

AP English Literature and Composition
Unit 2: Betrayal and Deception
Assessment 4
The Comic Epic Journey of *As I Lay Dying*

Title's Allusion to Epic

Agamemnon¹ to Odysseus² (*Odyssey* Book XI)

- “**As I lay dying**, the woman with the dog’s eyes would not close my eyes for me as I descended into Hades.”

¹ Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, led the expedition against Troy when Helen was taken by Paris. He was later killed by his wife Clytemnestra for sacrificing their daughter Iphigenia to Artemis.

² Odysseus (Ulysses), served as strategist and counselor to Agamemnon during the Trojan War. After the war, he experienced an arduous and perilous journey and a quest of discovery.

Definition of Comedy

Comedy, beginning in chaos and ending with the restoration of order through marriage, is drama that humorously examines human weakness and fault. According to Holman and Harmon, comedy is a genre “dealing with people in their human state, restrained and often made ridiculous by their limitations, faults, bodily functions, and animal nature, comedy draws its laughter from the spectacle of individual or collective human weakness or failure, hence its tendency to contrast appearance and reality, to deflate pretense, and to mock excess.” (*A Handbook to Literature*).

Project Elements

1. Create a detailed symbolic map of the Bundren family’s journey that is *As I Lay Dying* emphasizing the archetypal elements of the epic (quest, vast setting, trials and obstacles, interference from fate and/or supernatural forces, descent into underworld, archetypal heroes). Include on your map crucial comic moments of the journey (those that ridicule human weakness and fault). Mark all significant scenes with visual representations and labels.
2. Choose the four most pivotal events from the novel, and for each of these scenes, compose a well-developed paragraph in which you analyze the significance of this point in their journey as it reveals a complex theme about human weaknesses, faults, and limitations through the synthesis of epic and comic elements and the characterization of one or more Bundren family members. In your discussion of characterization, consider family members’ personality traits, drives, ulterior motives, sacrifices, relationships, and conflicts. Support your analysis with precise textual support, drawing from multiple narrators when possible.

Topic Sentence Template

Event

(such as action, attempt, failure, success)

ILLUSTRATES

Epic Archetype(s)

(such as hero traits/deeds, quest/journey, trails/obstacles, descent into underworld)

AND

Comic Irony

REVEALING

Theme

(assertion about human weaknesses, faults, and limitations)