning to unfamiliar words. When you are reading and you find a word that you don’t understand a word, use the words in the surrounding paragraphs and sentences to figure out its meaning. Let’s look at an example from the text.

It is easy enough to say that man is **immortal** because he will endure: that when the last ding-dong of doom has clanged and faded from the last worthless rock hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening, that even then there will still be one more sound: that of his puny inexhaustible voice, still talking.

The bolded word **immortal** can be identified using the following context clues: “he will endure,” “the last ding-dong has clanged and faded,” “hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening that even then there will still be one more sound,” and “inexhaustible voice, still talking.” All of these words reference that man won’t give up and continues to fight, so you can assume that **immortal** has a similar meaning. In fact, it means *not capable of dying, or living forever*.



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### Vocabulary

Understanding the vocabulary can really help you to gain understanding from the material. Here are some vocabulary words that are used in this lesson.

1. **commensurate** – adj.– corresponding in size or degree; in proportion
2. **acclaim** – noun – enthusiastic and public praise
3. **pinnacle** – noun – the most successful point; the culmination
4. **anguish** – noun – severe mental or physical pain or suffering
5. **travail** – noun – painful or laborious effort
6. **verities** – noun – true principles or beliefs, especially of fundamental importance
7. **ephemeral** – adj.– lasting for a very short time
8. **inexhaustible** – adj.– unable to be used up due to existing in abundance
9. **immortal** – adj.– living forever; never dying or decaying
10. **prevail** – verb – prove more powerful than opposing forces; be victorious