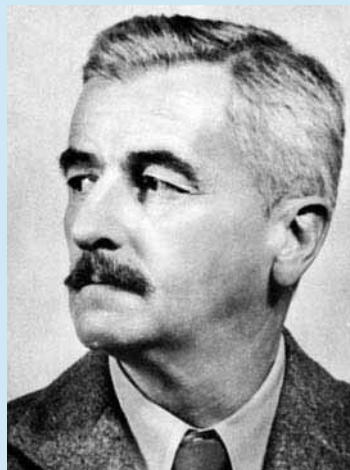


Reading Between the Lines

IF YOUR MOM SAYS, “YOU MIGHT WANT TO CLEAN UP YOUR ROOM,” YOU KNOW THAT SHE REALLY MEANS, “CLEAN YOUR ROOM.” YOU SEE BEYOND HER WORDS TO THE UNDERLYING MEANING—THE SUBTEXT. THIS MONTH, LC SHOWS YOU HOW TO APPLY THIS SKILL TO GREAT LITERATURE.

Who was William Faulkner?



William Faulkner was born in 1897 to a prominent family in New Albany, Mississippi. He grew up in Oxford, Mississippi, where he received a spotty education. After dropping out of high school, he educated himself by reading widely and voraciously.

Faulkner's first literary effort was a collection of poems that he self-published in 1924. From poetry he moved to the short story, and finally to the novel, which he believed was the most forgiving literary form. While he called himself “a failed poet,” Faulkner was quite an accomplished novelist, writing groundbreaking books that remain important today, including *As I Lay Dying*; *Absalom, Absalom!*; and *The Sound and the Fury*. Although American critics did not immediately recognize Faulkner's genius, French intellectuals Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus read and wrote about his work during WWII and helped establish his international importance.

In 1949, William Faulkner was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. He died of a heart attack on July 6, 1962.

How to read between the lines

>>Read the excerpt through once without reading the notes.

>>Read it a second time with the notes.

>>Note where the author implies something without stating it outright.

>>Notice the techniques that the author uses to communicate indirectly. The more you can tune in to these subtle messages, the more you will understand—and enjoy—fiction.

1. Right away, you know that Emily Grierson was never married, because she is still referred to as "Miss." You also know that the narrator lives in her town, and is telling the story from the perspective of a close observer.

From "A Rose for Emily"

When Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral: the men through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument, the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house, which no one save an old manservant—a combined gardener and cook—had seen in at least ten years.

It was a big, squarish frame house that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies in the heavily lightsome style of the seventies, set on what had once been our most select street. But garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood;

2. The description of Miss Emily's house implies that she has fallen from a state of wealth and grandeur into poverty.

3. "Cotton gins" tell us where the story is set: somewhere in the Southeastern United States.

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← continued from page 29

4. By describing the house in human terms—“stubborn and coquettish”—Faulkner implies that Miss Emily herself embodied these qualities.

only Miss Emily’s house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps—an eyesore among eyesores. And now Miss Emily had gone to join the representatives of those august names where they lay in the cedar-bemused cemetery among the ranked and anonymous graves of Union and Confederate soldiers who fell at the battle of Jefferson.

5. Faulkner reveals the name of the town indirectly, through his reference to “the battle of Jefferson.”

READING FOR SUBTEXT

THERE’S INFORMATION EVERYWHERE

- 1 **Pay attention** to both what the author writes and how he writes it. Information lurks in every word.
- 2 **Descriptions** are rich in subtext; the author chooses every detail in order to communicate something about the object.
- 3 **The setting** of a story provides significant context to the plot, and helps you interpret the action.
- 4 **Objects** closely associated with a character can often take on that character’s qualities.
- 5 **Authors** have to find creative ways to build background information into text so their stories don’t sound stiff. Just because the details are buried doesn’t mean they’re insignificant. Note this information wherever you find it.

>>Your Turn! Take two pages from a novel you are currently reading and underline examples of “subtext.” On a separate piece of paper, make notes as to what’s revealed.